

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY OVERVIEW CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of A meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 14 February 2008.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice-Chairman), Mrs T Dean, Dr M R Eddy, Mr P W A Lake, Mr C J Law, Mr R A Pascoe and Mr D Smyth

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M J Angell and Mr L Christie

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)) and Mills (Managing Director - Adult Social Services)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Minutes - 5 November and 3 December 2007
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2007 and 3 December 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

16. Select Committee - Topic Review Work Programme - update
(Item. 4)

(1) The Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager submitted a report updating the Committee on the current Topic Reviews and invited the Committee to set out its priorities in the work programme for the period Spring 2008 to Autumn 2008.

Topic Review Work Programme

(2) In relation to the Flood Risk Select Committee and County Council meeting on 13 March 2008, Dr Eddy requested that feedback on the recommendations of both of the Flooding Select Committees should be supplied to Members so that this could inform the debate.

(2) It was noted that the report from the Select Committee on Carers in Kent had been had been submitted to the Minister for Care Services as part of the review of the Prime Ministers 1999 Carers Strategy.

(3) Members were reminded that the Accessing Democracy Review had started its work. In relation to the proposed topic review on vulnerable children, the proposer of the review, had indicated that, as considerable work had been undertaken in the Children, Families and Education Directorate, he was satisfied that a review at this time would not be appropriate and he was happy for this to be withdrawn from the programme.

(4) The Chairman informed the Committee that their bid for a permanent Graduate Development Placement for Overview and Scrutiny had been unsuccessful. It was therefore up to the Chairmen of the Policy Overview Committees and other Members to continue to lobby for more resources.

(5) There were resources available for one review to start shortly and two potential topics had been identified. These were Provision of Activities for Young People and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

(6) The topic of **Provision of Activities for Young People** had first been put into the work programme in 2006 and was strongly supported by the Communities Policy Overview Committee. Mrs Doherty and Mr Lake spoke in support of this topic review and answered questions from Members on the proposal. The comments made by Members were noted by officers and would be taken into account when the Terms and Reference and scope of the review were drawn up.

(7) The proposed review on **Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** had been put forward by the Adult Services Directorate. Mr Mills and Mr M Angell were present and gave details of the proposed review and indicated why it was valuable to carry it out at this time. Mr Mills and Mr Angell answered questions and noted comments from Members in relation to this proposal. As part of this discussion, Mr Mills offered to meet reasonable costs for a professional adviser to this Select Committee from his budget.

(8) There was considerable discussion by the Select Committee on which of the two pieces of work should be allocated to the research officer resources that was becoming available shortly. It was acknowledged that both pieces of work were important and would add value to the work of the County Council.

(9) It was noted that whichever review was not selected at this point, would be the next review to be undertaken either by a graduate from the Graduate Development Programme, if the bid of the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager was successful or by the next research officer resource that became available within the team.

Monitoring of Select Committee recommendations

(10) Circulated with the report was an appendix which set out the monitoring that had been undertaken of all Select Committees since 2001. Also included was a copy of the report which had been submitted to Cabinet on 14 January 2007 which set out some of the key outcomes of Select Committees. It was noted that although the paper submitted was in a variety of styles, a standard monitoring format would be prepared to make this easier to monitor in future. Members indicated that they particularly liked the format that had been used for monitoring feedback on the Climate Change Select Committee.

(11) Members welcomed the report as a good starting point for the monitoring of all Select Committee recommendations. It was mentioned that where the recommendations involved lobbying Government or another body, Members would expect to be given information on what had actually been done and the impact that it had had, it was not satisfactory just to mention that the lobbying had taken place.

(12) As the information on the monitoring that had been undertaken to date had not been submitted to County Council, it was suggested that all Members should be made aware of it.

(13) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the progress of the Select Committee Topic Reviews Support for Carers in Kent, Alcohol Misuse and Flood Risk be noted;
- (b) it be noted that the Select Committee Topic Review on Accessing Democracy had commenced its work;
- (c) it be noted that the dedicated Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Research Officer would shortly undertake a review into the transport aspects of Accessing Health Care;
- (d) the Committee agreed to the withdrawal of the Vulnerable Children Topic Review proposal from the work programme;
- (e) that the proposed Topic Review on Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) be undertaken by the Research Officer resource which will become available once the Alcohol Misuse Select Committee has been reported to Cabinet on 17 March 2008;
- (f) that the Topic Review on Provision of Activities for Young People be put on the work programme to be the next review to commence in the September or sooner if resources become available;
- (g) it be noted that Members had found it extremely difficult to decide which Select Committee should be the next one to start its work.
- (g) the recommendations produced by Select Committees prior to March 2006 when a formal monitoring process was introduced be systematically reviewed by the parent Policy Overview Committee;
- (h) that all Members be informed that monitoring information is available, on request for some Select Committees.

17. Building Capacity for Policy Overview Committees

(Item. 5)

(1) The Chairman introduced a report which sought the Committee's views on the options for Building Capacity for Policy Overview Committees. Some Policy Overview Committees finding it a challenge to effectively deal with the required amount of business in a one day meeting. Included as an appendix, was a list of agenda items for the Policy Overview Committees over the past year with the indication of what part of the terms of reference they related to.

(2) Members discussed the issue of Capacity for Overview and Scrutiny and made comments which included the following:-

- Dr Eddy mentioned that the report did not cover Health Overview and Scrutiny or Cabinet Scrutiny. It might be helpful to look at the whole

Overview and Scrutiny structure as part of the Building Capacity exercise, as looking just at the Capacity for Policy Overview Committees did not deal with all of the issues.

- It would appear that some items for example, the Equality Strategy which went to all Policy Overview Committees might be more appropriate for an IMG comprised of Members of each of the Policy Overview Committees which could then feed back to the individual Policy Overview Committees.
- Mention was made of the financial monitoring reports and the timing of these in relation to the programme meetings for the Policy Overview Committees which meant that the basic data was often a number of months out of date. It was noted that the Corporate Policy Overview Committee had already raised this issue and that consideration would be given to the programming of Policy Overview Committees for 2009 to try and address this issue.
- It was mentioned that the Annual Performance Assessments for both Adult Social Services and Children, Families and Education did not appear to be going to the Policy Overview Committee.
- Mr Smyth highlighted the shortage of research resources for Select Committees and the difficult choice that Member had to make earlier in the meeting. He also made a plea for research resources for Cabinet Scrutiny Committee. He referred to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Research Model and he would like to see this replicated across Overview and Scrutiny.
- A number of Members spoke in support of the Rapporteur System. One of the advantages of this system was that it gave more Members the opportunity to have a greater degree of involvement. However, one of the issues with this would be the amount of research support that Members may require in order to carry out this role effectively.
- It was suggested that Policy Overview Committees should consider using IMG's when appropriate in same way that Cabinet Scrutiny does.
- Although Policy Overview Committees were developing and improving, a view was expressed that they were still too heavy on overview and light on scrutiny.
- The Chairman of Communities Policy Overview Committee commended the system of having their Cabinet Member/Managing Director give an oral update for up to 45 minutes at the start of each meeting. This provided an opportunity for Members of the Committee to put any questions within the remit of the Committee to the Cabinet Member supported by the Managing Director.
- It was suggested in relation to Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee that greater use should be made of the

Children's Champions Board to deal with appropriate matters to reduce the workload of the main committees.

- Ms Harrison explained the system at Swale Borough Council where they had Informal Member Groups which were not politically balanced or supported by Democratic Services Officers. Members carried out their own research, organised their own meetings and wrote their own report for submission to the main Committee.
- It was emphasised that there was a need to look at the structure for Overview and Scrutiny in relation to the divide between Policy Overview and Scrutiny.
- The Chairman stated that the comments made by Members would be used to inform further discussion on this issue with the Cabinet and Chief Officers Group. If Members wished to submit any further views, they could do so in writing.

(3) RESOLVED that the Committees views which will inform reports to the Cabinet and Chief Officers Group be noted.