

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee held in the Medway Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 20 November 2007.

PRESENT: Mr R A Pascoe (Chairman), Mr R Truelove (Vice-Chairman), Mr M J Angell, Mr T J Birkett, Ms S J Carey, Mr D S Daley, Mr M J Harrison, Mr C Hibberd, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr J I Muckle (Substitute for Mr A R Poole), Mr R J E Parker and Mrs P A V Stockell

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R F Manning and Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A St Clair Baker (Engagement & Improvement Manager), Mrs S Barton (Strategic Projects And Business Development Manager), Mr N Caddick (Resources Manager), Mr B Gould (Strategic Finance Advisor), Mr D Hall (Head of Transport & Development), Mrs C Singh (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr A Wilkinson (Managing Director - Environment and Regeneration)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

46. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2007 and 27 September 2007
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of 3 July and 27 September 2007 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

47. To note that future meetings of this Committee in 2008 will be held at 10.00 am:- Thursday, 31 January, Friday, 4 April, Thursday, 29 May, Thursday, 25 September Thursday, 6 November
(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the future meeting dates of this Committee into 2008 be noted as follows:-

Thursday, 31 January

Friday, 4 April

Thursday, 29 May

Thursday, 25 September

Thursday, 6 November

(All meetings will begin at 10.00 am)

48. Financial Monitoring Report - 2007/08 - Update
(Item B1)

(1) Mr Gould answered questions from Members on the Financial Monitoring Report – 2007/08 including the following issue:-

- In answer to what had happened to money set aside for the Wrotham Depot, it was explained that there had been agreement to utilise some money from the Capital funding of £2.5m next year and money into the Medium Term Plan. Mr Gould undertook to provide details of the progress on the Wrotham Depot to Members outside the meeting

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

49. Medium Term Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Gould advised that the Local Government Finance Settlement was still awaited but there were no significant changes to the Environment and Regeneration Budget assumptions which were set out in the Autumn Budget Statement in September 2007 and the Key assumptions remain, no increase in Government Formula Grant, Council Tax increase limited to a maximum of 5% per annum and the option to raise a precept on the Business Rate. He drew Members attention to Paragraph 4 of the report headed “E&R Priorities for the Medium Term Plan”.

(2) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments on the Medium Term Plan and to consider the suggested service pressures for the Directorate. They included the following:-

- In answer to what the assumed percentage pay rise was, Mr Gould advised that it was 2% across the Medium Term Draft Budget
- Page 1, paragraph 2.2 – in answer to how seriously the Directorate was taking the warning, Mr Gould advised that this was being taken very seriously and reflected that this was the first financial year that he could recall having to work within such tight limits.
- Members generally did not feel that they had adequate information at this stage to actually make suggestions around the areas and types of savings and efficiencies that they considered could realistically be achieved.
- In answer to how the measure of success or failure of the Kent Freedom Pass, Mr Wilkinson advised that he would be compiling a report which would cover; ensuring access to transport, ensuring a shift from car to bus, whether take up had been sufficient?, whether there had been a shift? The question of whether the pilot was then extended will be addressed and looked at as a Kent wide initiative.

(3) RESOLVED that the national and local context within which this MTFP was set and the Members comments be noted.

50. Kent Regeneration Fund Progress Update

(Item B3)

(1) The Committee received an annual report on bids made to the Kent Regeneration Fund and money spent to March 2007.

(2) Dr St Clair-Baker advised that there had been fewer new bids within the year 2006/07 approved from the Kent Regeneration Fund than in previous years. This reflected the tightening in the criteria, including the requirement from October 2006 for new proposals to link to "Towards 2010" targets, as well as the fact that some funding was already taken up by projects approved in prior years.

(3) Members of the Committee raised strong concerns regarding money spent on international projects such as the flights from Manston Airport to Virginia and considered these projects a waste of money. In response, Mr Gough said that at times risks needed to be taken. The international portfolio accounted for 20% of the total funding allocation over the lifetime of the fund to date.

(4) The Cabinet Member was questioned on what genuine regeneration was, whether it was the establishment of permanence in spending money on infrastructure, employment and housing. It was felt that many of the projects funded by the Kent Regeneration Fund came under the heading of highly desirable and full of fun. Mr Gough explained that events such as the Tour de France offered lasting legacy in raising to Kent's profile although regeneration in its purest sense was more in line with projects within areas such as Margate. He reminded Members that the Kent Regeneration Fund was for one-off funding to projects to give them a "shot in the arm" which otherwise would not happen.

(5) Members sought clarification on the progress of Ashford and requested a report and presentation to a future meeting of this Committee.

(6) Mr Wilkinson advised that he would be producing a Regeneration Strategy for KCC, which would include a district by district focus. The Committee noted that he intended to revisit the criteria of the Regeneration Fund, which would include clarifying how figures were calculated.

(7) It was suggested that the fund should seek to support projects from other directorates. Dr St Clair Baker pointed out that around 20% of funding allocated to date was for projects from other directorates/Portfolios. It was also suggested by Members that the County Council should investigate putting in a rail service from Ashford to Brussels following the drop in service by Eurostar from Ashford.

(8) RESOLVED that the Kent Regeneration Fund schedule to March 2007 and the comments by the Members be noted.

51. Bus Transport Policy

(Item B4)

(1) The Committee congratulated Mr Hall and his team for the major role they played in the innovation of the new bus policy and for winning many awards including the prestigious award "Transport Operator Award". Mr Hall highlighted the many achievements the County Council has made in improving and influencing bus services throughout Kent. The County Council had influenced the introduction of over 300 school travel plans. This work had led to increased use of public transport together with other initiatives, such as walking buses. The introduction of free travel

for all 11-16 year olds in Canterbury, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells will be introduced to the rest of Kent by 2009. This policy had already demonstrated a reduction in car trips to school. He also highlighted that bus services could play a major role in the regeneration process in areas such as Thanet with the Thanet Loop which was created through a Government, local authority and Stagecoach funded partnership.

(2) Members of the Committee felt that Kent County Council and Arriva partnership was exemplary.

(3) Members of the Committee requested that the various schemes be clarified, ie who they are aimed at, cost involved etc.

(4) Mr Hall advised that the "Freedoms Scheme" could be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet detailing the need for the phasing to be rolled out into areas through a strong rationale. He advised that the £50 charge had received no complaints since its introduction. Mr Hall advised that he had been speaking with representatives of the South Eastern Rail Network who were still lukewarm regarding a rail/bus transfer ticket.

(5) Members of the Committee raised their concerns with the "Free Travel on Bus Service" being implemented from April 2008, many District Councils across the county believed that the scheme had not received sufficient funding and in some cases had been required to make up the difference from their own resources.

(6) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

52. Select Committee Update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee considered a report on the Select Committee for Flood Risk and the reconvened Select Committee for Water and Waste Water, particularly in Ashford and the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme.

(2) The Democratic Services Officer tabled the Terms of Reference for the Select Committee for Flood Risk and advised that the Minutes for the meeting of Water and Wastewater, particularly in Ashford which met on 31 October 2007 would be submitted to the January 2008 meeting of this Committee.

(3) Members of the Committee agreed to consider future topics for the Select Committee Work Programme for submission to the next meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee in February 2008.

(4) RESOLVED that:-

(a) the outcome of the work of the Select Committee for Flood Risk be noted;

(b) the Minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee on Water and Waste Water, particularly in Ashford be submitted to the January 2008 meeting of this Committee; and

- (c) the update on the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme be noted.

53. Post Office Closures IMG – Oral Update

(Item C2)

(1) Mr Gough advised that a group of Members including Mr Truelove, Mr Hibberd and himself met to discuss the County Council's response to the consultation on the Kent Area Plan for Post Office closures on 30 October 2007.

(2) Mr Gough explained that a response would be written with all correspondence and feedback from communities received by the County Council accompanying the document as an appendix. He advised that he had written to all County Councillors for additional feedback during this process.

(3) Mr Parker sought clarification on whether the previous round of post office closures fed into this round. Mr Gough advised that the bulk of responses were from rural areas and Tunbridge Wells.

(4) RESOLVED that the Cabinet Members report be noted.