Present: the Chair of the Council (Dame Ursula Brennan); the Vice-Chancellor (Professor Karen Cox); the Deputy Chair of the Council (Bob Scruton); Colin Carmichael; Martin Cook; Neil Davies; Mark Ellis; Joshua Frost; Sarah Gibson; Kim Lowe; Dr Owen Lyne; Gabriel MacGregor; Andrew Newell; Mark Preston; Professor Georgina Randsley de Moura; Patrick Stillman; Zarafshaan Tahir; Sir David Warren; Professor Iain Wilkinson; Zoe Wood.

In attendance: Director of Finance/Chief Financial Officer (Jane Higham); Financial Improvement Director (Peter Pentecost); Director of Governance and Assurance (Secretary to Council) (Dr Sinead Critchley); Head of Corporate Governance (Deputy Secretary to Council) (Jo Pearsall).

Apologies: Mark Malcomson; Professor Richard Reece.

The meeting was held online through Microsoft Teams in recognition of the Government requirement to stay at home to mitigate the spread of Covid-19.

5332 CHAIR’S INTRODUCTION

a) Welcome

The Chair welcomed Professor Iain Wilkinson, the new academic staff representative, Patrick Stillman, the Kent Union Vice-President Postgraduate Experience (to his first meeting as a member of Council) and welcomed back Zarafshaan Tahir who had been re-elected as the student representative.

b) Confidentiality

The Chair confirmed the confidentiality of the discussions at Council and that there should be no interaction with social media during the meeting.

c) Declaration of Interests

Council noted the requirement for members to declare any potential conflicts of interest on any matters before the Council not already recorded in the Register of Interests for 2020/2021. Members were asked to declare any additional conflicts of interest they had with the Council’s business for the meeting not previously declared either at this point or if such a conflict arose during the meeting.

d) Council Meetings

The Chair drew attention to the Agenda, which had changed format, in response both to the Halpin recommendations and to feedback from members, to strike a balance between strategic and assurance considerations, and to advise that oral updates at the meetings and the circulation of information between meetings would be encouraged, to try to reduce the amount of reading required prior to each Council meeting.
e) Terms of Reference

The Chair confirmed that the Terms of Reference documents for Council, currently four separate documents, would be consolidated and reviewed against the CUC Higher Education Code of Governance which had been published in September 2020.

ACTION: Director of Governance and Assurance (Secretary to Council), Chair

5333 MEMBERSHIP

Council noted its membership for 2020/21, Paper C2020/001, and it was agreed that it would be updated to include the student representative, Zarafshaan Tahir. It was also confirmed that a recruitment exercise was underway seeking new lay members and that the outcome would be reported to the Lay Nominations Committee (and subsequently Council) in November 2020.

ACTION: Head of Corporate Governance (Deputy Secretary to Council)

5334 MINUTES
(Confidential to Council)

Confidential to members of Council.

5335 MATTERS ARISING

Council noted Paper C2020/003, the Council Action Log, and the plan to update the Action Log with actions completed and outstanding.

5336 VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S COMMUNICATIONS

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the weekly update to members of staff would now be circulated to members of Council.

The Vice-Chancellor gave a verbal update which concentrated on the following topics:

a) The University’s response to Covid-19

i) the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the number of cases among the University’s staff and student community remained low;

ii) that the University was working through its Gold Command Team, so that it could respond quickly to a changing environment;

iii) that the University was liaising with local communities and working with colleagues in the region, such as the local health protection teams;

iv) that there were students who were self-isolating on campus and that they were being cared for with food deliveries, regular contact and a care package put together by Student Services and academic teams;
v) that the University was tracking the use of its accommodation and that 90% plus had been booked, with 84% of the students who had booked accommodation having arrived and checked in;

vi) that work was ongoing on a blended academic approach, with a proportion of face to face and online learning;

vii) that there was on site testing on both the Canterbury and Medway campuses;

viii) that from an academic staff perspective, the quality of student engagement and academic exchange seemed higher than usual with the blended learning experience;

ix) that the University should anticipate questions over “value for money”;

x) that, from a staff point of view, the restructure, with members of staff moving to new Divisions or departments whilst working remotely, could cause a lot of anxiety and that it was challenging to deliver an ongoing education experience, research priorities and student support in such circumstances;

xi) that online classes could add more in-depth communication between students and members of staff but that it was difficult for students to engender a sense of community whilst separately online;

xii) that the University’s communications, internal and external, seemed impressive compared to others;

xiii) that it would be interesting to consider what the University had learned in the very quick transition from “in person” to digital and how that would shape decision making in the future.

The Chair of Council expressed thanks to all members of staff within the University community for their work at a time of great uncertainty.

5337 STUDENT RECRUITMENT FOR 2020/2021

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic Strategy, Planning and Performance, introduced Paper C2020/004.

Points made were as follows;

a) that despite being too early to circulate conclusions on the 2020 recruitment, the University was confident that it would meet the post-Covid-19 budget requirements;

b) that the Paper did not take into account the data on returning students;

c) that there had been a much higher level of deferrals for postgraduate overseas students than was usual, particularly for one year programmes;

The Chair confirmed that student recruitment would remain a standing item on future Council Agendas and that an update would be circulated to Council on Wednesday 14 October 2020 when the position would be clearer.
ACTION: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Strategy, Planning and Performance)

Note: The Secretary circulated the update by email on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

5338 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SENATE ON REVISIONS TO ORDINANCES 6 TO 8

The Vice-Chancellor presented Paper C2020/005, Recommendations from Senate on Revisions to Ordinances 6-8, and confirmed that these revisions reflected the agreed changes to the Senate membership. Points were made as follows;

a) regarding 7.3, that further clarification would be added to ensure transparency, and any edits be approved under delegated authority by the Chair of Council and the Vice-Chancellor;

Council approved the recommendations, provided that point a) was taken into account.

ACTION: Secretary to Council, Chair, Vice-Chancellor

5339 MEDWAY GREEN PAPER
(Confidential to Council)

Confidential to members of Council.

5340 REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
(Commercial in confidence)

Confidential to members of Council.

5341 REPORT OF THE FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT DIRECTOR
(Commercial in confidence)

Confidential to members of Council.

5342 REPORT FROM THE COUNCIL OVERSIGHT GROUP
(Commercial in confidence)

Confidential to members of Council.

5343 GILES LANE PROJECT
(Commercial in confidence)

Confidential to members of Council.

5344 KENT UNION BUDGET
(Confidential to Council)

Confidential to members of Council.
5345 REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Council received an oral update from the Chair of the Audit Committee following the meeting on 2 October 2020. The Chair raised the following points;

a) that, due to the publication of the new CUC Code, the Higher Education (HE) Audit Committees Code of Practice, in May 2020, the Audit Committee’s Terms of Reference would need to be reviewed and that this would be considered at the next meeting;

b) [redacted];

c) regarding going concern and the sign off of the Financial Statements for 2019/2020, which would be best done before the end of the calendar year.

[Redacted]

5346 COUNCIL DELEGATION TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT FOR 2020/2021

The Chair presented Paper C2020/013, Delegation to the Vice Chancellor and President for 2020/21, which was approved.

Council noted Paper C2020/014, on the Distinction between Governance and Management, as adopted in 2004.

5347 DATES OF MEETINGS IN 2020/2021

Council noted the provisional dates of Council’s meetings as follows:

- Friday 27 November 2020 at 10:30am
- Friday 11 December 2020 at 10.30am (if needed)
- Friday 12 February 2021 all day Strategy meeting (9.30am-4.30pm)
- Friday 26 March 2021 at 10.30am in Medway
- Friday 25 June 2021 at 10.30am (followed by the Council’s Annual Dinner)

Note: Following the October meeting the next Council meeting after the November 2020 meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 10.30am with a possible meeting on Friday 22 January 2020 at 10.30am (tbc).

5348 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Professor Wilkinson thanked everyone for helping him to prepare for and participate in his first meeting of Council;
b) Kent Vision
It was agreed that an update would be provided on Kent Vision, which was confirmed to be on track to deliver as planned.
ACTION: Professor Richard Reece, SRO, Kent Vision

c) Halpin
It was proposed to bring the Halpin recommendations back to Council and to take advantage of the consultancy that had been promised.
ACTION: Director of Governance and Assurance (Secretary to Council), Chair

d) Thanks
The Chair of Council thanked everyone who had worked so hard to deliver the best possible service to the University’s students in very challenging times.

Notes

1. Papers
Copies are available on the Council eboard portal (Diligent Boards) or on request from the Secretary. Approved Minutes and many of the papers are published on the University website at https://kent.ac.uk/governance/council/index.html.

2. Queries
Any queries should be addressed to Dr Sinead Critchley, Director of Governance and Assurance (Secretary to Council), (email: S.Critchley-2002@kent.ac.uk) or Jo Pearsall (J.L.Pearsall@kent.ac.uk or telephone 01227 823903).

JLP/SC 19.11.2020