

REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 12 November 2009.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr I S Chittenden (Vice-Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Substitute for Mr J R Bullock, MBE), Mr K A Ferrin, MBE, Mr P J Homewood, Mr J A Kite, Mrs J Law, Mr K Pugh, Mr K Smith, Mr M V Snelling and Mrs E M Tweed

ALSO PRESENT: Mr K G Lynes and Mr A Wickham

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Ms B Cooper (Director of Economic Development) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

26. Membership - to report that Mr K Smith has joined the Committee in place of Mr B J Sweetland
(Item A1)

27. Mrs Barbara Cooper, Director of Economic Development

The Chairman introduced and welcomed the recently-appointed Director of Economic Development, Mrs Barbara Cooper, to her first meeting of the Committee.

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2009
(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

29. Presentation - Environmental Technologies: Greener Opportunities for Kent
(Item B1)

Mr R Gill, Economic Strategy and Policy Manager, and Ms C Mckenzie, Greener Kent Manager, were in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Gill introduced a series of slides which set out the need for the KCC to assess the economic opportunities which could arise when addressing climate change issues. He emphasised that the issue was being addressed by councils across the UK and Europe, and was fast changing. He presented a draft report – *Low Carbon Opportunities for Growth* – which sets out a menu of potential actions that KCC could take, and invited further comments.

2) Ms Mckenzie set out work which was progressing in the meantime, including:- measures to improve the take-up rate of grants available to improve the environmental performance of individual homes, working with partners such as district councils, the fire authority and supporting people; work to increase the use of renewable energy sources and the resource efficiency and competitiveness programme.

3) Mr Gill and Ms Mckenzie responded to questions and comments raised by Members in discussion of the issue, as follows:-

- a) Members congratulated Mr Gill and his team on the work they had done, and on the clarity of the report;
- b) timber which would otherwise go to landfill should be used as a renewable energy source, whenever and as far as was possible. Kent was the second largest wooded county in the UK but did not make optimum use of this resource. Coppicing of woodland was not widely carried out as the resulting product was not considered economically viable. Coppicing skills could be taught to a new generation, perhaps in an apprenticeship scheme;
- c) KCC was aiming to reduce the total annual energy bill of £20mill across its whole estate, and had invested £1mill in measures to improve energy efficiency. This investment had already yielded £1.1mill of savings so was already generating an encouraging return;
- d) Kent was the only local authority in the UK to have installed LED lights across its entire traffic light network;
- e) Regeneration and Economic Development should join with Environment, Highways and Waste in working on the Renewable Energy Select Committee topic review, as this would strengthen the KCC's role on renewable energy and get optimum value from the Select Committee's work. The terms of reference of the review would need to be very clear and precise;
- f) Kent had a large number of listed residential properties which would be difficult and expensive to convert to more efficient forms of fuel, but most free support to convert homes was geared to helping the most vulnerable homeowners rather than the oldest properties. However, a bid for European funding sought to address the issue of updating historic properties;
- g) the committee should add questions about environmental sustainability measures to the questions it asks when visiting districts to look at their regeneration priorities;
- h) Kent could gain much from looking at the examples of renewable energy sources employed by other authorities. Canterbury City Council, for example, had an environmental policy which was applied across all their directorates; and

- i) Similarly, the UK could learn much from the experiences of other European countries (eg Austria, where there would be no question of what heating mechanism to install in a building, as the use of biomass was very well established).
- 4) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted, with thanks, and that Members' ideas and views on environmental opportunities for Kent, set out in paragraph 3) above, be taken into consideration.

30. Local Economic Assessment, Partnership Structures and Devolution *(Item B2)*

Mr R Gill, Economic Strategy and Policy Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Gill introduced the report, which set out the need for Kent to work in multi-area agreements with other authorities to meet its new duty. He responded to a number of questions and comments raised by Members in discussion of the issue, as follows:-

- a) Members expressed a range of views on the usefulness of partnership working between Kent and Medway, with some Members having reservations and others feeling that it was imperative;
 - b) District councils need to be involved in discussions and consultations right from the beginning, as their input and support was vital;
 - c) Working more closely with partners would mean that councils were better placed to face challenges and would avoid duplication of effort between county and district councils across the UK; and
 - d) It was vital to the success of this joint working that the timing of the exercise was right and that county and district partnerships were established as early in the process as possible.
- 2) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted, with thanks, and that Members' views, set out in para 1) above, be taken into consideration as work moves forward.

31. Regeneration and Economy - A District Perspective: Members' oral report back from visit to Swale Borough Council, 2 November 2009 *(Item B3)*

Mr K A Ferrin declared a prejudicial interest in this item due to his involvement in the development of the Kent Science Park at Sittingbourne, which was one of the sites viewed and discussed during the visit. He left the room and took no part in the discussion which followed.

1) The Chairman placed on record his thanks to Swale Borough Council for organising and hosting the visit, and thanked the Members of the POSC who had attended.

2) Mrs Cooper reminded Members that the aim of the visit was for the Borough Council to show POSC Members its priorities, for Members to see examples of different practice and best practice, and to seek to identify and understand the future funding needs of the areas visited.

3) Members agreed on the general usefulness of the visit in helping them towards the aims which Mrs Cooper had listed, and expressed the following views:-

- a) money spent on the Kent Science Park would need to show a return, and some Members were concerned that this might not happen;
- b) it is important to focus on people in an area and not just on the buildings and the physical economy;
- c) while some Members were impressed with what had been done in Sittingbourne town centre and the Queenborough - Rushenden coastal area, others felt Sittingbourne town centre could benefit from building up the night time economy with some fine dining establishments, and that more could be done to promote the heritage of the coastal area;
- d) it was vital to improve the quality of life in Sheppey to bring it up to the level of the rest of the county;
- e) Kent's Universities should be involved in the development of the Kent Science Park, to bring industry and science together;
- f) in undertaking this series of visits, the POSC needed to be able to gather consistent, comparative information from all areas. It was vital that the visit produced a useful report at the end which the POSC could present to Cabinet; and
- g) Members needed background and introductory information in advance of each visit, to get the optimum benefit from what they are visiting. Information packs given out by the borough on the visit need to be copied to those Members who could not attend.

3) RESOLVED that:-

- a) the views expressed by the Members who attended the visit be noted; and
- b) protocols and paperwork to prepare for and report back from the visit be further developed to give full and consistent information.

32. Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report 2009/10

(Item B4)

33. Autumn Budget Statement and Draft Medium Term Plan 2010/11 to 2012/13

(Item B5)

Mr D Shipton, Finance Strategy Manager, was in attendance for these items.

Members were asked if they wished to consider items B4 and B5 today as urgent business, as the papers had not been placed in the public domain with the required period of notice, or reconvene on another day especially to consider these items.

RESOLVED that consideration of items B4 and B5 be deferred until a specially-convened meeting on another date.

Members subsequently agreed that the special meeting take place on Tuesday 17 November 2009, commencing at 3.00 pm.

34. Update on Major Projects

(Item B6)

1) Mrs Cooper introduced the report and answered questions from Members about the Kent Savers scheme, credit unions and other ways to support the people of Kent through the recession, and how best to publicise, as widely as possible, what the KCC was doing and could do to help.

2) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted, with thanks.

35. Update on Select Committee Work

(Item C1)

1) Miss Grayell introduced the report and acknowledged the links with the 'Renewable Energy' Select Committee which this Committee was likely to have, which had been referred to by several Members while discussing the report on Environmental Technology.

2) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted.