

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Communities Policy Overview Committee held in the Archbishop's Palace, Palace Gardens, Mill Street, Maidstone ME15 6YE on Tuesday, 13 January 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs S V Hohler (Chairman), Mr T J Birkett (Vice-Chairman), Mr G Cowan, Mr A R Chell, Mr D A Hirst, Mr R E King, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr M J Northey, Mrs E D Rowbotham, Mr G Rowe and Mrs E M Tweed

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Bainbridge (Director Of Community Safety & Regulatory Services), Mr D Cloake (Head of Emergency Planning), Mr D Crilley (Director of Community Cultural Services), Ms J Edwards (Director of Policy and Resources), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms A Honey (Managing Director Communities), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance and Asset Management) and Ms A Slaven (Director Youth Services and KDAAT)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

109. Minutes - 12 November 2008

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

110. Portfolio Holder and Managing Director's Update

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Hill and Ms Honey gave an update based on the list of topics that they had circulated with the papers for the meeting this included :-

- Turner Contemporary
- KDAAT and Trading Standards
- Libraries
- Youth Services
- Apprenticeships
- Volunteers
- Kent History Centre
- Sub National Review
- Staff Changes

(2) Ms Honey stated that Mr Shipton would be leaving the Directorate to take up a post in Corporate finance, the Chairman thanked Mr Shipton for the excellent service and support that he had given to the Committee.

(3) RESOLVED that the update be noted and an update paper on Supporting Independence Programme be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

111. Turner Contemporary Update

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Hill presented a report which updated the Committee on the latest position regarding the construction of the gallery, the latest plans for the revenue running costs and funding of the operation of the gallery, and regeneration impact of the Turner Gallery and the Rendezvous site.

(2) Mr Birkett, whilst emphasising his support for the project, highlighted the importance of ensuring that adequate parking provision was provided for the numbers of visitors expected. Mr Hill explained that there would not be dedicated parking for Turner Contemporary but the needs of visitors to the gallery were being considered as part of a review by Thanet District Council of parking for the whole of Margate. Members also mentioned the importance of making use of public transport to the gallery as accessible as possible for visitors.

(3) Mr Rowe also expressed his support for the gallery and was pleased that a Kent firm had won the tender to build it. Mr Hill stated this company were committed to providing apprenticeship on the project and working with the local colleges.

(4) In response to a question from Mr Northey, Mr Hill stated that the new Chairman of the Trust and other board members came from a media background and understood the need to effectively promote Turner Contemporary and build its profile on a national and international level.

(5) In response to a question from Mr Long, Mr Hill clarified that KCC were responsible for the external maintenance costs for the gallery and the Trust were responsible for the internal running costs. In relation to the length of the lease and rent reviews, Mr Shipton explained that this was still to be negotiated with the trust but it would be based on a peppercorn rent.

(6) Members mentioned the importance of including Turner Contemporary in publicity, both in the UK and on the continent, as another good quality attraction for tourists to Kent. It was also suggested that Network Rail could be approached to make Turner Contemporary part of a "smart ticket" along with other Kent attractions.

(7) RESOLVED that the latest developments on the Turner Contemporary project and an update be submitted to the Committee twice a year.

112. Financial Monitoring 2008/09

(Item B3)

(1) Mr Shipton presented the regular report to this Committee on the forecast outturn against budget for the Communities portfolio based on the second quarterly monitoring report and subsequent exception report to Cabinet.

(2) In relation to the overspend on the Coroners' Service, Mr Bainbridge explained that part of the increase cost was due to our society becoming more litigious, which was having an impact on the decisions made by the service in relation to holding post mortems followed by an inquest. Mr Bainbridge confirmed that regular meetings were held with colleagues in the Coroners' Service and suggestions

made for looking at practices to take account of the county councils view on the cost of the service. Mr Hill confirmed that he was discussing this matter with officials in the Ministry.

(3) In response to a question on the difficulty in recruiting qualified Trading Standards officers, Mr Bainbridge explained that it was a national issue arising from additional funding being given to councils in relation to intellectual property crime, which had increased the demand for qualified staff. He confirmed that the service had not been compromised by not being able to recruit staff of suitable calibre, but with additional staff more work could be carried out.

(4) In relation to a question from Mr Birkett on Adult Education, Mr Hill reaffirmed his commitment to retaining a good quality service and acknowledged that in future years it may be necessary to review the policy to keep it cost neutral, in the light of the demise of the Learning & Skills Council.

RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the directorate for 2008/09 based on the second quarterly monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

113. Performance Monitoring 2008/09

(Item B4)

(1) Ms Edwards introduced a report which summarised 'in-year' performance of the service units in Communities in advance of the annual report on performance in July 2009. The report also provided an update on the new set of National Indicators.

(2) In response to a question from Mr Northey Mr Crilley undertook to supply Mr Northey with details of how the price of books was impacting on the library service.

(3) In response to a request from Mr Hirst for a definition of "effective treatment, Ms Slaven explained that for the previous target had simply measured numbers in treatment including those who did not complete the treatment. The new target which measures "effective treatment" only counted the number of people who complete a treatment cycle of 12 weeks and therefore this was a significant change.

(4) Following a question from Mr Rowe, Ms Slaven explained the Positive Action for Young People funding stream. Mr Chell confirmed that the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People had received information about this scheme.

(5) RESOLVED that the report be noted and that the November meeting of the POC receive a report on the National Indicator Set as it relates to the Communities Directorate.

114. Budget 2009/10 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTP) 2009/12

(Item B5)

(1) The Committee considered the Communities Directorate's Draft Budget proposals set out in the Draft Budget 2009-10 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2009-2012 and also the report which was circulated specifically relating to the key areas of these documents for Communities.

(2) Mr Hill, Ms Honey and Mr Shipton introduced the MTP, the Revenue Budget and Capital Budget for the Communities Directorate. Mr Hill and officers answered questions from members about the following issues:-

(a) *Inflation*

(3) In response to a question from Mr Northey on how far the inflation figures had been built into the budget and what strategies there were to deal with variations in the rate of inflation, Mr Shipton explained that contracts for rent, cleaning etc relating to the cost of running buildings include an annual indexation and therefore it was easier to predict the rate of inflation on the contracts. However, the area of greatest risk was the cost of electricity, as the Council had not entered into any long term contracts for energy provision, and a figure of 20% for inflation had been built into the budget for this. This represents prudent provision for what was the most volatile cost in recent months (with estimated increases in excess of 40% earlier in the year) and he was confident that they would be able to cope with any other variables.

(b) *Contact Centre re-charges*

(4) In response to a question from Mr Chell, Mr Shipton confirmed that there would not be any charge to the Directorate for the services provided by the Contact Centre as these costs were covered corporately and have not been included in the corporate budget delegated to service Directorates.

(c) *Personnel Services – charges*

(5) In response to a question from Mr Chell, Mr Shipton explained that the cost to the Directorate for Personnel Services would be based on the number of requests that the Directorate made to them and the support given.

(d) *Use of kent.gov to advertise vacancies*

(6) Mr Shipton confirmed that KCC only used kent.gov to advertise its vacancies. Evidence had shown that this was the most effective way of recruiting staff.

(e) *Adult Education - income*

(7) In response to a question regarding the vulnerability of the market- related income from Adult Education, Mr Shipton explained that there was a contingency plan that identified potential risks and action which could be taken in the event of these risks coming to fruition. Adult Education had a very detailed financial plan.

(f) *Staff reductions*

(8) In response to a question from Mrs Rowbotham, Mr Shipton stated that regarding the management restructuring and staff efficiency savings, one post had been identified in the MTP, which was subject to consultation, and a reduction of one post in the central support team. He explained that if an officer took early retirement then the portfolio would pick up the retirement cost until the officer reached normal retirement age. This might be an issue with the proposed restructuring of Registration Services. Ms Honey confirmed that there would be a confidential update on this restructuring at the next briefing for Dr Eddy and Mrs Dean.

(g) Vacancy Management

(9) Mr Shipton explained that a flexible approach was taken to vacancy management, there was local discretion and that savings were adjusted according to actual turnover of staff during the year.

(h) Homesafe Van funding

(10) In response to a question from Mrs Rowbotham, Mr Shipton explained that the funding for the Homesafe Van, which had previously come out of the Communities Directorate budget would now be funded from the Supporting People programme within the Adult Social Services budget as this was more appropriate. He confirmed that the Directorate would continue to look at all possible sources of government funding for their services but it was important to have an exit strategy for any such funding should it come to an end.

(i) Review of essential user's car allowance.

(11) In response to a question from Mr Rowe, Mr Shipton explained that officers were contracted as car users but whether they were an essential or casual car user would depend on the number of miles travelled in a year and was not a contractual condition. Where staff were not going to reach the required mileage to qualify as an essential user it was important to give them adequate notice that they would be re-classified as a casual user.

(j) Grants to village halls

(12) Mr King emphasised the importance of investing in community infrastructure, i.e. village halls, which were a good way of stimulating community activities and stated that he would like to see more flexibility in this budget in future.

(13) Officers and the Cabinet Member were congratulated by members on the budget that had been produced for Community Services, which safeguarded frontline services and achieved savings and were in line with the Committee's views, as expressed at the last POC.

RESOLVED that that the Budget 2009-10 and Medium Term Plan 2009 to 2012 for the Community Services Portfolio, along with the responses made to the questions from members, be noted.

115. Emergency Planning

(Item B6)

(1) Mr Cloake presented a report which summarised developments in emergency planning in the past year and noted three incidents which had occurred or been anticipated. The report also highlighted the attention being given to resilience issues in Kent that may be associated with the 2012 Olympic Games. Mr Cloake gave further information on the work of the Severe Weather Planning Group which was a working group of the Kent Resilience Group.

(2) In relation to a question on the budget implications for emergency planning for the Olympics, Mr Cloake confirmed that this could substantially be incorporated in the

current Emergency Planning and Sports Development budgets. Mr Hill raised the concerns of the Police regarding the number of officers, including specialist officers, that they would be required to provide to support colleagues in London.

(3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

116. Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) – KCC assessment and action plan

(Item B7)

(1) Ms Edwards introduced a report which formally confirmed KCC's successful achievement of Level 3 against the existing Equality Standard, making it one of only 12 County Councils to do so (with none at Level 4).

(2) In response to a question from Mr Long, Ms Edwards confirmed that officers believed that the recommendations could reasonably be delivered within existing resources. The major cost was officer time and therefore did not have a direct impact on the budget.

RESOLVED that: - (a) the actions at paragraphs 2 i to 2 viii in the report be noted; (b) the Committee agreed with proposals at paragraphs 3.1 to 3.5; and (c) it be noted that there would be a report to a future meeting setting out how the Directorate were addressing the proposals and the resource implications.

117. Draft Communities Risk Register 2009/10

(Item B8)

(1) Ms Edwards presented a report which identified the strategic risks that were managed and controlled within the Communities Directorate. The report also set out the main changes from the 2008/09 register.

(2) In response to a question from Mrs Rowbotham on the difficulties with recruitment and retention of qualified youth workers, Ms Slaven explained that this was not a problem solely for Kent but reflected a national picture. However in the north of the country the London wage factor also played a part.

(3) Ms Edwards explained that the scoring was based on officers' views on the order of risk. It was confirmed that where a high level of risk had been identified, contingency plans were in place.

(4) RESOLVED that the draft Communities Directorate Risk Register 2009/10 be endorsed for recommendation to the Governance and Audit Committee for approval.

118. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated Members on the work of the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People and invited suggestions for future topic reviews. Mr Chell, Chairman of the Select Committee stated that they would be meeting to discuss areas of recommendation later that week.

(2) RESOLVED that (a) the update on the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People be noted; and (b) Members email suggestions for potential Select Committee Topic Reviews, to the Democratic Services officer for consideration by the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee at its meeting on 28 April 2009.