

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – URGENT RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Roger Gough

Leader of the Council

DECISION NO:

20/00034

For Publication**Key decision: YES**

The decision will:

- a) *result in savings or expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000)*

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

Approve the procurement and setup arrangements for temporary morgue facilities to provide additional capacity projected to be required as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This approval includes agreement;

I. to approve the virement of £11m from reserves to support the procurement and management of temporary body storage solutions throughout Kent and Medway (at one or more locations extent to be decided) to provide additional capacity as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such solutions shall include, but not be limited solely to, site preparation, installation of temporary structure and equipment, management of the site, security and access control, facility management, ICT and technical systems support, body storage management, transportation and traffic management services to and from the location(s), demobilisation and site clearance including any decontamination; management and staffing and

II. to delegate authority under the Scheme of Officer Delegations to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Corporate Director for Finance and the Monitoring Officer, to take relevant actions, including but not limited entering into contracts and other legal agreements required to ensure the effective operation and delivery of the increased mortuary capacity, as necessary to implement this decision; and

III. to delegate authority under the Scheme of Officer Delegations to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Leader, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, the Corporate Director for Finance, the monitoring officer and the Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport to direct the use of KCC land and/ or finalise the terms and enter into the necessary contracts and legal land agreements required to enable the provision and operation of the mortuary capacity, and take other appropriate actions in relation to Property Management and Infrastructure activity, necessary to implement this decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

On 12 January 2020, it was announced that a new coronavirus had been identified. COVID-19 is highly contagious and the World Health Organisation has declared the risk and spread of the disease as a pandemic with Europe now at its epicentre. Although the Government has taken action to control the spread and rate of infection, there is expected to be a higher number of deaths resulting from the disease, than would ordinarily be experienced from other causes.

To support the COVID-19 response and the statutory obligation for KCC to provide mortuary space in an excess death scenario a site within KCC's ownership has been identified to support the initial requirement. However, it may not be possible to provide all of the required capacity within this site and a number of alternative sites are currently being investigated to provide additional capacity should it be required.

Financial Implications:

The total budget allocation to facilitate the project is £11m. Whilst the expenditure incurred as a result of this decision will initially be funded by the Council, the Government has confirmed that councils will be reimbursed for costs incurred as part of the response to the Covid 19 outbreak. The expenditure being incurred is to support a storage facility capable of managing the number of bodies in line with the forecast data provided by Government.

Reason for Urgency:

Kent is not alone in the need to make appropriate preparations for increased mortuary demand and supplies of the relevant equipment, land and ancillaries are limited. It is therefore crucial that KCC takes necessary steps to secure the additional capacity immediately while it is still available. Failure to take immediate action could limit KCC's ability to meet its statutory obligations to provide sufficient mortuary capacity.

This key decision is now required urgently to ensure appropriate authority is in place to support ongoing retention and use of the additional capacity which has already been identified and to provide necessary flexibility to allow for swift significant Officer decisions on this project should further capacity and facilities be required in response to the fast-moving situation. Should additional facilities be required, officers will inform the Leader in writing at the time.

Member and other consultation:

No Cabinet Committee consultation possible due to urgency process.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, in addition to agreeing that the decision could not be reasonably deferred, provided the following comments:

Mr Booth supported the decision.

The Group Spokespeople of the Scrutiny Committee providing the following comments:

From Mr Bird as Liberal Democrat Spokesperson on the Scrutiny Committee:

In the current circumstances I fully support this decision which needs to be taken for KCC to meet its statutory responsibilities. However, given that the proposed provision is for both Kent and Medway, I recommend that officers should enter into a cost sharing agreement with Medway Council as a matter of urgency.

The Chair and Group Spokespeople of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee provided the following comments:

No comments received.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

None: KCC has an obligation under the Civil Contingency Act 2004 to take the lead in responding to humanitarian impacts that result from an emergency that straddles more than one District within the county.

Current mortuary capacity in Kent and Medway is insufficient to deal with the Government's forecast number of excess deaths from COVID-19, therefore additional space needs to be procured efficiently to respond to modelling by the Government as the understanding of the virus' epidemiology continues to evolve.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None



06/04/2020

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signed

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date