

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre, Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 7 February 2023
Present	Councillors; Miss Susan Carey, Jim Martin (In place of Rebecca Shoob), Connor McConville, Terence Mullard, Patricia Rolfe and Georgina Treloar (In place of John Wing)
Apologies for Absence	Councillors; Peter Gane, Michelle Keutenius, Rebecca Shoob and John Wing
Officers Present:	James Clapson (Case Officer (Committee)), Dee Elson (Control Centre & Resilience Lead), Ewan Green (Director of Place) and Sue Lewis (Case Officer (Committee))
Others Present:	Lisa Guthrie (Head of the Kent Resilience Team – Kent Resilience Forum), Nicky Potts (Head of Operational Integration – National Highways), Sean Martell (Head of Service Delivery – National Highways), Chris Else (Assistant Director for Resilience – Kent Fire and Rescue), Robert Gregory (Deputy Director – Eurotunnel), Natalie Benville (media and Comms Manager - Eurotunnel), Emma Ward (Chief operations Officer – Port of Dover), Nadeem Aziz (Chief Executive – Dover District Council), Anthony Baldock (Director of Health and Wellbeing – Ashford Borough Council), Councillor Stuart Peall (Cabinet Member Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building Control), Geoff Miles (Chairman of Folkestone and Hythe Business Advisory Board), Dominic Graham (Alcaline - Quality & Insurances Manager), Callum Bailey (Director - Duo Technology Ltd), Matthew Arnold (Commercial Director - Stagecoach), Ian Hall (Security & Resilience Manager – South Eastern Rail), Jonathan Evans (Head of Border Resilience, Border Resilience and Response Team – Department of Transport), Elena Hall (Chief Inspector, Kent Poilce), Ross Dorman (Traffic Management Officer, Kent Police).

## **Election of Chairman**

As both the Chair and Vice-Chair had offered their apologies and were unable to attend the meeting, it was:

Proposed by Councillor Jim Martin  
Seconded by Councillor Mullard

RESOLVED:

That Councillor McConville be elected Chair for the meeting.

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Operation Brock Holiday Traffic Disruption**

Cllr Peall began proceedings by explaining that he brought his question to Council following the unprecedented disruption experienced by residents in the area between 22 and 24 July 2022. He hoped to get an understanding of what went wrong, and to see what could be done better.

Mr Green introduced the report that gave some background information and included the scoping document for the review. There were four suggested key lines of enquiry for the Committee to consider that would form the framework of the meeting. He also advised that the findings of the review would form part of the Council's response to the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) for inclusion in the Operation Fennel review.

### **What were the issues that caused the traffic disruption throughout the deployment of Operation Brock? Were there additional issues which resulted in the severe disruption experienced between 22 and 24 July 2022?**

Those present described the following factors that contributed to the disruption experienced between the 22 and 24 July 2023:

- The highest level of holiday traffic since the Covid-19 pandemic had struck. However the subsequent two weekends had a similar amount of traffic and the area did not experience the same level of disruption.
- The Just Stop Oil protest at the Dartford Tunnel delayed people reaching the Port and Tunnel in the run up to the weekend, this led to a domino effect of delays that ran into the weekend.
- There was a major accident on the M20 that led to its closure for 4 hours.
- The use of the A20 to divert Channel Tunnel traffic caused congestion in the surrounding area.
- Drivers instinctively tried to avoid areas of delay, this led to congestion in surrounding roads. It was especially problematic when large vehicles found themselves on unsuitable narrow roads.

- Following from Britain's exit from the European Union, more stringent boarder checks were required to enter Europe from 21 July. These checks took more time, and a full complement of French border control officers were not in position to conduct the checks until 23 July. This led to significant delays in processing travellers through the border control areas.

**Are there identifiable socio, economic, financial and environmental impacts resulting from the traffic disruption?**

Those present offered the following impacts resulting from the disruption:

- There was a perception that the area became gridlocked when Operation Brock was in operation. This perception led to a loss of business for existing companies and made new businesses hesitant to locate in the area.
- The media reported when there were delays and showed pictures of traffic jams, but did not report on how well the system worked when there were not traffic jams. This gave the impression that the area was paralysed with traffic. Visit Kent had been working hard to try and rebuff this perception to ensure that the positive impact of accolades like the Kent Heritage Coast being recognised as the fourth best region to visit in the World by the Lonely Planet in 2022.
- When the roads were blocked, people could not get to work, school, hospital, or shops. Stagecoach advised that they were typically one hour late in delivering children to school, and around 90 minutes late dropping children home after school.
- Operation Brock was considered a significant improvement when compared to Operation Stack. It was an innovative solution that could be deployed and removed in a single evening.
- East Kent residents and businesses were bearing the cost for a national problem, that should have a national solution.
- There was a need to add more resilience to the system. It was recognised that the KRF did a great job at managing events with the resources at their disposal.
- In 2010 a report was commissioned to look at the social and economic impact of Operation Stack on the Country.
- A lot of attention seemed to be focused on mitigating disruption in and around Dover, however the impact of the disruption in Folkestone and Hythe also needed recognition.
- The disruption may have impacted upon the emergency services' ability to respond to calls, this could have put people's health at risk.

**What reviews and debriefs have been undertaken in relation to Operation Brock and what are the outcomes and learning points from these?**

Those present provided the following updates and opinions in relation to the deployment of Operation Brock during the summer of 2022:

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- Between 22 and 24 July 2022 road closures resulted in some traffic control measures being unavailable. The KRF deserved credit in regaining control of the situation.
- The KRF's influence was limited to Kent, however the options to stop the build-up of traffic were limited once vehicles entered the county. A national response would be more effective in preventing the build-up of traffic in Kent.
- The KRF conducted a debrief on 28 September 2022 specifically relating to events between 22 and 24 July, it came up with 29 recommendations. Most of the recommendations have been fed into the ongoing Operation Fennel review.
- Operation Brock required the Police to control freight at key locations, such as Brenley Corner. There was a perception that foreign lorry drivers did not obey the rules, however this perception could be because 83% of freight vehicles were registered overseas.
- Operation Brock would continue to be used for some time, there were no plans to significantly change the system.
- Better systems were now in place to help ensure that an adequate number of French Border Control staff were on site at the Port and Tunnel.
- During busy times, the release of lorries from lorry stops was co-ordinated to try and manage their arrival time at the Port and Tunnel
- An extensive amount of work had gone into the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership's report on the impact of Operation Brock on businesses.

### **What assurances can be offered that the levels of disruption experienced throughout the deployment will not happen again; what measures will be put in place; and what is the timeline for implementation?**

The following points were made during consideration of the question:

- France and the EU could help by relieving some of the paperwork and bureaucracy.
- Communication with the Port and Tunnel customers could be improved, a text or email notification of potential delays, the impact of adverse weather conditions and other travel information could help people manage their journey to the border.
- Historically it had been found that when hauliers were advised of a delay, they tended to make their way into the area as quickly as possible, to get close to the front of the queue. This action could exacerbate congestion.
- The Department of Transport was scoping out a review to look at ways to improve the queuing systems, including the application of new technology. Recommendations from the review would be available in the summer 2023. The Department of Transport welcomed input from stakeholders into the review. The findings of the review would be used to create a case to government to fund additional interventions.
- The Council could collate reports from residents and businesses about how they have been affected by Operation Brock. This could then be submitted to the Department of Transport for inclusion in their case to Government for interventions.

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- There needed to be a shared voice to give a strong message about the negative impact the disruption has on East Kent, it was not just a Folkestone and Hythe problem.
- Communications to residents and businesses regarding the deployment of Operation Brock are co-ordinated by the KRF to ensure clarity of messaging.
- Both the Port of Dover, and The East Kent Chief Executive Group would submit responses to an all-party parliamentary group that has called for evidence on the matter.
- It was important that major housing developments, such as the Otterpool Park site, were considered as part of the planning process for any future emergency traffic management plan.
- The Port of Dover had received Levelling Up funding to reconfigure the layout and increase the capacity for vehicle management at the port. The funding would be used to move the border controls further into the port, this would enable the port to hold 2500 freight vehicles on site. Works were planned to begin in September 2023 and would take place during the normal daily running of the port.
- The Council could look to provide some information on its website to warn residents about times of possible disruption, however there was a significant risk that this could perpetuate the perception that the area was not open for business.

Upon completion of the debate, the Committee agreed the following recommendations:

1. That the ongoing engagement with businesses and residents, to establish the impact of Operation Brock, should continue.
2. That the Council continue to work with partners to promote the need for investment to achieve sustainable improvements in the cross-border traffic flow.
3. That once the Operation Fennel review was complete, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the findings that had an impact upon the district as part of its regular meeting cycle.