

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, 9 September 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, Mr C J Capon, Mrs T Dean, Mr C Hibberd, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr P W A Lake and Mrs E M Tweed

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A J King, MBE, Mr L Christie and Mr K Smith

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)) and Mr E Thomas (Policy Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chairman

(Item 2)

Mr C Capon moved, seconded by Mrs T Dean, that Mr E E C Hotson be elected Chairman of the Committee.

Agreed without a vote

Mr Hotson thereupon took the Chair.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

(Item 3)

Mr E E C Hotson moved, seconded by Mr P W A Lake, that Mrs E M Tweed be elected vice-chairman of the Committee.

Agreed without a vote

3. Minutes - 11 February 2009

(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes for the meeting held on 11 February 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

4. Urgent business

(Item)

The Chairman stated that he was of the opinion the reports on the consultation on "Strengthening Local Democracy" and the potential to refocus and restructure the

overview and scrutiny function should be considered as urgent business due to the need for Members to have the opportunity to make comments on these documents within the short timescale available.

5. Proposed Response to the Consultation on "Strengthening Local Democracy"

(Item 6)

(1) Mr King presented a paper which set out a draft response to the Government consultation "Strengthening Local Democracy" and invited Members comments prior to the final response being signed off by the Leader.

(2) Members made a number of comments which included the following which were noted by Mr King and Mr Thomas:-

- Question 2 – the suggestion in the draft response that the role of scrutinising expenditure of local public services could be via the Kent Public Service Board (KPSB) rather than using elected Members was mentioned. It was suggested that if the KPSB was used for this purpose then elected Members should have sight of the information being provided and the outcomes, or KPSB could be one method with there being other Member based methods as well.
- Question 3 - the list of bodies to be scrutinised should include utilities such as water, gas & electricity companies, in addition to rail companies and LAA partners.
- Question 7 – there was agreement, in principle, to the response to this question which proposed having a pool of co-optees for Overview and Scrutiny.
- Questions 8 & 13 – It was suggested that reference should be made to the subsidiarity principle at the end of the response.
- Questions 9 & 10 – there was a view expressed that if we believed that local authorities should have a power of competence then mutual insurance arrangements could be an example of this rather than introducing a specific power.
- Question 12 – it was noted that the response should be "yes".
- Questions 12 & 15 – the word "top tier" should be replaced with "top tier or other authority as appropriate"
- Chapter 3 – the opportunity should be taken to recommend a change in the building regulations or at least Planning Inspectors should be required to accept that local authorities have the power to say that in certain developments there should be a higher standard for carbon reduction.
- Chapter 4 - Mr Christie commended the system of government in Scotland as being simpler for the public to understand.
- Question 25 – a move in right direction, power should be vested in local government which would stop central government dictating the direction of travel for local government.
- The issue of the cost of scrutiny was raised and as the pre-amble to the consultation paper mentioned the Governments new burdens doctrine this should be referred to in the response.

RESOLVED that the comments made by Members be noted.

6. The Potential to Refocus and Restructure the Overview and Scrutiny Function

(Item 7)

(1) Mr King introduced a discussion paper which would be considered by each of the Policy Overview Committees, the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee (POC) and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to a report being submitted to County Council on 15 October 2009. Mr King stated that he wanted to make sure that every Member had the opportunity to consider this important issue and put forward positive suggestions before the final report was produced by the Leader and himself.

(2) The importance of each POC Chairman making sure that there was adequate time for Members to fully discuss this was emphasised.

(3) It was agreed that, where possible, the comments made by the POC's be available for the meeting of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 23 September 2009.

RESOLVED that a meeting of POCC Members with Mr King be held after the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have considered the paper and before the final report is despatched for County Council.