

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 15 March 2006.

PRESENT: Mr D Smyth (Vice-Chairman - in the chair), Mr T J Birkett (substitute for Dr M R Eddy), Mr J R Bullock MBE, Mr C J Capon, Mr D S Daley (substitute for Mrs T Dean), Mr J B O Fullarton, Mr C Hart, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr C J Law, Mr J I Muckle (substitute for Mrs M Newell), Mr R J E Parker, Mr J E Scholes, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mr C T Wells.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wale, Assistant to the Chief Executive and Mr S C Ballard, Head of Democratic Services.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

60. Membership

(1) The Committee was advised that both Mr Bassam and Mr Bliss were unable to attend the meeting because they were in hospital.

(2) RESOLVED that the Committee's best wishes be extended to Mr Bassam and Mr Bliss.

61. Minutes

(Item A2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2006 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

62. Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues - 2 and 9 March 2006

(Item A3)

(1) On note 1 of the 9 March meeting, Mr Smyth reported that it had not, in the event, proved possible to reach agreement on a cross-party response to the Interim Report of the Lyons Inquiry.

(2) RESOLVED that the notes of the meetings of the Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held on 2 and 9 March 2006 be noted.

63. Informal Member Group on "Kent - What Price Growth?" - 2 March 2006

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the recommendation of the Informal Member Group in note 2(2)(b) that the same presentations that were given to the IMG at its meeting on 2 March should also be given to all Local Boards (preferably at joint meetings of two or more neighbouring Boards) over the next 12 months, be endorsed;
- (b) the remaining notes of the meeting of the Informal Member Group on "Kent - What Price Growth?" held on 2 March 2006 be noted.

64. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee - Outcomes and Actions to March 2006

(Item A5 - Report by Assistant to the Chief Executive)

RESOLVED that the report on the actions taken as a result of the Committee's decisions at previous meetings, and on progress with Select Committee Topic Reviews, be noted.

65. Kent Prospects 2006-2012 - Working Draft

(Item C1)

(1) Mr P Raine, Director of Strategic Planning, and Mr S Arnett, Economic Development Policy Manager, Strategic Planning Directorate, attended the meeting for this item.

(2) The discussion of the item covered the following issues:-

- Time period covered by Kent Prospects

Originally intended to cover next 5 years but extended to 6 years to cover run up to London Olympics 2012.

- Multi-faceted nature of economic development, which requires skilled workforce, entrepreneurs, affordable housing, etc, all to come together.
- Importance of focus on education in order to create skilled workforce.
- Importance of public attitudes - as entrepreneurs, as consumers, etc - and need to change attitudes in order to tackle problems identified.
- Need for coherent and co-ordinated approach to the marketing of Kent.
- Opportunities for the Kent economy from the London Olympics.
- Need for emphasis on rural diversification:
 - tourism;
 - non-food crops and local processing capacity for, eg, biodiesel;
 - equestrianism;
 - promotion of locally-grown produce and the possibility of persuading supermarket chains to use more 'place of origin' labelling.
- Impact of water shortages on economic development:
 - potential for desalination;
 - problems posed for open-air reservoirs by increased evaporation caused by climate change.
- Possibility of developing alternative energy sources:
 - potential for re-opening Kent coal field;
 - wave power;

- tidal power;
- wind farms (particularly offshore).
- Development of more waste recycling and waste incineration locally to reduce transport costs.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Mr Raine and Mr Arnett be thanked for attending the meeting and for the information they had provided;
- (b) the Director of Strategic Planning's proposal to call a summit with the Regional Directors of the main supermarket chains to push for 'place of origin' labelling on fresh food be welcomed.

66. Recent Urgent Education Decisions

(Item D1)

(1) Mr L B Ridings and Mr J D Simmonds, Cabinet Members for Education and School Improvement; Mr D Adams, Area Education Officer, Ashford/Shepway; and Mr G Ward, Assistant Director of Education and Libraries, Resources, attended the meeting to explain why two recent Education Decisions had had to be taken as a matter of urgency.

George Spurgen Community School, Folkestone - Fresh Start Proposal (Decision 05/00743)

(2) Mr Ridings and Mr Adams explained that this Decision had needed to be taken as a matter of urgency because the school was in special measures; four subsequent HMI reports (the last in late September 2005) had found unsatisfactory progress; and the opportunity arose to make a Fresh Start application to overcome the problems at the school. By the time it became possible to pursue a Fresh Start application, the timelines, particularly in terms of the redundancy process for staff, meant that insufficient time was available for the normal consultation (both with the public and with the School Organisation Advisory Board) and Decision-making procedures, if the new school were to open in September 2006.

(3) If the Decision had not been treated as urgent and the scheme had gone through the normal consultation and Decision timescales, there would have been a significant delay in providing improved educational opportunities for children living in the area served by George Spurgen School

Basic Need - The North School, Ashford - Expansion (Decision 06/00772)

(4) Mr Simmonds and Mr Ward explained why this Decision had needed to be taken as a matter of urgency. During the negotiation for the PFI it was recognised that because of growth in Ashford there would need to be provision for 8 FE. However, the PFI funding agreed by government was only sufficient to enable 6 FE to be built which was then financially approved as part of a large PFI contract. KCC had allocated in its capital programme the additional funding for the extra 2 FE, but it had not been individually specified. The solicitors for the PFI bankers asked for confirmation that this expenditure had been formally authorised, hence the request for an urgent Decision.

(5) If the Decision had not been treated as urgent, accommodation for the additional 2 FE would have had to be built as a separate building, rather than as an extension to the new accommodation already under construction, with consequent delays, disruption, and additional costs.

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- (6) Procedures had now been altered to prevent a recurrence of this sort of problem.
- (7) RESOLVED that:-
 - (a) Mr Ridings, Mr Simmonds, Mr Adams and Mr Ward be thanked for attending the meeting, and their explanations of the reasons for the decisions on George Spurgen School and The North School needing to be taken as a matter of urgency be accepted;
 - (b) Mr Ridings' assurance that school reorganisation proposals would, wherever possible, be reported to the School Organisation Advisory Board at an early stage in the process be welcomed;
 - (c) Mr Ward's assurance that procedures had been changed to avoid any recurrence of the problem relating to The North School decision be welcomed.

06/so/csc/031506/Minutes