

**KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**

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**CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 1 July 2010.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Mrs T Dean (Vice-Chairman), Mr R W Bayford, Mr D L Brazier, Mr R B Burgess, Mrs J P Law, Mr R J Parry, Mr J E Scholes, Mr M V Snelling and Mrs P A V Stockell (Substitute for Mr J R Bullock, MBE)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P B Carter, Mr R W Gough, Mr A J King, MBE, Mr R A Marsh and Mr J D Simmonds

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Bole (Head Of I C T Commissioning), Miss J Clarke (Head of Communications), Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms J Hill (Performance Manager), Ms C McKenzie (Greener Kent Manager), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mr T Molloy (Programme Manager - Office Transformation), Mrs T Oliver (Director of Strategic Development and Public Access), Mr D Shipton (Finance Strategy Manager), Mr D Smith (Head of Contact Centre), Mr N Warren (Consumer Monitoring Manager) and Mr G Wild (Director of Law and Governance)

**UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

**54. Minutes**

*(Item A3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be published as a correct record.

**55. Dates of meetings in 2011**

*(Item A4)*

The Committee noted the dates of its meetings for 2011 as follows:-

Thurs, 13 January 2011

Thurs, 31 March 2011

Wed, 6 July 2011

Thurs, 22 September 2011

Thurs, 3 November 2011

It was noted that all meetings will start at 10.00am and may go on into the afternoon.

## **56. Chief Executive's Department Financial Outturn and Unit Operating Plan Outturn for 2009/10**

*(Item B1)*

(1) Mr Shipton introduced the 2009/10 financial outturn report and Mrs Hill introduced the annual operating plan outturn information, for each of the Service Units within the Chief Executive's Department. The report brought together financial and key activity and performance outcome information in the same place.

(2) Members were asked to consider how the Committee should contribute to formulating the 2011/12 budget and medium term plan at an earlier stage than previous years.

(3) Mrs Dean congratulated the Legal Department on the income that they had generated for the County Council.

(4) Mr Wild explained the comparison between the London rates for solicitors compared with the blended rate of £90m per hour charge by the County Councils solicitors for external work. This rate was attractive to the public sector. External rates were higher than internal rates and generated a surplus. External work subsidised internal legal work which was charged at below cost. If the Legal Department only carried out internal work they would be operating at a loss.

(5) Mrs Dean suggested that the meeting of the IMG to assist with the development of the Budget might wish to look at four areas of minor overspend (Strategic Management, Centrally Managed Budgets, Central Policy and Performance, Improvement & Engagement), which were showing an overspend that was small financially but high in percentage terms. She also hoped that the large underspend on Public Consultation was due to an overestimation rather than a lack of consultation. It was confirmed that it was not due to a lack of consultation.

(6) In response to a question Mr McMullan confirmed that there was an internal audit programme. She offered to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee on the Internal audit programme and how it impacted on the Chief Executives Department.

(7) The efficient way in which the Contact Centre dealt with calls was commended. It was suggested that consideration should be given to using an 01 number to access the centre so that mobile phone users with inclusive minutes could contact the Centre at no cost. Mrs Oliver explained that officers were currently exploring the use of an 03 number which was a low call number included in most mobile phone packages.

(8) The issue of the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook was mentioned including the restrictions on access Facebook by officers unless a business case has been made. The excellent facility provided by Yammer and the opportunity that it provides for Members to set up community forums was highlighted by Members. Miss Clarke explained that in relation to officer access to Facebook it has always been possible to make a business case for access to it, there was ongoing work with Ms Beer to look at the whole issue of officer access to Facebook

and she would report back to Members when there were clear recommendations. Miss Clarke undertook to provide a briefing note for Member on the use of Yammer.

(9) Members asked a number of questions on the figures relating to Freedom of Information (FOI) enquires. Mr Wild explained that there was a significant cost in providing responses to FOI enquires. The cost of obtaining the information per request was £70 but this did not include the cost of administering the system. Officers were looking at ways of improving transparency and reducing the cost. It was important to supply a response that avoided the need for requesters to come back again for additional information.

(10) In response to a question on whether it was possible to move the performance indicator for paying invoices for small businesses to 14 days, Mr Shipton explained that the challenge with this would be identifying which invoices were from small businesses as this was not currently identified on the payments systems.

(11) Mr Dean congratulated Commercial Services on having their most successful year ever and referred to the impending retirement of Mr Harlock, Director of Commercial Services. It was agreed that the Committees best wishes to Mr Harlock on his retirement be recorded along with their thanks for the innovative work that he has carried out in Commercial Services to generate significant income for the County Council. She commended the work that he did to assist the Select Committee on Home to School Transport in formulating their recommendation to introduce the Freedom Pass.

(12) Mr Gough acknowledged that there were issues with the search engine for the new website and that work was ongoing to resolve these.

(13) In response to a question on the Members Portal, Mr King explained that the Member and Officer Information Group was looking at this issue along with a number of other issues but until the way was clear on how a central source of information for Members, Officers and others was to be provide the Members Portal project was deferred.

(14) In relation to the Information Group Mrs Dean referred to the Member focus groups that had been assisting to define what information Members required, and that all Members were welcome to contribute to these focus groups. An issue raised by these groups was whether there was a need to have a separate internet and intranet. The key challenge would be how to safeguard non public information on one website. Mr Bole stated that he had been asked by Mr Gough to produce a report on the cost of combining the internet and intranet sites.

(15) RESOLVED that :-

(a) the revenue and capital financial outturn for 2009/10 including rollovers for committed projects and changes to capital programme and the performance outturn for 2009/10 be noted.

(b) an IMG of this Committee be established to contribute to the development of the 2011/12 budget which will meet on a regular basis over the next 6 months in order to get a fuller understanding of the implications of potential budget reductions and report back to the full Committee in November and January.

(c) a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the Internal Audit Programme and how it impacts on CED.

**57. WorkPlace Transformation (formerly Better WorkPlaces) Update**  
*(Item B2)*

(1) Mrs Oliver and Mr Molloy introduce a report on WorkPlace Transformation (formerly known as Better WorkPlaces). This was a programme of change which aimed to ensure that KCC had the right buildings in the right places for the 21st century for contact with Kent residents and for officers, in conjunction with partner agencies, and to deliver real efficiencies (including reduced office costs). Since reporting to the Committee in early 2009, the programme had made significant progress, closing four office buildings during 2009, and preparing the ground for future changes. Directorates had continued to work in a coherent and consensual fashion based on an agreed series of protocols. The report updated Members on progress to date, future plans for the office estate under the Better WorkPlaces banner, and additional projects now being undertaken.

(2) In response to a question on Thistley Hill Dover, Mr Molloy explained that this was a former primary school that had been turned into offices in 2009. 200 officers were based there mainly from Adult Social Service and Children Families and Education, It provided a good open plan space with storage provision. The ability to expand this site was limited but with better flexible working there was no pressure for it to take additional officers.

(3) In relation to the option of using a Total Place solution for the officers displaced from Kings Hill, Mrs Oliver stated that the issue had been timescale and cost for partners. In order to maximise the £1m saving from Kings Hill there was not sufficient time to achieve this solution, nor would it have returned a significant saving, so officers would be relocated within the KCC estate. The scenario would be different in other areas.

(4) Mr Gough state that following the Total Place pilot lessons were being drawn from which could be taken forward. Mr Carter emphasised the importance of all public sector partners working together to explore how to take this forward.

(5) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted.

**58. Report on Contact Centre (Consumer Direct South East)**  
*(Item B3)*

(1) Mrs Oliver and Mr Smith introduced a report which advised the Committee of the latest position in relation to the future of Consumer Direct from April 2011 and detailed the actions taken to date to try and secure the future of the service.

(2) Mrs Oliver undertook to bring an update report on the Contact Centre to the next meeting of the Committee and Members would be invited to visit the Contact Centre prior to the Meeting.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted and a report be submitted to the September meeting of the POSC on the Contact Centre (preceded by a tour of the Contact Centre)

## **59. A Comprehensive Engagement Strategy for Kent County Council**

*(Item B4)*

(1) Mrs Hill and Mr Warren introduced a report which set out the vision and principles developed for the Comprehensive Engagement Strategy including, three examples of consultation standards and invited Members to contribute any suggestions for standards they consider ought to be incorporated in the document when it was completed.

(2) Mr King explained that this was an ongoing piece of work and there was not currently clarity about what the government expected in this area. It was important to isolate the precise essentials of what we need to consult on to confirm with government policies in order to work in the most cost effective way. When the document came back to Members again it would be significantly different with the changes informed by the comments from this Committee and national guidance.

(3) Mr Carter emphasised the importance of working jointly with partners in relation to consultation and surveys in order to avoid duplication.

(4) Officers noted the need to review the Complaints, Compliments and Comments leaflet and to ensure that there was a balance across all three of these areas.

(5) In relation to the issue of trying to engage the public in strategic issues the example of the Minerals and Waste Development Framework, the public did not tend to want to comment at the strategic stage but when the results of the adoption of the plan effected them, they would then wish to have an input.

(6) Mrs Hill emphasised that the information received from consultations and surveys was centrally collated in an attempt to ensure that money was not being spent on obtaining information that the County Council already had.

(7) Mrs Dean expressed the view that two separate documents were needed, one for the public and one for officers. She suggested that the local member should be added to list of those who would decide on whether to inform, consult and involve (page 93). She did not accept that there may not be consultation on government advice or changes included in the election manifesto of the political party who lead the County Council (page 94).

(8) It was mentioned that some District Councils kept a list of organisations and who they represent, when they met etc, this information was required of organisations that engaged with the Council.

(9) RESOLVED that the progress being made in developing a Comprehensive Engagement Strategy for Kent County Council and the comments made by Members be noted.

## **60. Sustainability and Climate Change Update**

*(Item B5)*

(1) Ms McKenzie introduced a report which provided the annual update of Kent County Council and the Chief Executive's Departments progress against the commitments in the KCC Environment Policy and ISO14001 Environmental Management System accreditation.

(2) Ms McKenzie explained that the different levels of business miles across the directorates was a reflection of their different types of business, for example Adult Social Services staff needed to go out and visit clients. That Directorate had however embraced BT Meetme and had reduced their business miles by 7%. A Member suggested that there should be a policy on BT Meetme which included a degree of compulsion.

(3) The need to have some rationalisation/co-ordination of multi agency meetings to ensure that the same people were not attending a number of meetings across County to discuss different matters was raised.

(4) In response to a question on the recycling of computers, Mr Bole explained that KCC's equipment was rented and regularly refreshed to ensure that the old equipment was still able to be redeployed by the supplier.

(5) An assurance was sought that when designing new schools consideration was given to the use of shutters and shading outside the building rather than installing air conditioning.

(6) In relation to the LASER's purchasing of electricity, Ms McKenzie confirmed that this used to have a green energy section but this was dropped as it was not cost effective.

(7) Mr King expressed the view that sustainability and climate change were areas in which we could achieve several wins in one go. These were making the County Council more efficient and make more people aware of what it was possible to do.

(8) The Chairman thanked Ms McKenzie and her team on gaining re-accreditation to ISO14001.

(9) RESOLVED that the overall progress made by KCC and CED, especially the re-accreditation to ISO14001 be noted and the approach for taking this forward as set out in paragraph 5 of the report be endorsed.

## **61. Information Systems Deployment**

*(Item B6)*

(1) Mr Bole presented a report which provided an update on the use of information systems to support direct services. The scale and scope of the systems reflected the size and diversity of the County Council. There was a risk associated with keeping this number of systems integrated, as a small change in one area could have a knock on impact in other area(s). In such a large organisation it was

important to ensure that duplication was avoided. Opportunities to link systems with other public sector organisations were being explored to make effective use of resources.

(2) Mr Gough referred to the joint delivery of services, including ICT, with Reigate and Banstead Council which had recently been agreed. He referred to the attempt made by directorates a number of years ago to reduce their budget for ICT only to have to reinstate it in order to be able to deliver their services. He stated that it was possible to make short term savings in ICT but these tended to have costs in the longer term.

(3) Mrs Dean congratulated ISG officers for the efficient way in which they resolve IT problems reported to them.

(4) In response to a question on the apparently low number of PC's (14,000) Mr Bole explained that not all officers could make use of a PC and that there had been a shift in balance from desktop to mobile devices.

(5) Mr Bole explained that the regional data centre was part of ICT's capital programme. A lot of the County Councils ICT services were hosted in Docklands. He informed the Committee that Medway Council had moved into the former Lloyds of London data centre, in partnership with District Councils and ourselves it had been opened up as a public services data centre for Kent. This had resulted in savings from "Invest to Save" for all authorities involved. He stated that more savings could be made if health services participated.

(6) Reference was made to shared services in East Kent for revenue and benefits. Mr Bole confirmed that he was aware of this and was working with the Head of ICT at Canterbury CC, in conjunction with Reigate and Banstead Council on a initiative for the Cabinet Office. This was a pilot system for revenues and benefits that could be rolled out across the country. Mr Bole explained that one of the advantages of working with Reigate and Banstead Council was that it made the dialogue with DC colleagues easier as the County Council alone did not have the same overlap in systems use due to the difference in responsibilities.

(7) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted.

## **62. Select Committees - update**

*(Item C1)*

The Committee received a report which updated it on the current topic review programme. Also circulated with the report were minutes from a meeting of the Select Committee on Accessing Democracy which considered progress with its recommendations. Members were invited suggestions for future Select Committee topic reviews.

RESOLVED the:

(a) the progress made with the recommendations from the Select Committee review on Accessing Democracy be noted .

b) the Democratic Services officer for this POSC be advised of any items that Members would like to suggest for inclusion in the Select Committee topic review programme.