

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice-Chairman), Mr R H C Bliss, Mr R B Burgess, Mr B R Cope, Mr J A Davies, Mrs T Dean, Mr C G Findlay, Mr R W Gough, Mr J E Scholes, Mr J D Simmonds, Mr D Smyth and Dr M R Eddy (Substitute for Mr C Hart)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P B Carter, Mr N J D Chard, Mr A J King, MBE and Mr R A Marsh

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss J Clarke (Head of Communications & Media Centre), Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms T Gailey (Public Health Policy Manager), Mrs T Gleeson (Corporate Web Manager), Mr R Hardy (Head of Performance, Improvement and Engagement), Mr M Lemon (Head of Policy), Ms C McKenzie (Greener Kent Manager), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mrs T Oliver (Director of Strategic Development and Public Access), Mr D Oxlade (Head Of Policy), Ms A Slaven (Director Youth Services and KDAAT), Ms E Walker (Head Of Asset Management And Disposals), Mr P D Wickenden (Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager) and Mr A Wood (Head of Financial Management)

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **129. Minutes - 14 January 2009**

*(Item A3)*

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

#### **130. Corporate Services Budget Monitoring 2008/09**

*(Item B1)*

(1) Ms McMullan presented a report which summarised the projected outturn figures for the Chief Executive's Directorate and Financing Items as at the third quarter.

(2) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions or to make comments on the quarterly monitoring report, and these included the following issues:-

- In response to a question, Mr Wood confirmed that the adjusted figure for LABGI (Local Authorities Business Growth Incentives Scheme) to take account of the recent release of national LABGI monies did not have any impact on the 2009/10 budget as this had already been anticipated in the MTP.

- Mr Wood confirmed that any other disposals outside of the anticipated capital receipt of £7,411k for this financial year (page 19) would go via the Property Enterprise Fund 2.
- Mr Wood explained the reason for the forecast overspend of £268k for ISG.
- It was agreed that a note on the overspend of £250k against the target for outdoor advertisements would be sent to all Committee members.
- In response to a question about whether KCC had bulk purchased oil, and, if so, what was the loss on this now that the price per barrel had dropped, Mr Chard was able to confirm that KCC bought its oil to order on the wholesale market and therefore there was no loss to report. In addition, KCC hedged the purchase of its electricity and oil which had led to a 20% - 30% saving.
- Mrs Dean congratulated the legal department on its increased income.
- Members would be supplied with a note on the underspend on HealthWatch.
- In relation to the unrealised savings on the ISG budget, Mr Cockburn explained that this was a result of unanticipated demand, which had an impact on ISG support staff.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

(a) the projected outturn figures for the Chief Executive's Directorate and Financing Items, as at the third quarter be noted; and

(b) any briefing notes or additional information requested during the meeting be sent to all Members of the POC.

### **131. Communicating with Kent Residents - Next five years - Presentation** (Item B2)

(1) Miss Clarke gave a presentation on 'Communicating with our residents' which set out existing and future trends, how communication channels were changing, and the impact of this on residents and officers over the next five years.

(2) Mr King stated that one of the most important challenges to respond to was the change in emphasis from the public being passive information seekers to becoming active information seekers, and the implications that this had for the Council in communicating with its residents.

(3) Members asked questions and made comments on this presentation, which included the following:-

- A Member stated that it was not necessary to send people all available information in the form of expensive publications, but it would be more helpful to have a list of bullet points supplied with links to more information if required.
- The importance of having a responsive website was emphasised. Mrs Gleeson explained that work was being carried out on a phased improvement which would ultimately lead to a facility for the public to subscribe to the parts of the website that they were interested in, and to track things like reported highway repairs.
- It was important to remember that literacy and access to broadband facilities were still issues for some of the public.

- The move to work with District Council colleagues to produce a single magazine for each District, which would contain both County Council and District Council information, was welcomed.
- In response to a question on what is done to make sure that we give the media what they want in terms of press releases, Miss Clarke stated that there was a communication calendar so that the communications team planned ahead to make sure that the media had timely information.
- A problem identified with the idea of an interactive council chamber was how representative of their community the people sending in comments, etc, were and how this could be assessed. Miss Clarke acknowledged that there would be resource implications if people were asked to email in questions and comments as the meeting was going on as these would need to be monitored.
- Worcester City Council's website was suggested as an example of best practise as it was interactive and allowed the public to view 40 interactive things from the 1<sup>st</sup> page.
- Regarding access to training modules via a password, Miss Clarke explained that these could be on any subject, and the audience could include staff from other public sector bodies such as the health service.
- The need to reconsider the blanket blocking of staff's access to social network sites was mentioned, as in certain roles access to these sites could be very helpful.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the presentation be noted;
- (b) a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on savings made on publications; and
- (c) an update report be submitted to this Committee in six months time.

### **132. Access Kent Overview & Draft Business Case** (Item B3)

(1) Mrs Oliver gave a presentation which introduced a report on the Access Kent business case and the principles of Access Kent. The information within this document stemmed from agreements and discussions across the public sector. Members' questions and comments were invited and included the following:-

- The "tell us once" pilot had been very well received and it was hoped that this would be rolled out across the County.
- Mrs Oliver confirmed that the Department of Pensions and Works' "tell us once" project was being piloted in Kent as a direct result of Kent's work on Gateways. There are pilots operating in other parts of the country as well.
- Voluntary organisations should continue to be encouraged to have a presence in Gateways so that the greatest resource benefits can be gained for them and the benefits of information from different organisations in one place can be achieved for the public.
- The name "Access Kent" could cause confusion with public rights of way or accessibility specifically for the disabled. Mrs Oliver confirmed this had not been raised so far but she would take note of this concern

- It was suggested that the vision statement be simplified. Mrs Oliver confirmed that the statement was not aimed at the public and that a Customer Promise that would be used externally was being developed with members of the public
- The importance of investing more in training call centre staff was emphasised as they would be dealing with a broader range of issues and queries.
- It was suggested that the use of web cam technology in conjunction with KCC's website should be explored to make the website more personal.
- Members were pleased to see the references to County and District Councils working together for the benefit of their residents.
- The report was welcomed as a concept that would make life easier for the residents of Kent.

(3) RESOLVED that the principles and objectives of Access Kent be supported and an update report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

**133. A summary of progress in delivery of KCC's Environment Policy, including climate change and an overview of next steps for KCC and CED.**

*(Item B5)*

(1) Ms McKenzie reminded the Committee of Kent County Council's Environment Policy which was agreed by Cabinet in December 2007. As part of that process, KCC was committed to reviewing progress on implementation on an annual basis. She introduced a report which highlighted what significant progress had been made to date on delivering the Environment Policy (including climate change), and set out priorities for the next 3 years (2009-2012), together with the specific role and contribution of the Chief Executive's Department.

(2) Mr King and Ms McKenzie answered questions from Members, which covered the following issues:-

- Mr King explained that a Cabinet Working Group had been established to review progress on this, which involved a culture shift in the organisation.
- In response to a question on targets and carbon emissions for the Council's estates, Ms McKenzie explained that progress varied across the estate as 80 % of it was made up of schools, which had grown in terms of buildings, opening hours and an increase in ICT. Children, Families and Education Directorate colleagues were working with schools to reduce their carbon emissions.
- Ms McKenzie explained the role of Laser in bringing in external funding and also persuading schools to use renewable energy.
- In relation to street lighting it was suggested that consideration should be given to alternative methods of reducing electricity consumption apart from selective switch offs.

(2) RESOLVED that the progress to date and the general shape of the Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan be noted and the proposed next steps for CED, as outlined in Section 6 of the report, be endorsed.

### **134. European Affairs Update**

*(Item B7)*

(1) Mr King and Mr Oxlade presented the update report on KCC's recent European activities and answered questions from Members, which included the following:-

- In response to a question on whether Kent as a local authority got its fair share of European funding, Mr King explained that we drew more European funding than any other local authority in the country. We had achieved this because we had been working on this for a long time and were well connected. We were vigilant and well placed to take advantage of opportunities when they arose, for example the extra funding obtained for Turner Contemporary.
- The seminar on European funding which was held on 19 February 2009, County Council Budget day, was mentioned. It was explained that this event was aimed at officers and covered practical details of applying for funding.
- In response to a question on whether 50% match funding was still the norm, Mr Marsh explained that, due to the economic down turn, some countries were struggling to find 50% match funding and were requesting that the full amount be funded.
- Regarding the European Network of High Speed Regions, which had been established to provide a dialogue with rail operators regarding international high speed rail, Mr King explained that the membership of this was opportunistic and arose out of a debate facilitated by the European Commission, but other countries would be asked to join.
- In response to a question, Mr King undertook to provide information to all Members of the Committee on the potential benefits for Kent from the Commissions move towards improving access to loan funding

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **135. Kent HealthWatch**

*(Item B6)*

(1) Mr Marsh introduced an update on recent activity and planned development of Kent HealthWatch. He gave the latest figures for the total number of calls for 2009; 142 as at 25 March 2009. Mr Marsh and officers answered questions from Members which included the following:-

- A Member stated that the title "Kent HealthWatch" did not make it clear that this also covered social care issues.
- The Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee stated that he found HealthWatch to be a useful tool to monitor public concerns.
- It would be helpful to have comparison information for the number of calls with other organisations who get similar calls.
- In relation to the new publicity campaign that was due to start shortly, Mr Marsh confirmed that this was within budget and that there would be an underspend in the budget.
- It would be helpful to have feedback on the outcomes of calls to HealthWatch.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted and the monitoring figures for HealthWatch (including a definition of categories and the destination of queries) be emailed to Members of the Committee on a quarterly basis.

### **136. Connecting with Communities**

*(Item B4)*

(1) Mr Hardy introduced a report which set out a brief overview of the activities across KCC to engage and listen to the views of direct services users and residents. It also suggested a number of areas of improvement for further consideration.

- In response to a question, Mr Hardy confirmed that input from residents would not be the only information used when a decision was made; it would complement Members' role as decision makers and it would be for Members to weigh up different views and other information. When views were sought from the public, it would be made clear to them that other information would be taken into account when a decision was made.
- The importance of making sure that those who contribute to surveys, etc, were given feedback, was emphasised. Mr Hardy stated that, for consultation via the website, it was intended to post feedback on what had been done taking into account the views expressed
- As this was also about working with partners, and involvement with Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings was mentioned, Mr Hardy explained that information from PACT meetings could be obtained via the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, which have an analysis capacity.
- It was pointed out that KCC had already done a lot of work to engage with specific groups such as Looked After Children, whose views had informed the Kent Pledge.

(2) RESOLVED that the content of the report and its appendices be noted, and the principles on which the proposed improvements are based be endorsed. .

### **137. Property Enterprise Fund Terms of Reference**

*(Item B8)*

(1) Mr Chard and Ms Walker introduced a report which advised Members of the relevance of the original terms of reference for the Property Enterprise Fund (PEF). Also circulated at the meeting was the report to Cabinet on 10 July 2006 which set out the original proposal to establish the PEF. Mr Chard and Ms Walker answered questions from Members, which covered the following areas:-

- In response to a question on sources of knowledge of the property market, Ms Walker explained that they had a framework of 50 consultants who were agents in the property market at national, international and local level. They also used research houses for property tracking indicators. A lot of the property team had come from the private sector and KCC operated in the property market.
- Regarding looking for medium and long term investments, Ms Walker stated that they used the same framework of consultants. When looking to purchase property, this was carried out in accordance with the property management protocol and also an independent valuation was required from the framework of consultants. The disposals team were members of the Royal Chartered

Institute of Surveyors and as such were governed by the rules and code of conduct of the Institute.

- In relation to the £4m contribution to revenue in 2007/08 and 2008/09, confirmation was sought that this would not happen again. Ms Wood explained that this contribution was within the terms of reference (paragraph 3:12 of the Cabinet report of 10 July 2006 refers). Mr Chard stated that the purpose of PEF 1 was primarily to look at the long term benefits for Kent. He was not able to give a categorical assurance that this fund would not make any further contributions to revenue in the future.
- Opportunities to develop unfinished sites for Independent Living should be considered.
- Ms Walker confirmed that the independent valuations for disposals were attached to the documents when a decision was sought.

(2) RESOLVED that:-

(a) the existing Terms of Reference for PEF, and the preparation of a detailed acquisition strategy for the forthcoming financial year, be noted:

(b) no change be made to the original governance procedure; and

(c) the position with regard to the non-operational property portfolio currently valued at £86m, the forecast receipts of £39,690 (£13,305 after adjustment for risk) and the strategy to significantly slow the pace of disposals until the market shows signs of improvement (this is currently forecast to be in mid 2010 onwards), be noted.

### **138. An Alcohol Strategy for Kent**

*(Item B9)*

(1) Ms Slaven presented the draft Alcohol Strategy for Kent which sets out the way forward for agencies across Kent to work in partnership to prevent the harm caused by alcohol misuse. It aimed to provide a structure for the development of treatment programmes, a preventative strategy for adults and young people and a community approach to issues such as policing, licensing and trading standards. It set in context the current resource allocation and the improvements necessary to ensure that the County of Kent has in place an effective and responsive system. Members asked questions and made comments, which included the following:-

- Reference was made to the excellent work carried out by the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse which had been reflected in this strategy.
- It was suggested that consultations by Licensing Authorities should include Parish Councils.
- All Members of the Committee would be provided with details of the outcomes of the test purchases carried out by Trading Standards where alcohol was sold to underage people (page 144 of the Committee papers).
- Ms Slaven confirmed that discussions were already being held with Shepherd Neame and the licensed trade about various aspects of the strategy.
- Adding Councillors, especially District Councillors who may sit on Licensing Committees, to the list of consultees, was suggested.
- The issues of the training of GPs in alcohol awareness, and making sure that they had a knowledge of the interventions available, was mentioned.

- In response to a question on the reason for there being less availability of services to address alcohol misuse in West Kent, Ms Slaven agreed that social and historical factors had led to this, but this was being addressed with the PCT.

(2) RESOLVED that the contents of the strategy, the comments made by Members, and the progress of the strategy to broader consultation with partners and communities, be noted.

### **139. Select Committees - update**

*(Item C1)*

(1) Mr Wickenden referred to the minutes of the meeting of the Alcohol Misuse Select Committee which had met on 12 March 2009 to receive a report on progress with its recommendations one year after they had been to Cabinet.

(2) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Alcohol Misuse Select Committee held on 12 March 2009 be noted, and suggestions for potential Select Committee topic reviews be sent to the Democratic Services Officer for consideration by the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee.

### **140. Accessing Democracy – Recommendations of the Select Committee – Progress Report and Action Plan**

*(Item C2)*

(1) Mr Wickenden presented a report which gave an indication of how the recommendations of the Select Committee on Accessing Democracy were being progressed. Mr King would be establishing an Implementation Steering Group to take forward the recommendations.

(2) RESOLVED that the proposal, by the Executive, to establish an Implementation Steering Group be welcomed, and the progress already made to implement the recommendations of the Select Committee on Accessing Democracy be noted.