

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 25 July 2007.

PRESENT: Dr M R Eddy (Chairman), Mr D Smyth (Vice-Chairman), Mr A R Bassam, Mr J R Bullock, MBE, Ms S J Carey, Mr B R Cope, Ms A Harrison (Substitute for Mrs M Newell), Mr C Hart, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr P W A Lake, Mr C J Law, Mr G Rowe (Substitute for Mrs T Dean), Mr J E Scholes, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mr R Truelove

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wale, Assistant to the Chief Executive and Mr S C Ballard, Head of Democratic Services

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### 10. Membership

Members noted that Miss Carey, Mr Chell and Mr Horne had been appointed to serve on the Committee in place of Mr Capon, Mr Fullarton and Mr Wells, and that Mr Law had succeeded Mr Capon as the Conservative Group Spokesman on the Committee.

##### 11. Minutes - 27 June 2007 (Item. A3)

(1) At the request of the Committee, Dr Craig gave an update on revenue funding for Sure Start Local Programmes and Children's Centres (Minute 9(10)).

(2) As stated in the Minute, the Government provided revenue funding of an average of approximately £175k per annum for each Children's Centre to cover management, caretaking and at least 0.5 FTE of a qualified teacher. Funding for the 9 Children's Centres operated under the Sure Start Local Programme had been at a higher level to cover the cost of outreach services, but the Government had indicated some time ago that funding was to be reduced to the same level as other Children's Centres with effect from April 2008, with the cost of the outreach services being met instead by the bodies providing those services. It now appeared likely that the funding reduction would be postponed until April 2009, but confirmation of the detailed funding arrangements were expected to be received from Government shortly and would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

(3) RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

##### 12. Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues - 11 July 2007 (Item. A4)

RESOLVED that the notes of the meeting of the Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held on 11 July 2007 be noted.

**13. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee - Standing Report to July 2007**  
(Item. A5)

RESOLVED that the report on the actions taken as a result of the Committee's decisions at previous meetings, and the updated report on progress with Select Committee Topic Reviews, be noted.

**14. The Bridge Development, Dartford**  
(Item. B1)

RESOLVED that the decision by Cabinet on 16 July 2007 to agree to this scheme, valued at £8.5m to be fully funded by developer contributions, being formally added to the Education and School Improvement Capital Programme, be accepted without comment.

**15. Strategic Plan for the Provision of Secondary School Places 2007-2017**  
(Item. E1)

(1) Mr M C Dance, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education; Dr I Craig, Director of Operations; Mr M Nye and Mr T Smith, School Organisation Officers, Children, Families and Education Directorate, attended the meeting for this item.

(2) Dr Craig gave a presentation on the Strategic Plan document and the updated summary sheet circulated at the meeting. He explained that falling school rolls were now beginning to affect secondary schools. In 2005 Kent had had 4.51% secondary school surplus places; in 2006 5.02%; and this year 7.9%. The percentage of surplus places was predicted to rise for at least the next 10 years. Good practice suggested that each LEA should carry no more than 5% surplus secondary school places, so the rising level in Kent raised value for money and educational standards issues. Government policy was to encourage the closure of less successful schools and the expansion of popular schools.

(3) Dr Craig explained that the purpose of the Strategic Plan document was to provide contextual information which would stimulate debate over the next 6 months amongst all stakeholders, particularly at a local level, about how to tackle the issue of surplus secondary school capacity. Dr Craig said that, apart from in areas of West Kent, he hoped that the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme could be adjusted to deal with the major part of the surplus capacity issue.

(4) Dr Craig went on to say that, until 2004, KCC – and all other LEAs – had been required to produce an annual School Organisation Plan. This had always been very helpful for planning the provision of school places and so CFE officers had decided to continue to produce the same sort of statistical information. In future, it was intended that new Strategic Plan documents would be produced every year: primary in one year and secondary the next.

(5) Members' questions covered the following issues:-

### Accuracy of data

(6) In answer to questions from Mr Smyth, Mrs Stockell and Dr Eddy, Dr Craig said that although it was difficult to predict birth rate figures, it was possible to predict with reasonable certainty the number of children who would enter secondary school over the next 11 years and so the number of places could be planned accordingly.

(7) The statistical information was updated every year (even though, in future, formal publication would only take place every 2 years). This meant that birth rate changes, as well as other factors such as housing starts (although experience had shown that this was not a very reliable indicator of changes in the local school-age population) and new development proposals could be monitored and the plans adjusted accordingly. In addition, the School Organisation Officers were in constant contact with District Council planners in order to obtain intelligence on new housing proposals and to seek protection for potential school sites as necessary.

### Wider Issues

(8) In answer to questions from Mr Truelove, Mr Bullock, Mr Scholes and Mr Horne, Mr Dance and Dr Craig both gave assurances that, in considering how to reduce surplus secondary school places, full account would be taken of the wider role of schools within their community (both actual and potential); of the location of schools in relation to the community they served; of transport and travel implications; and of development control issues arising from extended-hours use of school facilities. However, other factors, such as the impact of parental preference on the popularity of schools, and the admission criteria adopted by some schools which tended to favour pupils from outside the local area or from outside the County, could not be ignored. The Greenwich judgement meant that no LEA could refuse access to its schools to children from other LEAs.

(9) Dr Craig also pointed out that, while the Government in the past had suggested that the minimum viable size for a secondary school was 4 FE, changes in governance and management arrangements (such as federations) meant that there was no longer a minimum viable size.

### Selection

(10) In answer to a question from Mr Rowe, Dr Craig said that KCC's policy was that the selection test (PESE) should achieve an overall selection rate of 25%. Thus, any reduction in secondary school places would have to be shared between selective and non-selective schools in order to maintain that percentage.

### Raising of Age Limit for Compulsory Education

(11) In answer to a question from Mr Law, Dr Craig explained that the Government's proposals did not involve raising the school leaving age to 18. Instead, it was expected that young people between the ages of 16 and 18 would have to undertake some form of compulsory education and training, not necessarily full-time.

(12) Dr Craig went on to explain that post-16 education was not included in the Strategic Plan for the Provision of Secondary School Places because funding for Further Education, including sixth forms, was calculated in a completely separate way.

### Independent Schools

(13) In answer to a question from Mr Lake, Mr Nye said that it was unlikely that the threatened loss of charitable status for independent schools would lead to many children transferring from independent to LEA schools. The biggest factor affecting the popularity of independent schools was the national economic situation.

### PFI Schools

(14) In answer to a question from Mr Rowe, Dr Craig accepted that KCC was committed for 25 years to maintaining schools built under PFI agreements. However, at the time that, eg The Malling School was built, there was no other way of funding new school buildings.

### Further Education (FE)

(15) In answer to questions from Mr Horne and Mr Cope, Dr Craig said that the Government had decided that £7bn of the £11bn currently spent by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on FE, should instead be allocated to LEAs, but what this would mean for the relationship between LEAs and FE colleges had not yet been finalised. The remaining £4bn of LSC funding was expected to be used mainly for the Higher Education sector (ie universities).

### Process

(16) In answer to a question from Mr Scholes, Dr Craig gave an assurance that there would be full opportunity for local debates over the next six months by stakeholders (County Councillors, District Councillors, School Governors, FE colleges, etc) on the secondary school capacity issue. The Strategic Plan document was already in the public domain and every Headteacher had been given a weblink to it.

### Conclusions

(17) RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Mr Dance, Dr Craig, Mr Nye and Mr Smith be thanked for attending the meeting to brief the Committee and to answer Members' questions;
- (ii) the assurance by the Cabinet Member that, in planning how to deal with surplus secondary school places, the wider issues (eg wider role of schools within their community (both actual and potential); location of schools in relation to the community they served; transport and travel implications; and development control issues arising from extended-hours use of school facilities) would be taken fully into account, be welcomed;
- (iii) the assurance by the Director of Operations, CFE that there would be full local debate on the secondary school capacity issue over the next

6 months be welcomed and the Director be asked to publish a timetable for this activity as quickly as possible;

- (iv) the Director of Operations, CFE be requested to provide Members with details of the future relationship between LEAs and the FE sector, and the implications of this for Kent, as soon as it had been clarified by Government;
- (v) the Director of Operations, CFE be asked to advise Members of the outcome of his investigation into why the number of pupils in the 15+ year group was slightly lower than preceding year groups.