

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 25 October 2006.

PRESENT: Dr M R Eddy (Chairman), Mr T J Birkett (substitute for Mrs M Newell), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr J R Bullock MBE, Mr C J Capon, Mr A R Chell (substitute for Mr J B O Fullarton), Mr B R Cope, Mrs T Dean, Mr C Hart, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr P W A Lake, Mr C J Law, Mr J I Muckle (substitute for Mr D Smyth), 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

32. Membership
(Item A1)

The Committee noted that Mr P W A Lake had been appointed to serve on the Committee in place of Mr R H C Bliss, and the Chairman welcomed Mr Lake to his first meeting.

33. Minutes
(Item A2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2006 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

34. Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues – 12 October 2006
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the notes of the meeting of the Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held on 12 October 2006 be noted.

35. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee – Standing Report to October 2006
(Item A4 – 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.

36. Guidelines for Members of the Public Who Wish to Address the Committee
(Item A5 – Report by Head of Democratic Services)

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the idea of issuing guidelines to members of the public who wished to address the Committee be welcomed;

- (b) the draft guidelines set out in the report be amended in the light of the comments made at the meeting and then finalised by the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman and Spokesmen of the Committee;
- (c) the guidelines be subject to amendment in the light of experience, and operation of the guidelines be reviewed formally after 12 months;
- (d) consideration be deferred to the next meeting of ways in which more members of the public could be encouraged to participate in the scrutiny process by attending meetings to give their views to the Committee on topics under scrutiny.

37. KCC Procurement Process

(Item A6 – Report by Head of Democratic Services)

- (1) Mr C Greaves, Head of Procurement, attended the meeting to assist Members with their discussion of this item.
- (2) RESOLVED that:-
 - (a) Mr Greaves be thanked for his assistance in the discussion;
 - (b) the contents of the report be noted.

38. Delivering a 21st Century Highway Service

(Item C1)

- (1) Mr K A Ferrin MBE, Cabinet Member for Education, Highways and Waste; Mr P Raine, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration; and Mr G Harrison-Mee, Director, Kent Highway Services, attended the meeting to answer Members' questions on this item.
- (2) In an introductory statement, Mr Ferrin explained that the sole reason for the decision to change from 3 to 2 super-depots was a financial one. The overall financial position had changed adversely since the original decision to establish 3 super-depots had been made because of flat Government settlements and no allowance for inflation on highway funding, and the threat of capping to KCC overall. Mr Ferrin was anxious not to reduce the amount of money spent on highway maintenance any further and so savings had to be made in the re-shaping project.
- (3) A 2 super-depot structure would require 1 depot to serve East Kent and another to serve West Kent. Site availability had proved a problem but KCC had now bought a site in Ashford, which could serve East Kent, and a site in Wrotham which, subject to planning permission, could serve West Kent.
- (4) Members' questions covered the following issues:-

Costs

- (5) In answer to questions from Mrs Dean and Mr Bullock, Mr Ferrin said that when he had taken over as Cabinet Member the capital cost of the 3 super-depot project was estimated at £26m. He had reviewed the plans in order to reduce the amount of accommodation at each location. This had reduced the capital cost to £21m. The reduction from 3 to 2 super-depots would further reduce capital costs to £17m and reduce

running costs (revenue) by £530k per annum. The capital saving would be invested in mobile technology and business systems which, in turn, would deliver business efficiencies.

IT

(6) In answer to a question from Mrs Dean, Mr Ferrin accepted that the original plans had included investment in IT. This investment had not yet been made but was now needed as part of the latest proposals.

Funding to District Councils

(7) In answer to a question from Mr Chell, Mr Ferrin confirmed that KCC had made a commitment to give £1m to District Councils for verge maintenance for a three-year period from 1 April 2005. He stood by that commitment.

Risk Assessment

(8) In answer to a question from Mr Bullock, Mr Raine said that he was unable to confirm whether or not any risk assessment had been carried out on either the original or the latest proposals for re-structuring KHS.

Back-up Options

(9) In answer to a question from Mr Parker, Mr Harrison-Mee explained that if there should be a delay in obtaining planning permission for Wrotham, West Kent staff would be based temporarily at Aylesford and Joynes House. If planning permission for Wrotham could not be obtained, then an alternative site in West Kent would have to be found.

Central Office Option

(10) In answer to questions from Mr Bullock and Mr Muckle, Mr Ferrin said that he had considered the possibility of moving to a Central Office option (one of the two options (the other being the 3 super-depot option) recommended by external consultations in 2004) but, in his judgement, the 2 super-depot option was better because:-

- (a) it avoided further delay – sites had been acquired which could be used for the 2 super-depot option. Changing to the Central Office option would require the site search to start again, because Aylesford (suggested by Mr Muckle) did not have sufficient space;
- (b) it was more efficient operationally because it reduced travelling time for staff from base to job and it allowed co-location of KCC/Ringway/Jacobs staff.

Location of Super-Depots and Satellites

(11) In answer to questions from Mr Lake, Mr Law and Mr Birkett, Mr Ferrin described the unsuccessful efforts that had been made to secure sites at Bridge and Dover. Some potentially available sites had to be ruled out because they did not meet KHS operational requirements.

Impact on Staff

(12) In answer to a question from Mrs Dean, Mr Harrison-Mee said that he hoped not to have to go through a further re-advertising process. He was already talking to the trade unions and had given a commitment to reduce disruption to staff to an absolute minimum. Mr Raine said that the main impact would be on staff at the Canterbury office who would have to transfer to Ashford rather than Dover as originally planned.

Contractors/Consultants

(13) In answer to a question from Mr Hart, Mr Ferrin confirmed that the new proposal would still involve co-location of KCC/Ringway/Jacobs staff. Ringway would be fitting GPS trackers in all their vehicles at their own cost and this would assist in improving efficiency.

Consultation

(14) In answer to a question from Mr Bullock, Mr Ferrin replied that unfortunately there had been insufficient time to consult the wider membership of KCC or the District Councils about the latest proposals.

Public/District Council/Parish Council Perception of KHS

(15) In answer to questions from Mr Hotson and Mrs Dean, Mr Raine pointed out that it was to be expected that the highways service would generate a big postbag because it was one of the few KCC services that was used by every resident. Compliments and complaints were monitored on a monthly basis and compliments outweighed complaints. Press coverage of KHS had been monitored monthly since April 2006 and this also had been favourable in every month but one.

(16) Mr Ferrin and Mr Raine felt, and Members agreed, that public satisfaction with KHS had improved since the introduction of Highway Liaison Officers.

(17) Mr Raine expressed concern that some District Councils were too quick to criticise and too slow to praise KHS. This had an impact on staff morale.

Forward Plan

(18) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Mr Ferrin said that the decision had needed to be brought forward so quickly that there was no time to include it in the Forward Plan. Notice of this had been given in accordance with the Constitution.

Conclusions

(19) Mrs Stockell proposed, Mr Chell seconded, that the Committee should express comments but not require reconsideration of this decision.

(20) In the light of the consensus that emerged as a result of the discussion of this proposal, Mrs Stockell, with the consent of her seconder, withdrew her motion.

(21) Mr Capon then proposed, Mr Law seconded, that the Committee should require implementation of this decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by Cabinet in the light of the Committee's comments.

Carried unanimously

(22) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Mr Ferrin, Mr Raine and Mr Harrison-Mee be thanked for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions;
- (b) concern be expressed to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste at the lack of consultation with the wider KCC membership, District Councils and other partners about the further changes to the KHS structure proposed in the Cabinet report;
- (c) implementation of the decision be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by Cabinet on the grounds that that the report to Cabinet on 16 October did not contain sufficient information on which the decision could safely be based. Cabinet's reconsideration should be on the basis of a much more detailed report, which should include the following:-
 - (i) consideration of the central HQ option for KHS (one of the two options recommended by external consultants in 2004);
 - (ii) a detailed financial breakdown of capital and revenue costs (including IT costs and any additional costs to contractors which they might pass on to KCC) allowing a proper comparison to be made between the three-depot option, the two-depot option, and the Central Office option;
 - (iii) a full risk assessment of the option recommended to Cabinet for approval in the new report;
 - (iv) a full environmental impact assessment of the option recommended to Cabinet for approval in the new report.