

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of A meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee held in the Council Chamber, Dover District Council, Council Offices, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover, Kent CT 16 3PJ on Thursday, 29 May 2008.

PRESENT: Mr R A Pascoe (Chairman), Mr R Truelove (Vice-Chairman), Mr M J Angell, Miss S J Carey, Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mr D S Daley), Mr M J Harrison, Mr C Hibberd, Mr R E King, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr R A Marsh, Mr R J E Parker, Mr R J Parry, Mr A R Poole, Mrs E D Rowbotham (Substitute for Mr J I Muckle) and Mrs P A V Stockell.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr K A Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste and Mr R W Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Supporting Independence.

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr L Davies (Director, Environment & Waste), Mr B Gould (Strategic Finance Advisor), Miss E Holliday (Team Leader Natural Environment & Coast) and Mrs C Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Change of Membership

(Item A1)

RESOLVED that Mr Muckle, Mr King and Mr Parry had replaced Mr Birkett, Mr Manning and Mr Snelling respectively on this Committee be noted.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2008

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2008 are correctly recorded subject to Mr Truelove being deleted as present and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Portfolio Holders' and Managing Director's Oral Update

(Item B1)

Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Supporting Independence

(1) Mr Gough advised that Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, had sent his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting as he was on holiday.

Secondary Homes

(2) Mr Gough advised that there were 380 secondary homes identified. The target was 500 which was well in advance of that target in four East Kent districts; Shepway, Dover, Thanet and Swale. This was now a countywide scheme.

London Array

(3) Mr Gough advised that Shell Oil Company would be pulling out of the consortium; Kent County Council (KCC), South East Development Agency (SEEDA) and Thanet District Council would remain. There was uncertainty as to whether Don Energy Eon would buy out Shell or whether a new partner would come in at this point in time.

(4) In answer to a question, Mr Gough explained that the London Array Project had significant prospects of going ahead. The government had signed up to a target on a series of renewables, not just electricity, by 2015. If the overall target was not achieved there would be fines incurred.

Post Offices

(5) Mr Gough explained that there had been a Community Summit held in March 2008 at which discussions took place on practical measures, rural access to closures, business links looking at closures, community shop models. The summit was keen to establish the impact of the Post Office closures but this information was not forthcoming despite going through Access to Information. The Members noted that this was just the first round of Post Office closures. There needed to be further lobbying.

Sub National Review

(6) Mr Gough advised that a consultation was being held and would run until 20 June. He agreed, following a request, to provide the paper due to be considered at the 16 June Cabinet meeting, to Members of the POC. Members were advised that the full consultation was detailed on the BERR website. Concern was expressed that there was no Member representation on the Kent Economic Board and whether the Fire and Police services would be represented. Mr Gough explained that the Fire and Police services did not form part of the Kent Economic Board. He said that he would have discussions with the District Council regarding the Police and Fire Authorities input. The Member representation will be the appropriate Cabinet Member.

(7) There was a suggestion that there should be a paper submitted on the Sub Regional Review to a future County Council meeting.

(8) In response to a question, Mr Gough advised that there was no right of veto. He explained that if there was a dispute this would be sent to the Secretary of State to decide. He advised that the representation on SEEDA would be 50% Members.

(9) In response to a request, Mr Gough agreed to hold a one off meeting of the POC to discuss the Sub Regional Review.

Portfolio for Environment, Highways and Waste

Increase in the cost of fuel

(1) Mr Ferrin stated that there was a major issue with the increased cost on all fuels. He had requested data using current fuel prices to evaluate the cost implications within his portfolio.

(2) There may be a requirement to make a reduction in works undertaken if the cost of fuel remained as it was. Mr Ferrin agreed to advise Members of the POC once the information had been quantified.

Potholes

(3) Mr Ferrin advised that the recent purge on filling potholes around Kent had been a success and cost £½ m. This undertaking had meant a delay in a variety of other tasks, which were now back on track.

Grass cutting

(4) Mr Ferrin advised that there had been numerous complaints from four district council areas; Canterbury, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks regarding grass areas not being cut. There were problems for a variety of reasons but this was an issue for the District Councils.

Lower Thames Crossing

(5) Mr Ferrin advised that Parkers Brinker Hoff had been contracted to carry out the Essex County Council feasibility study to be completed by the end of September 2008. Kent County Council and Essex County Council had identified the same sites for the proposed crossing. The outcome of the study would be recommended to the government.

Allington Incinerator

(6) The Committee were advised that Allington Incinerator continued to be out of commission and it was uncertain when it would be back on stream. The savings to KCC were £¼ m to date.

Environment

(7) Mr Ferrin gave details of the A2 Linear Park Project. There was a proposal for a cycling lane/bridle path at an estimated cost of £7-8 m and would be funded through grants from organisations such as Sport England. The Cabinet had agreed to fund the development of the project this year.

Increase in the cost of fuel

(8) In response to a question, Mr Ferrin advised that he had spoken with Mr N Chard, Cabinet Member for Finance on the necessity for an evaluation on the impact of the increases in fuel costs across the whole council.

Potholes

(9) In response to a question on potholes Mr Ferrin said that they would be revisited at a later date.

Lorry Parks

(10) A Member of the Committee had concerns that little information had been shared regarding the proposed sites for the lorry parks during Operation Stack. Mr

Ferrin explained that a consultation that included the Highways Agency, Borough and District Councils and Police and Fire services had been completed. There had been no intention to take the consultation further. The final design of Operation Stack had been agreed. The “window” to go for an environment assessment this year had been missed as it needed to include the month of March. This would be completed next year.

(11) Members raised concerns regarding the South East Rail Domestic that had taken off a number of services. Mr Gough agreed to send Mr Parker the study.

(12) RESOLVED that the responses to Members questions and the report be noted.

4. Consideration of the draft KCC Annual Plan 2008/09 and process for publishing the final approved version

(Item 2 – report by Mr P Carter, Leader of the County Council and Mr P Gilroy, Chief Executive)

RESOLVED that the arrangements for publishing the KCC Annual Plan 2008/09 be noted.

5. Financial Monitoring update 2007/08

(Item 3 – report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director)

(Mr B Gould, Strategic Financial Advisor was present to answer questions)

(1) The Committee considered a report which sets out the background and process for publishing the KCC Annual Plan 2008/09 and were asked to make comments prior to its approval at County Council on 19 June 2008.

(2) Following a brief introduction from Mr Gould Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:-

(3) In response to a request for an explanation on the paragraph 1.1.3.12 headed “Kent Regeneration Fund”, Mr Gough explained that there had been a time difference. The Regeneration Fund fed into the residential disposals. This was an issue of cost rather than disposal income timing difference KCC was supposed to commit to in 2007/08. There were two further developments in Kings Hill. The market conditions meant a change in how this fund was allocated. This would now be allocated from the Corporate Centre. Members were advised that this would not affect the road improvements at Kings Hill.

(4) Mr Ferrin agreed to feed back information on claims received and claims paid out due to the deterioration of Kent roads.

(5) RESOLVED that the responses to Members questions and the report be noted.

6. Biodiversity and Kent County Council

(Item 4 – report by Mr K Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste)

(Mrs L Davies, Director, Environment and Waste and Miss E Holliday, Team Leader, Natural Environment and Coast were present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report that outlined the NERC Biodiversity Duty, a new duty that required local authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in their activities and its implications for KCC.

(2) Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:-

In response to a question, Mr Ferrin advised that KCC was compelled to do this and there would be no additional funding.

In response to a question, Mrs Davies advised that the plan needed to be in place before the government's review in 2009. She assured the Committee that a lot of work had already been undertaken. A draft of the Plan would be submitted to the September meeting of this POC covering the costs and benefits for Kent.

(3) The Committee wished to thank the officers for all the work already undertaken.

(4) RESOLVED that the Cabinet be recommended to:-

- (a) highlight the importance of the NERC Biodiversity Duty to their respective directorates; and
- (b) to engage the directorates in the implementation of the NERC Biodiversity Duty, clarifying action through the production of a KCC Corporate Action Plan for Biodiversity as a key element of the KCC Environment Plan to flow from the forthcoming KCC Regeneration Strategy.

7. Isle of Grain to South Foreland and Medway and Swale Estuary Shoreline Management Plans

(Item 5 – report by Mr K Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste)

(Miss E Holliday, Team Leader, Natural Environment and Coast was present for this item)

(1) Miss Holliday introduced the report on the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) as a high level, non statutory document that determined the coastal defence policy for a stretch of coastline for the next 100 years. They were living documents that needed to be reviewed on a regular basis and were accompanied by an Action Plan that aimed to facilitate the implementation of the policies and set a framework of monitoring progress.

Miss Holliday highlighted that the main factors influencing the policy recommendations for each section of coastline were protection of people, property and infrastructure, economics, technical viability and environmental protection/enhancement. The shoreline was divided into policy units and shoreline management policies were recommended for each over three epochs: 0-25 years; 25-50 years; and 50-100 years.

(2) Members of the Committee congratulated Miss Holliday for the extensive work already undertaken.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Committee supported the endorsement and adoption by Cabinet of the Shoreline Management Plan, the preferred management policy and the Action Plan. Policies for managed realignment to be adopted under the understanding that these would be subject to further detailed investigation and consultation be noted; and
- (b) the Committee's support for the endorsement and adoption by Cabinet of the preferred Management Policy as a development planning consideration.

8. Dover Pride and Dover Coalfields

(Item 6 – report by Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) Mr P Watkins, Leader of Dover District Council and Mr T Ingleton, Head of Regeneration were present for this Item at the invitation of the Committee, to give a verbal update on regeneration in Dover.

(2) Mr Watkins and Mr Ingleton spoke on the Dover Pride initiative, which would be targeting the issues surrounding the disconnection by the A20 of the town of Dover, which has some 4 of the most deprived wards in the country, with the Port of Dover, the biggest "ro ro" (Roll On Roll Off) port in Europe giving an underlying feeling of being "Port Rich and Town Poor". Other issues to be addressed were; the increase in lorries using the port causing bottle necking during Operation Stack, air pollution, the forecast of freight estimated to double over the next 20 years, delivering opportunities for employment and delivering opportunities in heritage and retail. There was an urgent need to get advantages from proposed expansion of the Port to the rest of the community. They advised that a big disappointment was the future of the Snowdon site, a former Kent colliery site, which still remained uncertain although the Kent Coalfield Project in general had been successful.

(3) RESOLVED that the oral report be received.

9. Select Committee - Update

(Item 1 – report by Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) The Committee considered a report detailing the progress on the Select Committees for; Alcohol Misuse, Accessing Democracy and Autism.

(2) The Democratic Services Officer gave an oral update on the outcomes from the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee meeting held on 23 May 2008.

- An additional Research Officer would be recruited for the Policy Overview Committees, interview to be held on 5 July.
- Interviews were due to be held to replace the Research Officer for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 June.
- Agreement had been given to the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager to prepare a business case for a Democratic Services Officer.
- Agreement had been given for the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager to prepare a bid for a graduate from the Graduate Program.
- Agreement had been given for "Provision of activities for young people" to be the next Select Committee review.

- The Environment and Regeneration bid for a Select Committee on Future Rail Services in Kent which whilst the Committee recognised its importance could not be resourced from existing resources. The Committee had asked to explore with Environment and Regeneration and the Leader how a focussed piece of work around the most immediate issues of this review, i.e. influencing passenger timetables/gateway stations might be supported. A recent appointment had been made within the Environment and Regeneration Directorate and some successful candidates were asked whether they would be able to support this piece of work. Environment and Regeneration would fund this position. The research and writing of the report was still to be resolved.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and oral update be noted.