

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 6 September 2017.

PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr R H Bird, Mr A Booth, Mr G Cooke, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr D Farrell, Mr R C Love, Mr J P McInroy, Mr B J Sweetland and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance, Mr R W Gough, Ms D Marsh, Mr P J Oakford, Mrs S Prendergast and Mr K Pugh

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr P Leeson (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mr A Scott-Clark (Director of Public Health), Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development), Mr M Thomas-Sam (Head of Strategy and Business Support), Mr J Lynch (Head of Democratic Services) and Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

138. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2017

(Item A4)

Mr Booth asked why his apologies were not recorded within the minutes of the meeting on 7 July. The Scrutiny Research Officer explained that apologies were recorded on the Council's Committee Management System but that these were not contained within the printed minutes.

The Chairman referred to an update note on the Council's Fire Safety Review from the Director of Infrastructure which had been circulated to the Committee via email. This was considered to be comprehensive and members would await the full report to Cabinet in due course.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2017 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

139. Select Committee Work Programme

(Item A5)

(1) The Scrutiny Committee received 'bids' for three Select Committee topics.

Pupil Premium – Mrs Prendergast

(2) Mr Gough explained to the Committee that this review would be timely. As attainment had risen, gaps had remained intractable. There had been a high profile Government initiative in the form of Pupil Premium; it would be useful for the Council to look at what good was being achieved with the money received through Pupil Premium, where there were examples of good practice and how this

could be shared. Pupil Premium was money given directly to schools but influenced a performance gap in schools on which KCC was judged.

- (3) Mrs Prendergast gave Members some background on Pupil Premium which had been brought in in 2011 to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities. Mrs Prendergast envisaged that the Select Committee could review how the £58million of Pupil Premium per annum was currently being used to benefit Kent's vulnerable learners. The review could identify best practice which could be shared to improve the outcomes for vulnerable learners.
- (4) The Chairman opened the debate up to questions. Members considered this to be a worthy topic which followed on well from the Grammar Schools and Social Mobility topic which referenced Pupil Premium. One Member asked the Corporate Director whether all the data which would be needed for the review would be available. Mr Leeson confirmed that all the data required would be available.
- (5) One Member asked whether it was the intention to look at the cumulative effect of the proposals for the new School Funding Formula as well as Pupil Premium. There were concerns over the two making a huge difference to the income of schools. Mr Gough explained that he considered these to be slightly different issues although it would be for the Select Committee to determine its own Terms of Reference.
- (6) Another Member raised the issue of the performance gap and the link to poor aspirations of children and parents from more deprived backgrounds.

Social Isolation

- (7) Mr Pugh presented the Social Isolation Select Committee proposal and explained that a lot of information was available. He gave an example of how social isolation might occur after a hip operation. There were concerns that once social isolation started occurring and mild depression and mental ill health set in. Research recognised that people needed communities and friends, for example, to help prevent them suffering from mental ill health. It was hoped that the Select Committee would look at the problem of social isolation and come up with solutions to cater for people long term in terms of involvement in the community.
- (8) Mr Thomas-Sam responded and confirmed that the impact of social isolation was well understood and could affect long term health. Both health and social services were working together to try to support people but it was important for Members to look at the contribution of other key agencies as well. Mr Oakford explained that the scope of this proposed review was huge, it covered people of all ages through their lifespan, young people, care leavers, unemployed people and single parents and it was necessary to encompass everybody. Mr Oakford referred to a report from NHS England which focussed on reducing social isolation across a lifespan.
- (9) Ms Marsh asked that the review considered guidance from the late MP Jo Cox which related to loneliness. It was important to understand the difference between loneliness and social isolation. Ms Marsh referred to Blue Zones which were 'happy places' all across the world which invested in social interaction and

relationships. The review needed to look at all areas from libraries to parks. There were also links between loneliness and dementia and research showed that social isolation was linked to physical illness and death.

- (10) A number of Members were concerned at the wide spectrum of the review, it was important that Select Committees did not take on a life of their own and there should be a time limitation on Select Committee so there was an opportunity for a broader range of work. It was suggested that every decision made by the County Council should reference whether the decision improved or detracted from social isolation.
- (11) A Member asked for assurances that this review could be worthwhile and meaningful whilst touching on all the subjects that it needed to touch upon. The member also sought clarification that within the Terms of Reference the Committee would be establishing whether there was a close correlation between social isolation and mental ill health. Mr Scott-Clarke explained that there was evidence connecting social isolation and the health of an individual. The Select Committee would be told when drawing up their Terms of Reference that there was a close correlation between social isolation and mental ill health.
- (12) There was also a cost to getting the issues around this topic wrong, and the Select Committee should also look at how much could be saved by getting this right. One Member suggested another angle which was the cultural aspect to this review and the promotion of voluntary groups and churches.
- (13) Mr Thomas-Sam, suggested that the 3 most critical issues to this review were identifying who was socially isolated in Kent, to identify the extent to which current service provision was effective and investigate how to improve mental health and wellbeing at all stages of life.

Affordable Housing

- (14) Mrs Dean presented the Affordable Housing Select Committee proposal and explained that the Committee had received three extremely good subjects but that she was not pressing for Affordable Housing to be tackled immediately. Mrs Dean met with the Leader earlier in the week and now having received the officers' comments she proposed that the Select Committee proposal be refined. The lack of affordable housing was important and affected the Council's ability to recruit and created problems with education, health and social isolation. This was an important subject but there was no statutory responsibility on the council. However the Council did have large investments and land holdings and this issue would have to be tackled in conjunction with other agencies who had responsibility in law. Mrs Dean suggested that the subject be reviewed and considered it a strong contender for the third Select Committee subject.
- (15) Mr Dance responded and explained that this was a key issue, as there was often an Infrastructure 'lag'. The market was dominated by large house builders and consideration needed to be given to the introduction of innovative ways of building.

- (16) The Corporate Director explained that although the Council did not build houses it did have a role, it was a large investor and her directorate would be pleased to work with Mrs Dean to further refine the topic.
- (17) A Member welcomed the review and raised the issue of twin hatted members who might sit on planning committees for the district councils. It might be possible through the County to escalate pressure to some of the larger developers. Members agreed that the three topics were strong and worthwhile issues. Members were pleased with the opportunity to refine this topic further to ensure it worked well for Kent. Good housing was one of the key determinates of people's health and social wellbeing; it was possible to build very good housing with more innovative methods.

Conclusion

- (18) The Chairman concurred that Members had heard proposals for three strong worthwhile subjects, all deserved the Committee's support and he would like to see all three established.
- (19) Members discussed the resource available to the Select Committee and the possibility of being able to establish two Select Committees running concurrently but this was counter balanced by the budget pressures on the County Council, there was only one research officer available.
- (20) It was considered that Pupil Premium could be dealt with in a relatively short period of time, reporting to County Council in March 2018. Social Isolation was considered to be a complex issue which would be considered on the conclusion of the first topic and the Provision of Affordable Housing to Kent Residents to follow but work to be undertaken to develop the scope of the brief at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED that the Select Committee on 'Pupil Premium – narrowing the attainment gap for Kent's vulnerable learners' be established to report to County Council in March 2018.