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 Wednesday, 11 February 2009.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice-Chairman), Mr C J Capon, Mr B R Cope, Mrs T Dean, Dr M R Eddy, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr R F Manning, Mr J D Simmonds and Mr D Smyth

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance) and Mr P D Wickenden (Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

30. Minutes - 10 September 2008
(Item 3)

Matters arising from the minutes

(1) Mr Wickenden reminded Members that following the County Council meeting on 11 December 2008, there was still more work to be done to agree the process for the launching and publishing of Select Committee topic reviews at County Council meetings. He referred to the meeting of the County Council on 30 April 2009 where the Select Committee topic reviews on Passenger Rail Services in Kent, Provision of Activities for Young People and Autistic Spectrum Disorder were due to be considered. It was important that the outstanding Select Committee Topic Reviews were considered by the County Council before the election of a new County Council in June. Members discussed this issue and the views expressed included the following: -

- As a Select Committee had already debated the content of their report and it would have been considered at Cabinet there was not the need to have that type of debate at council. The County Council meeting should therefore focus the debate on what would happen with the recommendations.
- Although it had previously been suggested that there should be a maximum limit of two hours for each select committee slot at County Council the objective should be to keep this item as short as possible
- It was suggested that the process at County Council should be to have brief statements on the report, and the Leader or Cabinet Member(s) should then set out how the report was going to be implemented including the resources required and its value to the Council and the people of Kent,

(2) Mr Wickenden also informed the Committee that the following suggestions for Select Committee topic reviews had been put forward by Members: -

- Dementia
- Adult protection and safeguarding

(3) He added that he would be encouraging Cabinet Members and Chief Officers to put forward topics for Select Committee reviews.

(4) Mr Wickenden undertook to supply Mrs Dean with a list of current IMG's supported by Democratic Services.

(5) It was noted that there would be an additional meeting of the committee on 17 July at 2 pm to agree the next two-year work programme.

(6) It was confirmed that a meeting would be arranged between the POCC Chairman and spokesmen and the Chairman of the County Council to discuss the launching of the three Select Committee topic reviews at the County Council meeting in April.

(7) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on September 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the chairman.

31. Policy Overview Committees (POC's) consideration of the Medium Term Plan
(Item 4)

(1) Ms McMullen was invited to comment on the report that had been circulated with the agenda which set out how each Policy Overview Committee (POC) had considered the MTP relating to their portfolios. She stated the POC had all considered their MTP's in different ways, for example the Corporate POC had a debate on the MTP at their main committee meeting but also set up an IMG to look in more detail at parts of the MTP in an informal setting. In contrast the Communities POC had a long and constructive debate at their POC meeting, following this they did not feel the need to hold their own IMG. Both methods had produced constructive outcomes so she did not believe that there was a "one size fits all" for this process.

(2) If a POC did decide to establish an IMG this should be organised well in advance so that Members who wish to take part had the opportunity to do so. An advantage of having an MTP IMG was that it gave the opportunity to ask detailed questions of Cabinet Members and Officers and raise and discuss speculative suggestions in an informal setting.

(3) The Chairman expressed the view that even if a POC set up an IMG to consider its MTP it was important this did not replace the opportunity for the full POC to debate the MTP. Mrs Dean suggested that no decision on the establishment of MTP IMG's should be made at this time, but that it should be for each POC to decide the process that they wished to follow.

(4) In relation to MTP IMG's, Dr Eddy stated that it would have been useful to have the notes from these meetings at the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee in January when they considered the budget and asked that this be done if MTP IMG's are held in future.

(5) The Chairman agreed with Ms McMullan that in terms of the early budget planning process, the July cycle of POC meetings was as important as the November cycle.

(6) Ms McMullen referred to the discussion at the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on the future Economic Management Group, and whether its remit should be subsumed into the Cabinet Scrutiny Budgetary Issues IMG. Mr Smyth, as Chairman of the Budgetary Issues IMG, stated that although he would be happy for this IMG to take on this task there was a question of overloading this IMG which consisted of three Members. Ms McMullen stated however the remit of this group was covered, it was essential that the terms of reference for considering economic management board matters were right. These matters would need to be considered on a quarterly meetings basis to pick up on issues and trends and if the Budget IMG extended its remit to include this then other Members could be invited to attend when these issues were discussed.

(7) The Committee also discussed other ways in which the POC's could build capacity to carry out their work. The Chairman suggested that consideration be given to the use of rapporteurs who could be responsible for specialist areas of work and report back to the POC.

(8) The success of the Children's Champions Board was also mentioned. This Board looked at a significant issues relating to Looked after Children's Safeguarding issues. This format of having a specialist group that reported back to the POC could be replicated in relation to other issues.

(9) Mr Capon stated that in relation to the Children's, Families and Education POC, as this POC covered a very large area of work and tended to have long meetings to cover its business, it would be very helpful to have IMGs for specific issues for example special needs transport. He explained that as a matter of practice reports were taken as read and officers added any additional information and took questions from Members, this made the most effective use of meeting time.

(10) Mr Wickenden stated work was being carried out by the IMG on Members Information to assist with building capacity for members. Also the IMG on Member Development was looking at Member training including the role of the elected members.

(11) RESOLVED that the feedback given by members on the value of POC's using an IMG to consider their MTP be noted and that the individual POC's be asked at their July 2009 meeting to consider whether they wished to set up an IMG on their MTP to meet in November 2009.

32. Select Committee Topic Review Programme - Update
(Item 5)

(1) The Committee received an update on the current topic review programme and the resources available to deliver it. Mr Wickenden reminded Members that a two-year topic review programme was an aspiration within the Constitution. It would be helpful to work towards a provisional programme which could be considered at a

July meeting of the POCC so that the Select Committees could start their work in September 2009.

(2) Members mentioned the perception that the terms of reference for Select Committee reviews tended to be drawn up by officers with little input from Members. Mr Wickenden referred members to the agreement at County Council on 11 December 2008 that Members should be engaged in developing the terms of reference for Select Committees at an early stage. Therefore, the terms of reference would be developed by a small cross party group of members group, from the membership of the Select Committee prior to approval by the Select Committee. Mr Wickenden also mentioned the importance of involving the Cabinet Member and Managing Director at the beginning, middle and end of reviews to get engagement and sign up.

(3) It was also important that the inaugural meeting of the Select Committee agreed its timetable so that it was clear when the Select Committees would be considered at Cabinet and County Council.

(4) Dr Eddy referred to the appointment of Mrs Taylor, in September 2008 to the post of Research Officer for the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee. He and the spokesmen on Cabinet Scrutiny Committee expressed their thanks to Mrs Taylor for the support that she had given to the Committee.

(5) An issue raised by Mrs Hohler was what happened once the Select Committee had completed their work and had held their one year monitoring meeting. There was often a need for this work to be taken forward with a Member input. Mr Wickenden stated that once the monitoring of the Select Committee had held their monitoring meeting, work to carry the recommendation rested with the Executive, assisted by the Directorate(s). The Executive had established a number of task groups to take forward Select Committee recommendations such as the one on Physical Social and Health Education. Mrs Dean expressed the view that once a Select Committee had finished its work its ownership was at an end and their role was to monitor the recommendations, there was a tendency to expect too much of Overview and Scrutiny Members.

(6) In relation to officer support Mrs Dean pointed out that the IMG on Members Information had been supported by the Liberal Democrat Staff Officer, the Leader had agreed to this arrangement. She raised a word of caution and on the overuse of IMGs, as these were not meetings that were held in public and therefore should not be used to consider issues which were of general interest. She commended the annual monitoring process of Select Committee reviews which gave Select Committee Members the opportunity to comment on the outcomes achieved.

(7) Mr Wickenden stated that in relation to offer support for Select Committees there were 2.5 full-time equivalent Research Officers. Mr Wickenden was planning to submit a joint report with Robert Hardy to the April meeting of the POCC to look at the resource issue as part of a wider report he was preparing on the options for re-structuring the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

(8) Regarding the “one year on monitoring report’s for Select Committees” which were submitted to the POCC for information, a number of comments were made including the importance of Members not accepting the response “work was being

undertaken". The monitoring reports should include measures of success and timescale for further progress.

RESOLVED That (a) the progress of the Select Committee Topic Reviews Accessing Democracy, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Provision of Activities for Young People be noted

(b) the process for establishing a two year Select Committee topic review programme be endorsed

(c) the resources available to support overview and scrutiny and deliver the Select Committee topic review programme be noted

(d) the adoption of the “Public Relations Protocol for Select Committee Reviews and Reports” and the ongoing work to agree a process for launching Select Committee reports be noted

(e) the monitoring of Select Committee recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 be noted

(f) the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager submit a report to the April meeting of the Committee on the structure of POC’s and staff resources.