

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 13 September 2019.

PRESENT: Mr A M Ridgers (Chairman), Mr S Holden (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P M Beresford, Mrs R Binks, Mr R H Bird (Substitute for Mr D S Daley), Mr A Booth, Mr A H T Bowles, Mr M A C Balfour (Substitute for Mr D L Brazier), Mr N J Collor, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr D Farrell, Mr G Lymer, Mr S C Manion, Mr M D Payne (Substitute for Mr D D Monk) and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance and Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Mrs S Holt-Castle (Interim Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

170. Membership

(Item 2)

The Committee noted that Mr D Monk had joined the Committee as a new representative.

171. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies were received from Mr A Cook, Mr D Brazier (substituted by Mr M Balfour) and Mr D Daley (substituted by Mr R Bird).

The Chairman agreed for Mr Payne (Non-Committee Member) to substitute for Mr D Monk in his absence.

172. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 4)

Mr M Dance declared an interest in item 8 (Inward Investment Services) and item 9 (Visitor Economy Services) on the agenda due to his role as the Director of Locate in Kent Ltd. and Visit Kent.

Mr Bird declared an interest in item 6 (Verbal Update) in relation to the Broadband update provided by Mr M Dance (Cabinet Member for Economic Development).

173. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2019

(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 26 June are a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

174. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 6)

1. Mr Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Faversham library was officially re-opened on 2 July having undergone a major refurbishment which included improved access to changing facilities for those with disabilities as part of the 'Good Day Programme.'
 - (b) The 'Space Chase' Summer Reading Challenge 2019 hosted by Kent's libraries encouraged children aged 4 to 11 to read a total of six books over the summer period. The Challenge successfully encouraged 20,000 children to partake with 10,000 children on target to completing the reading challenge. Mr Hill commended the events success and the achievement of the participants.
 - (c) Mr Hill was invited to attend the Open Golf Tournament at Royal Portrush and commended the events planned and controlled approach. Mr Hill acknowledged Kent County Council's role in facilitating easy access to the event for the general public attending the Open Golf.
2. Mr Dance (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Kent County Council (KCC) had commenced work with the Government's Building Digital UK (BDUK) team to improve access to faster broadband services. To date, the work had brought superfast broadband to 138,000 homes and businesses which meant that over 95% of properties across Kent and Medway had access to superfast broadband that offered between 25 to 35mbps. Due to the intervention of the National Infrastructure Commission, the Government then changed its approach and opted for Fibre-to-the-premise. As a result, KCC had to amend its approach and work with BDUK and Openreach to ensure that isolated rural homes and businesses with no or slow broadband, had access to fibre-to-the-premise broadband. Mr Dance confirmed that work in rural areas would start in January 2020.

To access information regarding the Broadband Programme, please use the link provided:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/broadband/our-broadband-programme>

- (b) The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme was launched on Tuesday 10 September 2019 which helped those in the hardest-to-connect locations to get faster broadband. Kent residents who were eligible to receive the voucher scheme could therefore benefit from up to £1000 of additional funding per property.

To access information regarding the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, please use the link provided:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/broadband/broadband-voucher-schemes/kent-broadband-top-up-voucher>

3. The Cabinet Members and Director of Economic Development responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) Mr Dance said that the Government would not fund any further broadband schemes unless it was fibre-to-the-premise. The predominant concern that created frequent issues for Kent's roads and pavements was new housing estates, as developers often failed to provide adequate future-proof infrastructure to support broadband technology which in turn generated significant fines for companies. However, Mr Dance noted that BT provided the infrastructure at no additional cost, for companies who included them at the right point in the planning process.
 - (b) Mr Smith (Director of Economic Development) agreed to provide a confidential briefing note to Members of the Committee which would contain a response to Members queries and provide a crib sheet containing key facts and points that could be used by Members to answer queries presented by residents within their wards.
 - (c) Mr Bowles addressed the Committee in his capacity as Chairman of the Swale Joint Transportation Board and queried the response time from Officers when emailed by elected Members and Parish Councillors. The Chairman agreed to pass the query onto the relevant Cabinet Member and ask that a response be provided in a timely manner.
 - (d) In response to concerns regarding existing copper BT ducts and whether new infrastructure would need to be built to support fibre-to-the-premise, Mr Dance informed Members that a briefing from the team would take place early in 2020.
 - (e) The Chairman welcomed Mr Payne to address the Committee who informed Members that an item on Heritage Services including the current priorities and future strategy would be presented at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 10 October 2019. A wider briefing would then be held for Members who wished to attend.
 - (f) A Member paid tribute to the Heritage Services and the work that had been done to restore the Roman temple in Newington.
4. RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

175. Libraries, Registration and Archives Performance 2018-2019 (Item 7)

James Pearson (Head of Service for Libraries, Registration and Archives) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) introduced the report that set out the Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) performance against its outcome-based specification for 2018/19. Mr Hill paid tribute to the library staff who continued to provide an excellent service and achieve performance targets during a period of immense financial challenge, and this was clearly demonstrated through the user case study (Appendix 1).
2. Mr Pearson said that the service specification required LRA to use two different approaches in measuring performance. The first was Key Performance Indicators the second was outcomes. Outcomes focused on the quality of experience/ service for the customer, both of which were essential to understanding service impact. Mr Pearson referred to the KPI Summary in Appendix 1 of the report and highlighted some of the key findings. In particular, he drew Members attention to the falling number of visits to libraries and archives which reflected the national downward trend as well as failure to meet the library community outreach target which focused on home library service customers. Mr Pearson said that the LRA team would continue to review the ways in which it promotes and develops the outreach service and as part of the strategy work in 2019/20, the LRA team had revised its KPI's to focus on customer satisfaction. However, Mr Pearson noted that despite budget efficiencies the LRA had performed well across a range of criteria, with customer satisfaction rates remaining at 90% or above for all parts of the service.

Mr Pearson referred to the outcome framework (detailed in appendix 1) and said that LRA continued to collate and analyse customer experiences across a number of key areas including social isolation and loneliness, mental health, general health and intergenerational interactions. Mr Pearson reiterated Mr Hills commendations and said that the customer case study was a testament to the LRA staff and volunteers who continued to have a positive impact on the services provided.

Mr Pearson noted the key achievements of the LRA service (as set out in the End of Year Report) and proceeded to present a short film to the Committee.

To access the film, please use the link provided:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFvjZT2Gh40&feature=youtu.be>

3. Officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) The LRA service had 1,119 volunteers in 2018/19 whom worked over 45,000 hours across a number of areas. Mr Pearson said that the LRA service was keen to look at ways it could work collaboratively across KCC to advertise the volunteering opportunities available and develop a menu of choice to incentivise and retain volunteers who enjoyed doing a range of activities.
 - (b) In response to KPI7 (PC hours used in libraries), Mr Pearson said that usage of static PC's was declining as more people had opted to use their own portable devices and log-onto the library Wi-Fi. As a result of this, the LRA service recognised the demand for new innovative IT solutions and said that a

refresh was due to take place that would see improved public PCs while reducing the overall number while also bringing forward Wi-Fi printing across the county.

- (c) In response to Library Extra, Mr Pearson confirmed that a full report was due to be presented at the November Committee, however, work continued to be undertaken to develop and promote the service, including for example looking at encouraging commuters to access e-books whilst on the train.
- (d) Mr Pearson informed Members that the LRA performance data did not differentiate between library, physically and electronically issued materials within the KPI's as every issue was a valuable statistic. However, Mr Pearson agreed to circulate the requested information to Members.
- (e) In relation to accessibility training for staff, Mr Pearson informed Members that he would expect staff to be fully trained on the hearing loops and to carry out routine checks on a regular basis. Mr Pearson agreed to follow-up Members concerns.

4. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

176. Inward Investment Services

(Item 8)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report that set out the inward investment services contract, its performance since August 2016 and the intended commissioning and procurement process for a new inward investment service contract that would commence in April 2020. Mr Smith informed the Committee that the contract was split into several parts: to deliver Kent specific outcomes, investment opportunities from overseas markets, an increased supply chain to local businesses, increased inward investment (from the United Kingdom into Kent) and a raised profile for the county as a destination for investment. The current provider, Locate in Kent, was on track to meet all performance indicators set within the current contract, however, Mr Smith assured the Committee that the future contract would be more ambitious and would enable the service to focus on the opportunities and challenges for Kent and Medway in a post-Brexit economy. In terms of securing EU funding to support a new Inward Investment contract, Mr Smith informed the Committee that a bid had been submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the outcome of the application would be confirmed before the end of the calendar year. Mr Smith informed Members that if the bid was successful, a decision report (containing a revised EQIA), would be presented before the Committee at a later date prior to a Leader decision being taken to award a future contract.
2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

177. Visitor Economy Services

(Item 9)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report that set out the visitor economy services contract, its performance since 2014 and the intended commissioning and procurement process for a new visitor economy contract that would commence in April 2020. Mr Smith informed the Committee that the current visitor economy contract required the current provider, Visit Kent, to develop and deliver innovative and creative solutions to grow Kent's visitor economy and support Kent County Council's (KCC) priorities for the visitor sector. As part of the new commission, KCC would expect the new service to offer more than the current provider and to develop a 'visitor first' strategy (detailed in section 4.6 of the report). Mr Smith said that KCC did not benefit from EU funding, however, Visit Kent received financial contributions of £1 million per annum from other organisations, of which KCC contributed 15%. Mr Smith informed the Committee that the contract would be signed by the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport under the Executive Scheme of Officer Delegation.
2. Officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) Mr Smith said that due to the uncertainty of Brexit since the referendum, the sterling exchange rate had made overseas visits to England good value for money resulting in the perception of increased visitor numbers. However, due to the negative reports on Brexit's possible impact on Kent's road network, this had caused overseas travel agents to cancel a number of tours which as a result lead to loss of earnings for many businesses within the visitor economy sector. As part of the new commission, KCC expected the new contract provider to develop a visitor strategy that would respond to the macroeconomic impact that affected Kent as the visitor sector attracted 65 million tourists and supported 77 thousand jobs. Mr Smith assured Members that representations had already been made to Government which sought additional support.
3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

178. Performance Dashboard

(Item 10)

Helen Groombridge (Performance and Analytics Manager) and Stephanie Holt-Castle (Interim Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement) were in attendee for this item.

1. Mrs Groombridge introduced the Performance Dashboard which showed progress made against targets set for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) up to the end of June 2019.

2. The Cabinet Member and officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) In response to queries relating to KPI *DT14: Percentage of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) faults reported online*, Mrs Holt-Castle said that the trajectory of figures demonstrated that once someone had used the online tool, they were more likely to use it to report future concerns. Mrs Holt-Castle acknowledged Members concerns and agreed to report these to the team.
 - (b) With regard to developing the I-App reporting tool, Mrs Holt-Castle informed Members that the tool was used by a number of organisations and that Kent County Council did not have ownership rights to the map, however, agreed to look at whether it could be adapted to show Public Rights of Way.
 - (c) Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) acknowledged Members frustrations regarding the backlog of applications and said that this was due to major resource issues. He informed the Committee that he would continue to appeal for more money within the budget as it had to be tackled from a financial perspective.
3. RESOLVED that the performance report be noted.

179. Serious and Organised Crime

(Item 11)

Members of the Committee indicated that they would be referring to information contained within the exempt report and therefore consideration of this item was deferred to the exempt part of the meeting (Minute 183 below refers).

180. District Visits Programme 2019

(Item 12)

Rob Hancock (Programme Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Hancock introduced the report that provided an update to Members on the recent visits to Folkestone and Hythe District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and outlined the programme of future visits to Kent districts in 2019/20.

The following visits had been confirmed:

- Ashford - 11 October 2019
- Thanet - 22 November 2019
- Canterbury - 13 December 2019
- Maidstone - 5 February 2020
- Sevenoaks - 18 May 2020

The Chairman expressed the wish, that the visit to Thanet on 22 November 2019 would include a trip to the Turner Contemporary.

2. RESOLVED that the report and scheduled future visits be noted.

181. Work Programme 2019/20

(Item 13)

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted subject to the inclusion a 'Broadband' item which would be presented to the Committee at the appropriate time.

182. Exclusion of the Press and Public

(Item)

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Exempt Items

(open access to minutes)

183. Serious and Organised Crime

(Item)

Natalie Liddiard (Intelligence and Standards Manager, Public Protection) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Liddiard provided an update to Members on Serious and Organised Crime in Kent and the affect it had on UK citizens and its economy. Mrs Liddiard informed Members that at the end of June 2018, the National Crime Agency was aware of 4,542 organised crime groups operating in the UK and from what had been reported to date by the National Audit Office, the level of serious and organised crime within the UK was increasing. Mrs Liddiard informed Members that following a request that was made at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee in July 2019, a confidential Member Briefing had been scheduled and the date had been circulated to all Members of the Council.
2. RESOLVED that the Kent County Council's approach to Serious and Organised Crime, be noted.