

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 3 July 2007.

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

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A St Clair Baker (Engagement & Improvement Manager), Mr M Bodkin (Head of Urban Regeneration), Mr N Caddick (Resources Manager), Dr L Davies (Director, Environment & Waste), Mr R Hardy (Head of Improvement And Engagement), Mr G Mee (Director - Kent Highway Services), Mr P Raine (Managing Director of Environment and Regeneration), Mrs C Singh (Democratic Services Officer) and Smith (Transportation Manager - East Kent Division)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

35. Membership – *(Item A1)*

RESOLVED that Mr T Birkett and Mr R Truelove had replaced Mr K Sansum and Mr R Muckle on this Committee be noted.

36. Election of Vice-Chairman *(Item A3)*

Mr R J E Parker proposed, Mr Maddison seconded that Mr R Truelove be elected as Vice-Chairman.

Carried without a vote

37. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2007 *(Item A4)*

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2007 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

38. KCC's Equality Strategy *(Item B1)*

(1) Members received a report that sought their views on the County Council's Equality Strategy. The Equality Strategy sets out how the County Council will

promote equality and community cohesion and tackle unfair discrimination in Kent. An accompanying covering report highlighted in particular, the role of the Strategy in delivering the agenda of the Environment and Regeneration Directorate.

(2) The Equality Strategy brought the three strands; gender, disability and race equality schemes together to make the County Council's work consistent across the County.

(3) The Committee were given the opportunity to raise comments and ask questions on the covering report and Strategy. They were as follows:-

- There are excellent Statement of Values in the Strategy
- In the past it had been difficult getting the highways services to take on board the issues of disabled access on local roads and the provision of bus service, which relied on staff attitudes
- The strategy needed more recognition of mental health related disabilities
- Do services contracted out adhere to this Strategy? (Dr L Davies agreed to look into this)
- The Ghurkha community was becoming a large community in Kent and should be recognised as such in the Strategy (Mrs K Chantler to feed back for Corporate Lead responsible for Strategy)
- Concerns were raised on the issue of facilities provided for disabled that were not used, particularly in relation to education and social services
- The social differences of the population across Kent were raised, in particular the disparities between East and West Kent and the effect Medway had on the data included within the Strategy
- One Member reported they had received positive feedback that styles were being replaced with "kissing gates" which were easier for disabled, elderly and dog walkers to use

(4) Dr Davies advised that the attitude of staff was important and the Equality Strategy needed to be embedded. The Directorate was currently working towards Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government which would help to embed this work. The Directorate action plan would be updated 2008 identifying what the directorate would do with the results of the impact assessment and where the greatest impact would be.

(5) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the comments made in paragraph (3) above be noted by the drafting officer; and
- (b) the report be noted.

39. KCC's Annual Plan 2007/08, Directorate Annual Report 2006/07 – Year End Elements (Item 3) and Urgent Report – CPA Corporate Assessment (The Chairman took this report as urgent to allow the Committee to note report in line with all the Policy Overview Committees)
(Item B2)

(1) The Committee agreed to take agenda items B3, B4 and the urgent report together as they had a similar theme.

(2) Members of the Committee focused their comments and asked questions as follows:-

(1) Are we too dependent on Small/Medium Enterprises (SME)?

In response Mr Raine said that Kent, in common with some other shires, was characterized by a relatively high proportion of small and medium sized employers. These brought strengths (e.g diversity) and weaknesses (e.g. greater vulnerability to market conditions) and the key was to help them maximise the former and minimise the latter.

(2) Are we as good at Marketing as Managing?

The Kent workforce has a lower proportion of individuals with degree or higher level qualifications compared to other SE counties and this was recognised as an issue. Kent graduates are more likely to express a desire to work outside Kent than within it and efforts were being made through T2010 and the LAA to change this perception. The Committee were advised that the “Business Link” was core to SME and was carrying out a valuable job in Kent.

(3) Projects like Thames Gateway seem to take a long time to progress.

In response Members were advised that the nature of many major regeneration projects was that things did not change ‘overnight’. Looking back 5-10 years and comparing then and now would, for example, show how much had changed in the M2/A2 Fastrack Eastern Quarry area and the major works that had been done. The injection of significant Government funds did not begin until 2004/05, and since that time progress has, given the scale of the developments involved, progressed well.

(4) Members were advised that regeneration programmes often had upsides and downsides. A possible example that was quoted was the forthcoming running of domestic services on the high speed rail link. These will open up opportunities for many people in Kent, but one potential challenge that can be envisaged is that this could put pressure on the recruitment of key workers and house prices.

There was irritation with the term “Highspeed Regeneration” as it was felt that the highspeed trains would be by passing Kent.

(3) RESOLVED that the reports be noted.

40. Highways Restructuring Consultation (Item B4)

(1) The Committee considered a report on the Highways Services including the restructuring programme; relocation of staff, the two new depots, the use of new IT and the new staffing structure.

(2) Mr Harrison-Mee advised that the full structural implementation would be completed in January 2008, although the new depots would not be ready and staff would need to be in temporary accommodation until the new buildings were completed.

(3) The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. They were as follows:-

- The proposed new structure could create silos of expertise. How will they work across the services? Mr Harrison-Mee advised that each of the functions was represented on the Alliance Board. Area issues go to the Area Liaison Office – they in turn go to the Area Manager
- It was felt that the KHS ICT had not been adequate in the past – quality was vital
- Members felt that there had been morale problems over the last two years which would continue until the restructuring was over
- Members advised that Officers felt there was uncertainty about management “Who was responsible”?
- There had been problems with response times to Councillors and the public calls regarding faults. There needed to be a system of clear response and priorities
- Training programmes were required ie., engineers need good communication skills, etc
- Monitoring was required – when a task had not been carried out who had the responsibility to do it? Tasks need to be prioritised.
- Road safety was raised as a concern.
- The positions; Head of Local Operation and Head of Performance and Communications were key roles.
- Members did not want to see officers losing the use of their local knowledge as a result of the restructuring.

- Members were pleased to see a closer working relationship with the Borough Councils through secondments.
- Members looked forward to there being more emphasis on Development and Planning with District Councils
- Democratic Input – need to raise the Joint Transportation Board status.
- Frustration was voiced on streetlights that had not worked for years although they had been reported. Mr Harrison Mee asked the Member to forward the details to allow him to look into this.
- Members foresaw gaps in communication to the public in the areas that did not have a Parish Council or a Town Council – Need to look at rural and coastal areas too

(3) Mr Harrison-Mee responded to the comments advising that the Kent Highways Services (KHS) had over-promised in the past and this would be addressed. He agreed that the Joint Transportation Boards were needed as a forum to consider and agree the funding, schemes and the prioritising of local schemes.

(4) Mr Harrison-Mee advised that a key element of ICT kit, the GPS Location System was to be purchased. This was an electronic notebook with maps and using a pointer the operator could electronically pinpoint the site and allocate a reference number. There would also be a new monitoring system; this would allow the reference numbers to be available on the website. He aimed to reverse the 60% of the Ringway gangs spending their time driving and 40% carrying out the work.

(5) Regarding street lights, he advised that the response time was now 10 days for replacements or repairs. He proposed that in the summer months work would be carried out to do replacements and in the winter months, repairs.

(6) On the issue of the morale and the training of staff, Mr Harrison-Mee advised that KHS had the highest age range of all the directorates most staff were over 50 years old. There was to be a graduate/apprenticeship scheme.

(7) The new organised structure was to hold people accountable. The response times would be improved in a way to maximise staff time.

(8) Mr Harrison-Mee concluded that the service also needed to be able to say no in a reasonable way, being honest about the time something was going to take to do.

(9) Members of the Committee agreed to pass on any further comments/views on the report outside the meeting.

(10) RESOLVED that the views of the Committee Members and the report be noted.

41. Kent Highway Services Alliance Board - Measuring Success Report (Item B5)

(1) The Committee received a report on the work of the Kent Highways Services Alliance Board, this comprised the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and

Waste, Managing Director for Environment and Regeneration, Director of Kent Highways Services and the National Managing Directors from Jacobs, Ringway and TSUK. The Board is responsible for setting strategic direction and policy for the KHS Alliance, developing the vision and culture and monitoring efficiency and performance.

(2) Members of the Committee expressed their dissatisfaction with the maintenance of street lighting particularly, in the East Kent area. Members requested monthly reports on the progress.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Committee Members receive monthly progress reports on the streetlighting in East Kent; and
- (b) the report be noted.

42. Thanet Regeneration Initiatives – Progress

(Item B6)

(1) Mrs Bruton and Mr Bodkin gave a presentation using overheads on:

- an update to the briefing on the linked regeneration initiatives which affected the central part of the Isle of Thanet reported to this Committee – *(Minute ref 23/06)*
- an update on Kent International Airport; and
- a briefing on the Turner Contemporary and the associated Margate Town regeneration initiatives

(2) Mr Smith tabled a map of the proposed highway improvements in Thanet (attached to these Minutes) Mr Smith advised that the majority of the plan would be paid for by developers in the area.

(3) RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

43. Select Committee Review Programme update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report on the newly appointed Select Committee on Flood Risk and an up date on the Select Topic Review Programme.

(2) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The Overview and Scrutiny Manager be authorised to liaise with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Liberal Democrat Spokesman of this Committee on the draft Terms of Reference for the Topic Review on Flood Risk; and
- (b) the update on the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme be noted.