

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HEALTH

Decision Made: 26 September 2023

Public consultation in relation to the Kent Community Warden Scheme (KCWS)

Issue for Decision

To submit a response to Kent County Council's public consultation on the provision of Kent Community Wardens, which has announced plans that would see the service reduced significantly and have a potentially disproportionate impact on Maidstone and its residents as a result.

Decision Made

That the consultation responses attached at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved.

Reasons for Decision

Kent County Council are proposing changes to the Kent Community Warden Service (KCWS) as detailed in their Consultation document and questionnaire found in appendix 1 to the report.

The KCWS is a discretionary service that provides a proactive and visible service to improve residents' quality of life and allow their communities to thrive. The proposed changes are driven by KCC's financial challenge, which requires savings of £1 million by 2024-25. This would entail a reduction of 32 warden posts and two management posts, and a change in the allocation of wardens across the county.

The proposed changes aim to retain the service's wide remit, objectives, and community-based approach, but with fewer wardens and less coverage. The service will continue with six teams covering two districts each, with a minimum of three wardens per team plus a team leader. Additional wardens (14 under the proposed reductions) will be placed within teams based on need using the proposed Geographical Allocation Policy (GAP), which uses a variety of data and information to rank wards according to need.

The consultation is running for 12 weeks from 12 July until 3 October 2023. The feedback from the consultation will be presented to Members of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee in January 2024 for their consideration and recommendation.

What impact might the proposed changes have in Maidstone specifically

Maidstone is currently covered by one team, which comprises one team leader and 13 wardens distributed across Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling as detailed in the table at 2.6 below.

Areas covered	Area type	Allocated?
Aylesford, Burham, Eccles	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Bearsted	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Borough Green and Wrotham	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Boughton Monchelsea, Chart Sutton and Loose	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Coxheath	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Ditton	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
East Malling	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
East Peckham and Hadlow	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Harrietsham and Lenham	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Headcorn	Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Marden and Staplehurst	Towns / Villages / Civil Parishes	Warden allocated
Snodland and Holborough	Towns	Warden allocated

Under KCC's proposed changes to KCWS, this team would be reduced to one team leader and three wardens with additional wardens allocated according to need using GAP. This means that many areas in Maidstone that currently have a warden allocated to them would lose their warden while some areas without a warden may gain one. The document does not specify which wards in Maidstone would be affected by these changes as it depends on the use of GAP. Given high levels of deprivation and other issues in East Kent there is a concern that most warden resources will be deployed there.

The reduction of wardens in Maidstone could affect support for residents, especially those who are elderly, vulnerable, isolated or have complex needs. It will also affect partnership working with other organisations such as Community Protection Team, Kent Police, Parish councils, community groups, schools, health services, and Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

The document invites residents and stakeholders in Maidstone to share their views on how these changes could impact them or their organisation; what they would like KCC to consider or put in place if wardens need to be withdrawn from an area; what alternative sources they would turn to if they lose their warden support; and any suggestions on how else the service could make savings.

The KCWS in Maidstone offers a range of support to the community, playing an integral role in supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the community, providing vital information, directly or through vulnerability meetings to statutory services on mental health, self-neglect, and general welfare concerns. The combination of their uniform and absence of enforcement powers creates a unique offer that builds trusted relationships and get through the barriers that other services find challenging. They also help free up hospital beds by helping vulnerable people return home and access support services, reducing the burden on acute NHS services. including providing knowledge and advice on local services, assisting with engaging hard-to-reach residents, providing one-to-one

support to clients, and supporting community safety and engagement initiatives.

Amongst our concerns as an authority is that while this may result in short-term savings, it is likely to have significant impacts on public funding in the long term due to increased demand for acute services rather than the care and support the service is currently able to provide. It will also displace current support onto agencies who may not be resourced or may get resistance from being able to support individuals or communities. This will include our Community Protection Team, Housing Teams, the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System and acute services like Mental Health and Social Services.

The information provided in the consultation identifies that nearly 50% of those supported by wardens were helped to access services via social prescribing by the wardens. The report identifies that there are other services available to support individuals who need it. This statement conflicts with their acknowledgment of the need for support for vulnerable people to access services; a role the wardens actively provide.

There is also concern that recent changes to the role of Police Community Support Officers may exacerbate the loss of KCWS as it is unlikely that Beat Officers, particularly at current resourcing levels, will be able to support communities and vulnerable individuals in the same way. This is further aggravated by the impact of the financial crisis on the charity sector where the reduction in funding streams is seeing services reduce or even stop.

Data gathered in relation to serious violence shows that periods of poverty have significant impacts on communities with violence more prevalent in those individuals who are deprived key services during times of crisis. The reduction of services at this time is very likely to impact on levels of violence in the next 10-15 years.

A further concern is that if the proposed measures are introduced the level of demand on the reduced team could be very overwhelming. The existing KCWS service is embedded within local service delivery and a smaller team may be ineffective due to an unreasonable demand. This might impact on the service further due to high turnover or sickness within the officers that remain.

The timescale provided has not allowed for Maidstone Borough Council to undertake a consultation of its residents. The KCC Consultation has been shared with all elected Ward Members and Parish Councils for them to engage with or encourage their communities to respond.

The Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee considered the matter on 7 September 2023 and recommended that the recommendation be approved.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the matter on 19 September 2023 and recommended that the matter be approved, subject to amendments to the response including; that a robust covering letter be sent with the response, that KCC should be implored to proactively secure alternative sources of funding for the service and to amend the response to question 7a to include the service's positive impact to young adults, particularly those that are vulnerable. The responses within appendix 2 have also been strengthened in tone in response to the comments made.

Alternatives considered and Why Rejected

Do Nothing- the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health could choose not to respond. The decision on whether to amend the KCWS lies with Kent County Council and a public consultation will allow the communities themselves to provide feedback.

This option was rejected, as responding to the public consultation would ensure that the concerns identified by the Council were represented as part of the evidence gathering process prior to the decision being finalised by KCC.

Background Papers

None.

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.



Signed: _____
Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Health

Full details of both the report for the decision taken above and any consideration by the relevant Policy Advisory Committee can be found at the following area of the [website](#)

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm on Tuesday 3 October 2023.**