

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 24 September 2010.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Mrs T Dean (Vice-Chairman), Mr R W Bayford, Mr D L Brazier, Mr J R Bullock, MBE, Mrs J P Law, Mr R J Parry, Mr J E Scholes, Mrs J A Rook (Substitute for Mr M V Snelling) and Mrs A D Allen (Substitute for Mr B R Cope)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P B Carter, Miss S J Carey, Mr R W Gough, Mr A J King, MBE and Mr J D Simmonds

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Mr R Fitzgerald (Performance Monitoring Manager), Ms T Gailey (Public Health Policy Manager), Mrs S Garton (Head of County Performance and Evaluation Manager), Ms J Hill (Performance Manager), Ms K Kerswell (Group Managing Director), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mrs T Oliver (Director of Strategic Development and Public Access), Mr D Oxlade (Head Of Policy), Mr D Shipton (Finance Strategy Manager), Mr D Smith (Head of Contact Centre), Mr D Tonks (Head of Audit & Risk), Mr D Whittle (Policy Manager) and Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

63. Minutes - 1 July 2010

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be published as a correct record.

64. Kent County Council's Contact Centre (Contact Kent and Consumer Direct South East)

(Item B1)

(1) Mrs Oliver and Mr Smith presented a report which provided information for Members on the performance, staffing levels and funding of the Contact Centre and current developments. Mrs Oliver stated that Contact Kent was now connected to all non emergency contact centres in the County giving the ability to directly transfer calls. They were moving towards being able to answer queries without having to transfer the customer. The service was also piloting remote working from Gateways or home. There was a member of staff from Contact Kent in each of the Gateways, this was to help with consistency between Gateways and Contact Kent and also career development for staff. It was important that Members and officers had confidence in the service provided by Contact Kent.

(2) The Chairman referred to a visit, by some of the Members of this Committee, to the Contact Centre before the meeting. He commended the good atmosphere, professionalism of the staff and also the excellent training provided.

(3) In response to a question on the potential to lose the benefits of team working by providing the service remotely, Mr Smith explained that even when staff were working remotely they would need to come back to the office to attend training and team meetings. He agreed that if there was too much remote working there was a danger that the productive culture of the Contact Centre could be lost. They would therefore limit the numbers of working remotely at any time and appreciated the need to keep a balance of remote working and centre based staff. He acknowledged that remote working was a way of retaining specialist staff and also gave additional flexibility during bad weather.

(4) Mr Smith explained that the average waiting time for calls to be answered was checked every week to ensure that it did not disguise excessive waiting times. However, some calls that required an input from skilled staff sometime necessitated a longer waiting time. He emphasised that the key measure was quality of service for the customer.

(5) In relation to the possibility of having a single phone number for all calls, Mr Smith explained that the challenge with this was that there would then need to have an Interactive Voice Response system requiring the caller to select options or to have all customer services staff able to answer every call. Currently the most effective method of filtering calls was to use different numbers, but this was an issue that would continue to be discussed.

(6) Mr Smith confirmed that there was extensive use of mystery shoppers, and that newly trained staff were mystery shopped by other members of staff. Kent Connects was a member of the top 50 contact centres in the Country which involved using 400 mystery shopper calls a month to bench mark against Public and Private sector centres, looking at soft skills and resources.

(7) Ms Oliver explained that the aim was to have as much initial contact in one place to avoid passing customers around the organisation or between organisations. She confirmed that KCC following a change in contract was now receiving income from the 0845 number, which had previously been received by a private company. The aspiration was to move towards a "03" prefix however that would not have income attached.

RESOLVED that: - (a) the current high quality of customer service and performance of the Contact Centre be noted;

(b) the transfer of additional services into and through the contact centre, maximising efficiencies, service quality and customer satisfaction be supported

(c) the direction that assessment undertaken by Contact Kent as 'deep' as possible, reducing the need for future contact as measured by the first contact resolution rate be supported.

65. Financial Monitoring 2010/11

(Item B2)

- (1) Mr Shipton introduced the first quarter's budget monitoring report for 2010/11 which was reported to Cabinet on 13th September 2010.
- (2) It was agreed that in future reports where a post was being deleted it should be made clear if the post had been vacant for some time. Also the importance of graphs and charts being readable in black and white print was emphasised.
- (3) RESOLVED that the projected outturn for the Chief Executive's Department and Financing Items for 2010/11 based on the first quarter's monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

66. Draft Towards 2010 Annual Report

(Item B4)

- (1) Mrs Garton presented a report which reminded the Committee that the four year term of Towards 2010 would come to an end this month and the closedown report would go to County Council on 14 October 2010. Also circulated was a draft of the County Council report (for the corporate-related targets).
- (2) RESOLVED that the attached draft report be noted.

67. Draft Annual Performance Report 2009/10

(Item B6)

- (1) Mrs Garton introduced a report which provided an overview of the Annual Performance Report 2009/10 and attached a draft of the report for Members' information.
- (2) Officers undertook to pass the comment made on the lack of involvement of Thanet District Council in the opening of the new wind farm to "Backing Kent Businesses".
- (3) RESOLVED that the draft Annual Performance Report and the outcomes achieved in 2009/10 be noted.

68. Core Monitoring

(Item B7)

- (1) Mrs Garton explained that Core Monitoring reports were being considered at all Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees (POSC's) this cycle, the purpose of these reports was to inform Members on key areas of performance and activity across the authority. She asked for feedback on the presentation of the report. POSC would receive these reports on a quarterly basis with the next one being submitted to the January POSC meetings.

(2) Mrs Dean referred to the excellent system that the Kent Fire and Rescue Authority had for tracking this information and asked that consideration be given to adopting this. Also she requested that a comparison with the family of Local Authorities be included in future reports. In addition comparative national statistics for sickness absence compared with the private sector could also be reported. She suggested additional indicators relating to property and finance including the time taken to pay invoices and targets regarding property disposals. In addition the performance of the Superannuation Fund could also be reported here. In relation to CO2 emissions, KCC's own properties could be reported separately from schools.

(3) Mr Ballard undertook to supply a written response to all POSC Members on the reasons why the footfall figures for the Tunbridge Wells Gateway had gone down in the period April to June 2010 and the definition of a transaction compared to footfall.

(4) RESOLVED that the report and the suggestions made by Members on the presentation of this report be noted.

69. Complaints, Comments and Compliments

(Item B8)

(1) Mrs Hill introduced a report which provided information about complaints against the Council considered by the Local Government Ombudsman; comments on the Council's performance on complaints, comments and compliments under our own performance management (including a detailed report on the Chief Executives Department complaints, comments and compliments); and reports on developments in the Councils complaint handling for 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010.

(2) A review of Ombudsman complains was being undertaken to see how KCC could be more proactive in future was welcomed. It was agreed that the link between good communication and a reduction in complaints was well made.

(3) In response to a question Mrs Hill explained that the majority of highways complaints were made by phone, but in contrast complaints to Adult Social Services tended to be by letter.

(4) The majority of Ombudsman complaints referred to in the report related to school admissions and the Ombudsman had been involved with staff training to help address some of the main issues.

(5) In response to a question on feedback to complainants, Mrs Hill confirmed that every directorate gave feedback to complainants. Also complaints were invited to become involved in improving the complaints process, by having the opportunity to comment on new leaflets etc. Key to reducing complaints was making sure that people had the right information and understood why the County Council did things in a certain way.

(6) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made be noted.

70. Internal Audit Progress Report

(Item B9)

- (1) Mr Tonks introduced a report which summarised the Internal Audit Programme and how it impacted on the Chief Executives Department. Half of the internal audits carried out fell within this Department.
- (2) Reference was made to the review of the payroll services contract with East Kent and how those in receipt of the service agreed that specific standards were met. Mr Tonks explained that there were two aspects to this, firstly to give the County Council an assurance that they were delivering to a contract and secondly to pick up any aspects of the review that the Districts requested. District Council internal audit teams had been invited carry out reviews but none had taken up this offer.
- (3) There was a discussion on the role of Governance and Audit Committee and the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (POSC) in relation to internal audit reviews. The Chairman emphasised the importance of avoiding duplication between these Committees but he believed that there was a role for the POSC in looking at issues that were relevant to its remit.
- (4) In relation to a question on data backup and data centres, Mr Tonks explained that it was intended that this would look at the back up for our main systems, everyone should be working on a network drive that was backed up.
- (5) Mr Tonks undertook to provide Mr Parry with a copy of the report on Virus protection /Software when it was available.
- (6) RESOLVED that the progress against the 2010/11 audit programme as it impacts on CED be noted.

71. KCC International Activities Annual Report 2009 -10

(Item B10)

- (1) Mr Oxlade presented Kent County Council's International Strategy which highlighted the importance of Members being fully informed about international work in Kent. As part of this commitment, the attached fifth International Activities Annual Report highlighted examples from the range of international work undertaken across KCC and the county over the past year. This year's report reflected continuing emphasis and success in achieving a number of high value EU projects in support of KCC Directorate and Kent priorities and in helping Kent Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to 'internationalise' their business activities. The report also provided an overview of international activities involving young people in the context of developing 'global citizenship' as well as international development work supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).
- (2) Mr King made the point that over the past 2 years KCC had attracted £21m of international funding of which £12 m was interreg so access to international funding would not be diminished by the demise of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). He emphasised the importance of building Kent's trade in the international context and to learn from best practise worldwide in order to deliver the exceptional value for money that would be needed in the times to come.

(3) Mr Oxlade confirmed that the unit tried to provide a comprehensive service to Kent organisations such as Kent Police. He also explained that the Power Project, which was a low carbon community initiative, was a SEEDA initiative which was being led by the Greener Kent Manager.

(4) The Partnership with Ghana was commended, and it was suggested that consideration should be given to supporting opportunities for young people in Kent to get involved for example via graduate programmes or internships.

(5) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted.

72. NHS White Paper 'Equality and excellence: liberating the NHS

(Item B11)

(1) In introducing the report Mr Gough explained that he had been asked by the Leader to take on the role of coordinating the response to the "Equality and Excellence: Liberating the NHS" white paper, which was due to be submitted to the Department of Health following approval by the Cabinet on 11 October 2010.

(2) Miss Gailey explained that there were a series of consultation papers and a cross directorate officer group were working with Members to develop responses on behalf of KCC. It was important to persuade the Department of Health not to be too prescriptive and that there was no "one size fits all" solution.

(3) The Leader informed the Committee that Kent had a unique opportunity to work together with health colleagues to find a constructive solution to the proposals. In early November there would be a conference for GP's in Kent, to give them an opportunity to look at how they could organise themselves and how we could support the localism agenda across the county. It was also intended to hold a Members seminar after the GP's conference. He stated that it was important that the 12 Districts and the County of Kent worked together on the community health agenda and that GP's be encouraged to achieve co-terminosity.

(4) It was confirmed that some District Councils had responded to the consultation.

(5) RESOLVED that the report be noted

73. The Leader and Group Managing Directors update

(Item B3)

(1) The Chairman welcomed Ms Kerswell, Group Managing Director, to the meeting. Mr Cater and Ms Kerswell updated Members on the following issues:-

Bold Steps for Kent

(2) The Leader referred to the changes being introduced by the coalition government to health, education, regeneration and the reconfiguration of services following the reductions expected in the Comprehensive Spending review. Bold Steps for Kent was a radically different document to Towards 2010, it would include

the reshaping of the organisation and would also look at partnership working. He stated that there would be a review of partnerships and a Kent re-commitment. The document would set bold parameters and brave targets but there was a need to be mindful that it would need to evolve to take account of changing circumstances.

(3) The lack of any reference to the environment, climate change and the green agenda within Bold Steps for Kent was mentioned and it was requested that there be a reference to climate change within the document.

(4) It was suggested that there should be more clarity around the use of the phrase "Big Society" to ensure that it was meaning for the documents audience. Ms Kerswell referred to work being undertaken by Ms Honey with Members to develop their ideas on the Big Society. There would also be a voluntary sector conference in the autumn.

(5) Mrs Dean put forward the view that Bold Steps should not support free schools without the regulations for these being available. She welcomed further discussion on what was proposed for free schools.

(6) The Leader referred to the move towards joined up District services which would be delivered not by transferring staff but by pooled manpower resources. He hoped to establish two or three pilots for joint commissioning which could be rolled out universally. He assured Members that Elected Members from KCC would be working with their District Council colleagues, whatever their political persuasion, to set specifications for the joint commissioning of services.

(7) The Leader explained that there would be a consultation document for Bold Steps for Kent after 11 October 2010. Whether there would be two versions of the document, one for the residents of Kent and one for staff and partners, was still being considered.

First Bold Steps

(8) The Leader mentioned the recent launch of "First Bold Steps" which started an informal consultation on the re-shaping of the organisation, including the move from a federated to an integrated organisation.

(9) Ms Kerswell stated that KCC was a very successful organisation but there were certain things that could be done better. As part of the informal consultation on First Bold Steps, seven manager meetings had been held and to date over 200 responses received. The majority of comments had been positive about what works and what could be changed.

(10) The Chairman emphasised the importance of engaging with Members on the transformation of the organisation, which would be a cultural change for Members as well.

Transparency and openness policy

(11) The Leader mentioned the recent media launch of the transparency and openness policy, the media had been encouraged to use the information sensibly and with integrity. Regarding the publishing of all invoices over £500, it was

important to minimise the financial burden of generating this information. Members expressed concerns about the low level of this threshold for a large organisation like KCC.

(12) Ms Kerswell stated that she would be sending a message to all staff that afternoon thanking them for the successes they had achieved. She wanted staff to know that they were valued, in light of recent press coverage following the launch of the transparency and openness policy.

(13) RESOLVED that the update be noted

74. Bold Steps for Kent - Update

(Item B5)

(1) Circulated with the papers for the meeting was an update on the timetable and development of the new medium term plan, *Bold Steps for Kent*. During consideration of the previous item the Committee gave their input on the key issues and what the plan might address.

(2) RESOLVED That the report and the comments and feedback on the themes and emerging priorities for Bold Steps for Kent made under minute number 73 above be noted.

75. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received an update on the current topic review programme and were invited to suggest topics for future Select Committee topic reviews.

(2) RESOLVED that the current Select Committee topic review programme noted.