

HOUSING, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

7th September 2023

Public consultation in relation to the Kent Community Warden Scheme KCWS

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	7th September 2023
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	19 th September 2023
Cabinet Member for Housing and Health	Before 29 th September 2023
Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet Member for Housing and Health
Lead Head of Service	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnership Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All
Executive Summary	
<p>KCC are currently undertaking a public consultation in relation to the Kent Community Warden Scheme (KCWS). Through the consultation, KCC have announced plans that would see the service reduced significantly and have a potentially disproportionate impact on Maidstone and its residents as a result. To ensure the concerns of Maidstone Borough Council are recorded the following report provides information in relation to the proposed changes and the potential impact and offers suggested responses to the questions asked in the consultation should the Cabinet Member choose to respond.</p>	
Purpose of Report	
Cabinet Member Decision	

This report asks the Committee to consider the following recommendation to the Cabinet Member:

That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health consider the information provided in this report and use that information to make a representation to the proposed changes.

Public consultation in relation to the Kent Community Warden Scheme KCWS

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The proposed changes are likely to impact on our ability to provide a Safe, Clean and Green borough. It will also impact on Homes and Communities. The public consultation offers and opportunity to ask KCC to consider the implication changes will have on our strategic objectives.</p>	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendation supports both the Health Inequalities are Addressed and the Reduced Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved Cross Cutting Objectives.	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Risk Management	There are no proposed risks associated to the recommendation.	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Financial	Whilst there are no direct financial implications associated to the recommendations in this report, it is highly likely that the proposed changes will impact on a number of services in the Housing and Health Portfolio as demand shifts to Maidstone Borough Council services	Head of Finance
Staffing	Whilst there are no direct staffing implications associated to the recommendations in this report, it is highly likely that the proposed changes will impact on a number of services in the Housing and Health Portfolio as demand shifts to Maidstone Borough Council services.	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

Legal	Responding to the public consultation has no legal implications.	
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes.	Information Governance Team
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	Whilst there are no direct Public Health implications associated to the recommendations in this report, it is highly likely that the proposed changes will impact on the health of the population and individuals in the borough.	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Crime and Disorder	Whilst there are no direct Crime and Disorder associated to the recommendations in this report, it is highly likely that the proposed changes will impact on the crime and disorder due to the partnership role the KCC Wardens have played in the borough, including the multi-agency taskforce.	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Procurement	Not applicable	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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. In order to meet the deadline for the consultation, a report will be presented to the relevant PAC outlining our proposed responses to the consultation on behalf of residents of Maidstone and/or as a member of the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

What impact might the proposed changes have in Maidstone specifically

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 Team - Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling (1 team leader, 13 wardens)

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

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 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.

- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 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.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 **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.
- 3.2 **That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health responds to the public consultation** on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council. This is the preferred option as detailed in section 4.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred and recommended option is 3.2, that Cabinet Member for Housing and Health respond to the public consultation to ensure the concerns identified in 2.4 to 2.12 are represented in their evidence gathering prior to the decision being finalised.
- 4.2 Whilst the response alone is unlikely to persuade the decision makers, the response provided will lend weight to similar responses and ensure that the

views of Maidstone Borough Council are represented alongside other concerns or support offered by the general public and other stakeholders.

- 4.3 Suggested responses for the questions in the consultation are provided in Appendix 2 for Cabinet Member for Housing and Health to consider/use when responding to ensure the concerns identified above are incorporated.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered are low, other than potential reputational damage. Conversations held with Strategic partners and community representatives, such as Elected Members and Parish Councils, through Cluster meetings and Conversations have been taken into consideration when putting forward the proposal.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 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.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Health will respond to the consultation using the information provided within this report and the appendices as an appointed representative of Maidstone Borough Council.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: KCWS Consultation document and questionnaire
 - Appendix 2: Suggested responses to the questionnaire.
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