

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 21 January 2009.

PRESENT: Dr M R Eddy (Chairman), Mr D Smyth (Vice-Chairman), Ms S J Carey, Mr A R Chell, Mr G Cowan, Mrs T Dean, Mr R W Gough, Mr C Hart, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr R E King, Mrs J Law, Mr M J Northey, Mr J E Scholes, Mr J D Simmonds and Mr R Truelove

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership) and Mrs A Taylor (Research Officer to Cabinet Scrutiny Committee)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

116. Declarations of interest

Mrs Dean declared a personal interest in item A7 – paragraph 31 (e) (Communication and Media Business Plan IMG), as she was the Chairperson of the organisation referred to in West Malling.

Mrs Hohler declared a personal interest in item E1 and, in particular the article referred to in “The Independent” on Monday 19 January, as she was a personal friend of Michael Spencer, Conservative Party treasurer.

117. Minutes - 10 December 2008

(Item. A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2008 be approved and the Chairman be authorised to sign them as a correct record.

118. Action Taken on Committee's Recommendations

(Item. A4)

RESOLVED That the action taken by the Cabinet on the Committee's recommendations from its meeting on 10 December 2008, be noted.

119. Follow-up Items from Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Item. A5)

The Committee was advised that the covering report for this item, together with information relating to the Sevenoaks Academy, was circulated separately.

In relation to the Kent 2010 Action Plans, Mrs Dean stated that the information supplied in relation to target 35 (work with bus and train providers and lobby government to improve public transport services in Kent), was out of date, adding that the number of complaints she was receiving was still high, particularly in relation to the cost of rail fares and the availability of rail services to central London early in the morning.

Mr Sass undertook to contact the relevant officers (Mick Sutch and David Hall) for a more up to date report, addressing Mrs Dean's concerns.

In relation to a further question on Building Schools for the Future (BSF), detailed on the final page of the covering report, Mr Hart asked whether KCC's contribution of £24.5m for Wave 3 included the value of relevant property assets that will be put back into the pot following the completion of the wave. Mr Sass undertook to seek further information on this point.

RESOLVED That the report on follow up items be noted.

120. Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues - 8 January 2009
(Item. A6)

In relation to a question from Mr Smyth on behalf of Mrs Dean about the savings associated with the introduction of Kent TV, Mr Sass confirmed that he would continue to liaise with the Chief Executive's office in relation to a formal response to Mrs Dean's questions.

In relation to the discussion on S.106 agreements, Mrs Dean expressed the view that the proposed clawback arrangements for the Ashford Newtown site (item 5 on page 19) could apply equally to other sites due to the ongoing effect of the economic downturn and suggested that the general principles of the clawback mechanism should be considered by this Committee. Members agreed that the Budget IMG was asked to consider whether there should be an agreed set of guiding principles for such arrangements, which could be recommended to the Cabinet for approval.

In relation to the specimen business plans (pages 21 to 38), Dr Eddy asked on page 37 to whom was the target date of delivery/completion reported to, i.e. how would Members become aware that a particular project, development or key action had been completed? Mr Smyth undertook to raise this matter with Andy Wood and the Budget IMG.

RESOLVED That the notes of the Budget IMG held on 8 January 2009 be agreed

121. Communication and Media Business Plan Informal Member Group - 19 January 2009
(Item. A7)

The Chairman stated that the details of translation services and their costs be provided for all Members of the Committee, rather than just Mr Daley (paragraph 31 (f)).

Mr Chell asked if the improvements to the KCC website referred to in paragraph 13, also included KNet, as in his opinion, parts of KNet were cumbersome to use. Mrs Dean stated that, during a meeting of the Strategic Communications Group the previous day, it was stated that the resources allocated for the website refresh would include improvements to KNet. She added that mention was also made about the role of the Head of Communications and Media Centre in policing any new or amended publications and the work being done to collate information about events taking place across the County. The Chairman stated that he was pleased

that there was all-party representation on the Strategic Communications Group and asked if all Members could receive regular copies of the list of events.

RESOLVED That the notes of the Informal Member Group on Communications and Media Centre held on 19 January 2009 be agreed.

122. KCC's Treasury Management Policies
(Item. E1)

Mr Sass reported that, despite being requested to do so, Butlers had not provided answers to the Committee's written questions for consideration and discussion at this meeting. A response had been received from Butlers stating that, "due to the extensive nature of the questions posed we have not been in a position to finalise our response in the short time available. Therefore we will not be able to get the responses to the questions to you prior to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee meeting. However, we will endeavour the get the responses to you as soon as possible"

Dr Eddy referred to an article in "The Independent" on Monday 19 January, copies of which had been tabled for Committee Members.

Members agreed that there was little to be achieved if no answers had been forthcoming from Butlers and Mrs Dean suggested that the Committee should express its disappointment that it could not exercise its important scrutiny role in relation to this matter. Mrs Dean also referred to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee on local authority investments and referred in particular to the evidence given by an independent consultant called Howard Knight, who had made reference to Kent County Council. Members agreed that it was important to obtain a full transcript of the relevant parts of the Select Committee debate and seek the comments of KCC officers accordingly.

The Committee discussed the next steps with regard to the questions that Butlers had been asked to respond to.

RESOLVED That:

(1) a letter should be sent to Butlers in the name of the Chairman and Spokespersons of the Committee, stating that the Committee was pleased to note that Butlers would endeavour to get the responses to us as soon as possible and adding that Members would appreciate receiving answers to their questions prior to the Committee's next meeting on Monday 26 January; and

(2) a full transcript of relevant parts of the House of Commons Select Committee on local authority investments be provided for relevant Officers in the Finance service to comment on at the appropriate time.