

COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 12 January 2010.

PRESENT: Mrs E M Tweed (Chairman), Mr A R Chell (Vice-Chairman), Mr I S Chittenden, Mr H J Craske, Mr M J Harrison (Substitute for Mr C T Wells), Mr D A Hirst, Mrs J Law, Mr J Ozog, Mr K Smith, Mr R Tolputt, Mr A Wickham and Mr A Willicombe

ALSO PRESENT: Mr L Christie and Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Bainbridge (Director of Community Safety & Regulatory Services), Mrs G Bromley (Strategic Manager, Libraries and Archives), Mr D Crilley (Director of Community Cultural Services), Ms J Edwards (Director of Policy and Resources, Communities Directorate), Mr I Forward (Head of Adult Education), Ms A Honey (Managing Director Communities), Mrs G Hopkin (Head Of Service), Miss C Martin (Head of Supporting People), Mr M Scrivener (Business Information Manager), Ms A Slaven (Director Youth Services and KDAAT), Mr K Tilson (Head of Finance for Policy and Resources) and Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

36. Minutes - 11 November 2009 (Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed as a correct record.

37. Portfolio Holder and Managing Director's Verbal Update (Item B1)

(1) Mr Hill and Ms Honey updated the Committee and answered questions on the following issues:-

Capital programme

(2) The topping out ceremony for Turner Contemporary had been held on 1 December 2009 and had been a very successful event with a lot of representatives from partners attending. Mrs Honey reported that the transfer of staff to the new Trust would take place on 1 April 2010.

(3) Mr Hill informed the Committee that the agreement with the developer for the Kent History Centre had been signed, he congratulated Mr Crilley and his officers for bringing this to completion, especially in the difficult economic climate.

(4) Regarding libraries, a contractor had been appointed for the Beaney in Canterbury and they were due to start on 3 February 2010. In relation to Ashford Library, KCC's Planning Applications Committee were due to consider the planning application on 21 January 2010 and, subject to approval being granted, it was anticipated that work would start on site in April 2010 and be completed in May 2011. Good progress was being made on Gravesend Library, planning permission had been granted on 21 December 2009 and work would start on site in March 2010.

Youth justice conference

(5) Mr Hill referred to the National Youth Justice Convention that had been held on 12 November 2009. An issue that was discussed was the funding of youth custody, and whether it should continue to be centrally funded or the funding allocated to local authorities. Ms Honey stated that the Youth Justice Board would be considering this issue and that perhaps this Committee would like to have a discussion on this matter at a future meeting. Ms Honey advised that the Directorate were involved in a themed informal inspection which was looking at the youth court service and its relationship to the youth offending services. She would bring an update on this to a future meeting of the Committee.

Conference on young people and alcohol

(6) Mr Hill referred to the conference on alcohol abuse that had been held on 24 November 2009. This conference had focused on the dangers of alcohol for young people. The expansion of the Kent Community Alcohol Partnership had been launched at an event in Canterbury. The results of the three pilot areas showed that there they have had a significant impact. These areas were going to be expanded to take in a wider area, with an additional fourth area being Maidstone Town Centre.

Kent Cultural Baton

(7) Mr Hill mentioned the launch of the Kent Cultural Baton on 3 December 2009. The Baton would be complete by the end of March 2010 and would then start going around the county to celebrate the Cultural Olympiad.

LGA conference on museums, libraries and archives

(8) Mr Hill had attended the LGA conference on museums, libraries and archives on 14 December 2009. There was a strong message on the need for change, and the good work being carried out in Kent was acknowledged

Volunteering Annual Event

(9) Ms Honey referred to the successful annual volunteering event which had been held in November 2009. She informed the Committee that Communities and Children, Families and Education Directorates had been chosen as a pilot to look at volunteering for young people (14 to 16 years) which attracted £1.2m funding to enable young people to volunteer for up to 50 hours over a period of time.

RESOLVED that the update be noted

38. Financial Monitoring Report : Community Services 2009/10

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Tilson presented a report on the forecast outturn against budget for the Communities portfolio. Members asked questions which included the following:-

- Mr Tilson confirmed that Medway Council contributed a fixed amount to the budget for the Coroners service but that an agreement had been reached in relation to the current year's projected overspend. A new agreement was being negotiated for future years based on budgeted costs, demographic spread and would be variable if actual costs differed from budget. Pressures on this budget continued including the Coroners pay rise, body removal contract and also certain mandatory fees. It was also mentioned that one five week inquest could cost the authority up to £100k.
- Mr Tilson explained that the underspend generated by the Supporting Independence Programme had been used to balance the Communities budget overspend and that the service review was ongoing which may deliver further savings in anticipation of revised service delivery in future years.
- Mr Tilson confirmed that the reserves for Supporting People were ring fenced. The reserves were £9m at the beginning of the year but a planned drawdown of nearly £3m of these funds was approved by the Supporting People Commissioning Body. It was confirmed that the reserved did not feature within the Income and Expenditure account (monitoring focused on gross, income and net) but was within a Balance Sheet code. It was agreed that Mr Tilson would discuss this outside of the meeting with Mr Christie if he required additional clarification. Ms Slaven explained that the funding for the Supporting People Programme came from the Department of Communities and Local Government and the programme was delivered via the commissioning body.

(2) RESOLVED that the projected 2009/10 outturn figures for the portfolio, based on the outturn included within the second quarterly monitoring report, as presented to Cabinet on 30th November 2009 be noted.

39. Budget 2010/11 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/13

(Item B3)

(1) The Committee considered the Communities Directorate's Draft Budget proposals set out in the Draft Budget 2000-11 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2010-2013 and also the report which was circulated specifically relating to the key areas of these documents for Communities. The report also provides a summary of the relative priorities discussed at the IMG of this Committee, which met in November 2009.

(2) Mr Hill and Ms Honey introduced the draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan for the Communities Directorate. Mr Hill and Officers answered questions from Members about the following issues:-

(3) In response to a question from Mr Chittenden on why the savings for Arts (Rationalisation of grants – page 68 of MTFP) were modest compared to other areas, Mr Crilley explained that over the past 3 years this unit had been substantially

reviewed and their remaining budget left little flexibility for savings, however, the £20,000 savings proposed were significant in terms of their available budget. In addition to this, all savings within the MTP, with the exception of Towards 2010 funding, were efficiency savings. The Arts Unit had a net cash limit of £1.4m, of which a third related to salaries so this gave an indication of the relative level of savings made by the unit.

(4) Mr Bainbridge clarified that the savings proposed from the budget for “Neighbourhood Policing” and “Reduce night time crime” (£45,000 in total – page 66 of MTFP) related to funding for a small team in the Community Safety Unit to produce supporting statistics, carry out project work and back office support. As the work overlapped with that of a team in another part of KCC, the two teams were going to be merged which would result in £45,000 savings and would have no impact on front-line service delivery in these areas.

(5) Mr Christie, although not a Member of the Committee, was given the opportunity to ask a question on the draft budget and MTFP. Mr Christie expressed concern at the reduction in funding for Supporting Independence (£500,000 – page 66 of MTFP). Mr Tilson explained that Supporting Independence had been the subject of internal review and the senior management team were supportive of the proposals. The saving related to a reduction in Towards 2010 funding, as the unit would now provide the service using a different delivery model. It was also noted that there had been significant underspends in the budget over the past few years.

(6) In response to questions from Mr Christie, Mr Tilson stated that approximately up to one third of Communities staff were at the top of their pay scale but would report the actual position to Members at the subsequent meeting. Mr Tilson also explained that there was no current provision for a cost of living increase within the MTP for 2011/12 and 2012/13 due to uncertainties surrounding public sector pay in the future but that this would be revisited in due course. This policy was consistent throughout the authority.

(7) Mr Tilson offered to provide a budget briefing to Mr Christie outside of the meeting.

(8) Mr Hill emphasised the important role of this Committee in the policy led budget changes that would take place over the next two years.

(9) In response to a question from Mr Tolputt on the “Dilapidations – Church Street” Folkestone, officers undertook to supply written details to the Committee of future options surrounding the building.

(10) RESOLVED that that the Budget 2010-11 and Medium Term Plan 2010 to 2013 for the Community Services Portfolio, along with the responses made to the questions from Members, be noted.

40. Performance Monitoring 2009/10

(Item B4)

(1) Mr Scrivener presented a report which summarised ‘in-year’ service unit performance information in the Communities directorate during 2009, in advance of

the annual report on performance in July 2010. It also provided an update on the National Indicator Set. Members were invited to ask questions or make comments which included the following:-

- Members asked that in future successes for the directorate should be given a higher profile in reports.
- Mr Hill confirmed that he discussed cross cutting issues with Cabinet colleagues and that a number of Boards had been established to deal with such issues for example the Learning and Skills Board. These boards were a means of ensuring that directorates work together on issues.
- In relation to Emergency Planning, Ms Honey mentioned the fantastic work that they had done on KCC's behalf in the inclement weather both before and after Christmas. The Committee endorsed the comments made by Ms Honey and added their own thanks to the Emergency Planning team.
- In response to a question on the response to the loan shark campaign, Mr Bainbridge stated that the cost to KCC of providing this service was minimal as the hot line was funded nationally by the Treasury. He stated that they had a number of leads which were being followed and he hoped to see results from them in the long term.
- Mr Bainbridge gave details of the successful prosecution which had resulted in a forfeiture of £3.2m in assets which were the result of a criminal lifestyle. This had been the result of a case that had been going on for 5 years and involved the police and trading standards working closely together.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

41. The Kent Supporting People Programme *(Item B5)*

(1) Ms Martin presented a report which introduced Members to the Supporting People Programme and included a summary of the draft Kent Supporting People Strategy for 2010-15 which was due to be endorsed by Cabinet in February 2010.

(2) In response to a question on how the strategy was affected by partners budgets this year, Ms Martin explained that the programme was funded centrally by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The area where District Council budget pressure could have an impact was in relation to Home Improvements Agency's and the handy person service. The Strategy tried to ensure that all partners contributed as much as they were able on a match funding basis, included within this were the two PCT's. Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT was already contributing in some areas to the handy person service but not universally. The aim in the strategy was to achieve match funding from the Home Improvement Agencies, Health, Housing and Supporting People. In light of the current financial situation this was a medium to long term objective.

(3) In relation to funding for the programme, Ms Martin stated that this had been uncertain for a long period of time, there had been efficiency savings imposed over periods of time. The funding formula used by the Department of Communities and Local Government took two forms, dampened and undampened, KCC operated on the undampened which gave funding of £32m a year. If the dampened formula was

implemented funding could drop to £28m. The commissioning framework was looking at how the programme could be delivered if the funding was reduced.

(4) Members then asked a number of questions in relation to the Handy Person/Handy Man and Handy Van services. It was agreed that Members would be sent a brief paper on these services.

(5) RESOLVED that the transfer of the Supporting People programme to Communities and the scope of its services be noted and that Members submit any comments on the draft Kent Supporting People Strategy for 2010-15 to the Head of Supporting People.

42. The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading

(Item B6)

(1) Mr Crilley, Ms Bromley and Mr Forward presented a report which noted the progress on the development of a Strategy for Reading and Literacy in Kent ("Kent Approach") and identified the next stages. Officers answered questions of clarification and Members were invited to advise on ways in which they might act as ambassadors for literacy and reading in their local communities.

(2) Ms Bromley explained that the library service was leading on work to develop this strategy across directorates. She emphasised the importance of matching the individual to the right approach to literacy, at the right time and in the right place. Mr Forwards reiterated that the Kent Approach was two-pronged including a focus on the development of skill, including writing and the development of an enjoyment of reading as an adult.

(3) In relation to a question on the prison and young offenders services, Ms Bromley confirmed that the library service worked closely with the prison service, Community Safety was an emerging sector and would be a priority in the coming year. Regarding support for people with dyslexia Ms Bromley confirmed that the library service worked with colleagues in Children, Families and Education and with the British Dyslexia Association. Mr Forward referred to the specialism that the Adult Education Service had in the field of adult literacy, he stated that 80% of adults who presented to the service as non-readers gained significant reading skills. Mrs Law highlighted the need to develop literacy skills at Key Stage 2. Mr Tolputt suggested that youth clubs could provide an opportunity for local Members to act as ambassadors.

(4) RESOLVED that the activity that has taken place, the continuing momentum of this work and the comments made by Members be noted.

43. Adult Education and KEY Training Update

(Item B7)

(1) Mr Forward introduced a report which provided an overview of the performance of the Adult Education and KEY Training services which were now managed together as a single business unit. The report also identified some of the

major challenges and opportunities which had been met in the last 3 years and other challenges which were anticipated.

(2) Mr Forward highlighted the challenge of the likely downward pressure on funding for post 19 skills. Although the details of funding and the impact on Kent were not available he identified the challenge as one of maintaining both universal and targeted services if funding was reduced. Information on funding should be available in next 4 or 5 weeks. When this information was available it would be circulated to Members.

(3) The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked staff in the Adult Education unit for their work on delivering services to a high standard in a challenging environment.

(4) In response to a question on the reduction in people using KEY training services in Maidstone, Mr Forward explained that in Maidstone this training was school based around the young apprentice programme.

(5) It was suggested that the reduction in fees for adult education for the over 60s and also free provision for the deaf should be highlighted.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

44. The Youth Rehabilitation Order & The Scaled Approach

(Item B8)

(1) Mrs Hopkin presented a report which set out the new sentencing arrangements for 10 – 17 year olds provided by the Youth Rehabilitation Order and identified the required changes to service delivery by the Youth Offending Service resulting from the implementation of the Scaled Approach. The expectations of the Statutory Partners making up the Youth Offending Service partnership to match the known needs of the youth offending population to their services were clarified.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted

45. Draft Communities Risk Register 2010/11

(Item B9)

(1) Ms Edwards introduced a report which identified the strategic risks that were managed and controlled within the Communities Directorate

(2) RESOLVED that the draft Communities Directorate Risk Register 2010/11 be endorsed and recommended to the Governance and Audit Committee for approval.

46. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the progress with establishing the Select Committee on Extended Schools.

(2) RESOLVED that the update report be noted and delegated authority be given to the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager to receive the officer group report

on extended schools and share it with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Liberal Democrat Spokesman at the end of February 2010.