

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, 11 January 2011.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L Andrews (Head of Service, KDAAT), Mrs G Bromley (Strategic Manager, Libraries and Archives), Mr D Cloake (Head of Emergency Planning), Ms J Edwards (Director of Policy and Resources, Communities Directorate), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview)), Mr C Gabriel (Senior Project Manager), Mr M Gilbert (Performance & Contracts Manager) and Mr K Tilson (Head of Finance for Policy and Resources)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

91. Membership

(Item A1)

It was noted that Mr R Burgess had replaced Mr C Wells as a member of this Committee.

92. Minutes - 11 November 2010

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2011 are correctly recorded subject to minute no 86 (11) being amended to read "Concern was expressed that it seemed to be the same people involved in community/voluntary sector work rather than new volunteers." and that they be signed as a correct record.

93. Portfolio Holder and Managing Director's Update

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Hill and Ms Edwards (on behalf of Ms Honey) updated Members on the issues listed in the paper circulated with the agenda and answered questions from Members.

Ms Edwards

(2) Ms Edwards informed the Committee that she would be retiring from Kent County Council at the end of March 2011 and she took the opportunity to thank Members, especially Mr Hill as Cabinet Member, for all their support over the years.

The Committee recorded their thanks to Ms Edwards for her support and expressed their best wishes to her for the future.

Restructuring

(3) Mr Hill reminded Members that the restructuring agreed by the County Council on 16 December 2010 would bring significant new services together under the remit of the Customer and Communities Directorate including Gateways, Healthwatch and Public Rights of Way. He reported that Ms Honey had been slotted into the post of Corporate Director of Customer and Communities.

Emergency Planning Exercise (16 November 2010)

(4) Mr Hill referred to the Emergency Planning Exercise that had been held on 16 November 2010. This had been the first exercise that the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team had held. It had been a great help in terms of clarifying the role of services and the decisions making response by Corporate Management Team and Cabinet. A further exercise would be held in due course.

Visit to Cookham Wood (19 November 2010)

(5) Mr Hill stated that he had visited the Young Offenders Institution at Cookham Wood, which currently accommodated eight young people from Kent. Progress with vocational training was still in its infancy and some of the young people were not there long enough to get a meaningful qualification.

Youth Justice Board: Conference – Newport (23 & 24 November 2010)

(6) Mr Hill explained that the Youth Justice Board was being disbanded and that it was not yet clear what would take its place.

Turner Contemporary Handover Celebration (8 December 2010)

(7) Mr Hill referred to the very successful handover celebrations that had taken place on 8 December 2010.

Chief Coroner Interviews (10 December 2010)

(8) Mr Hill informed the Committee that a new Chief Coroner had been appointed. This would be Kent's first full time Coroner. A Member referred to the number of post mortems carried out in the County at the discretion of Coroners which impacted on the county council's budget. Mr Hill stated that there was a wide variation between the percentage of post mortems carried out in different parts of the county and he would expect the Chief Coroner to look at consistence across the County.

Library – Self Service

(9) A Member mentioned the new self services system which he had seen in operation in Cornwall. He stated that it worked very well and made the job of the Librarians more interesting. Mr Hill undertook to supply a note informing Members of the roll out of self service.

The Youth County Council Election Results

(10) Ms Edwards reported that there had been over 100 candidates for the recent Youth County Council Elections and that over 27,000 votes had been cast. The successful candidates would be attending a residential event in January and would set the agenda for the year at their first meeting in February 2011. It was agreed that there should be a report on the work of the Youth County Council to a future meeting of the Committee and it was suggested that Members take the opportunity to observe meetings of the Youth County Council

Forward Plan - Edenbridge Centre

(11) In relation to the Edenbridge Centre, Mr Hill confirmed that the planning phase had been completed and that the developer would begin on site in March 2011. He suggested that the Committee should receive a paper on this in 6 months, to see what could be learned from this example of developing a Community Centre with a large number of partners on green belt land.

(12) RESOLVED that the update be noted.

94. Financial Monitoring 2010/11

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Tilson and Mr Hill presented the regular report to the Committee on the forecast outturn against budget for the Communities portfolio.

(2) Mr Chittenden pointed out that a lot of the underspend was due to holding posts vacant and asked how this was balanced with providing services. He was assured by Ms Edwards that this was a planned reduction which had happened faster than anticipated and that no front line services were at risk from these vacancies.

(3) In response to a questions, Mr Tilson clarified that the mortuary charges by Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust was based on a cost per case and so the global figure was an estimate of the number of cases.

(4) Mr Tilson explained that part of the income to the youth services came from rental charges to third parties for use of youth centres. He undertook to provide all Members of the Committee with a breakdown on the change in income for the Youth Service.

(5) Mr Tilson explained that the underspend on projects relating to apprentices had arisen for a number of reasons including the logistics of finalising arrangements in year for an apprenticeship pool. This money would be spent in the fourth quarter of this financial year or the first quarter of the next financial year.

(6) RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the directorate for 2010/11 based on the latest monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

95. Core Monitoring Report (including in-year performance update)

(Item B3)

(1) Ms Edwards presented a report to inform Members about key areas of performance and activity within the Communities Directorate. It includes results from in-year performance monitoring, of which emerging headlines were reported to this Committee in November 2010. Ms Edwards drew Members attention to the strong Ofsted result that the Adult Education Service had achieved. They had been assessed as a good 2, which was an important achievement.

(2) In response to a question Ms Edwards explained that the two youth worker posts to support working care leavers were externally funded, and this funding was not longer available. This would be considered further as part of the business planning process.

(3) Addressing questions on the library service, Ms Bromley explained that the new self service system in libraries would bring a number of opportunities to increase loans including having library staff spending more time floor walking and helping customers. She reported that the e-books facility was going well with eight thousand books being issued in the first three months. There were challenges and discussions were underway with Amazon in relation to the Kindle market. The IT market enabled the public to access libraries outside of normal opening hours, for example 50 books had been issued on Christmas day.

(4) In response to a question on library closures, Mr Hill confirmed that there were no plans to make any closures in the first two years. He stated that during the next few months' consideration would be given to the modernisation of the library service. Ms Bromley explained that the Library Service was working with volunteers within communities to make books accessible from places where people go such as youth centres. In response to a question on why library issues numbers were below the national average when Kent had a high number of libraries, Ms Bromley stated that this would level out with the new approaches such as e-books. A Member made the point that it was important that the public were able to clearly identify library staff in order to seek assistance.

(5) A Member commended the HOUSE project which had worked very well in Thanet and especially successful was the use of viral advertising.

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

96. Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

(Item B4)

(1) The Committee considered the Draft Budget proposals relating to the Communities Directorate as set out in the Draft Budget 2011-12 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2011-2013 and also the report which was circulated specifically relating to the key areas of these documents for Communities Directorate.

(2) Mr Hill and Mr Tilson 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) Mr Tilson confirmed that the “new library and community centre, Cheeseman’s Green, Ashford” (page 151 of the draft MTFP) was the only project which was reliant on specific grants and/or external funding and would only go ahead if the funding was achieved.

(4) Mr Tilson explained that in relation to Youth Centres that benefit from an 80% reduction in rates because a charity is accommodated onsite, there was legislation pending which may withdraw this exemption and a pressure has been provided for accordingly.

(5) In response to a question Mr Tilson confirmed that in the Registration and Community Learning and Skills services, the user did pay for the elements that were not paid for by grants or Government contribution but that a small KCC budget was prevalent for Registration. In relation to Adult Education, if enrolment figures fall this can cause a funding pressure, as it is difficult to react quickly to reduce costs. It was important to get the right mix of fixed and variable costs in order to react for a change in the enrolment figures and to balance the books. He stated that it was also a mid to long term aspiration for the Registration service to be cost neutral, or as close as.

(6) Regarding funding for Supporting People, Mr Tilson explained that the partner agencies in receipt of cascaded funding e.g. Borough/District Councils, were aware of funding cuts driving the need to do things differently, for example providing floating support, and we were working closely with all partners. In relation to Community Safety, Borough/District Councils had been consulted and there were partnership arrangements in place or negotiations ongoing.

(7) In relation to budgets which had been un-ring fenced, Mr Hill stated that the responsibility rested with the County Council to decide how to allocate these funds.

(8) Mr Tilson explained how the County Council’s capital programme was funded and explained the term of prudential borrowing.

(9) In response to a further question on Supporting People, regarding floating support, Mr Tilson stated that services and the way in which they were delivered were under review. The intention is to provide one countywide approach to create an efficient and cost effective service that continued to protect the most vulnerable people in Kent. The resulting plan would be shared with the Committee when it was available.

(10) In response to a question on the reduced figure for the contribution towards the running costs for The Bridge (page 93 – Draft Budget) from £32,000 to £2,000, Mr Tilson explained that £32,000 had been added to the base budget, not reduced, and that the £2,000 was the inflation element in future years e.g. they were not yearly increases but the movement in the base budget. He also gave an explanation of the £838,000 in 2012/13 (page 93 – Draft Budget) for Review of service provision – creation of commissioning budget and how this needed to be viewed in tandem with the gross savings that are identified on the following page to get back to the £0.9m Youth Service saving that is identified in the Budget MTP paper.

(11) There were a number of questions relating to the Youth Service and in response Mr Hill stated consideration was being given to re-modelling the Youth Service including commissioning more work in the voluntary and private sectors, where capacity existed already or had the potential to increase in the future. He undertook to ensure that when a plan had been developed it would be shared with the Committee.

(12) RESOLVED that the revenue and capital budget proposals included within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/13 be noted and the comments made by Members on the revenue and capital budget proposals be fed into the Cabinet Budget meetings and County Council in February.

97. Turner Contemporary Update

(Item B5)

(1) Mr Hill introduced a report which updated members of the Committee on the latest position on the construction of the gallery and its future operation. He referred to the very successful handover event that had taken place on 9 December 2010. Mr Gabriel gave a presentation which illustrated the development of the building and showed the layout and facilities. The Gallery would be opened to the public on 16 April 2011.

(2) It was suggested that the café in the building should serve Kentish produce and the operator should be made aware of potential staff from Thanet College. Mr Gabriel undertook to raise this with the Trust who were interviewing a number of service providers for the café.

(3) In relation to sharing the site with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), Mr Hill stated that the RNLI had an ambition to have a more central site but did not have the funds to achieve this. He believed that having them on the Turner Contemporary site added to the whole seaside scene.

(4) Mr Hill explained that the question on the future funding of the Gallery was as important for the County Council as for the Turner Contemporary Trust. The Chairman of the Trust was well aware of the risk of depending on public subsidy and therefore the Trust would try to generate their own income.

(5) Mr Gabriel stated that information on exhibitions due to be held at the gallery was available online. There would also be building signage and a banner showing the changing programme. In relation to car parking, consideration was being given to making sure that information was available at the point of entry to the town showing where to park for the Gallery. Visitors would be encouraged to park in College Square to encourage people to walk to the Gallery and to generate business for the town.

(6) In response to a question on Members being able to scrutinise the business plan for the Trust, Mr Hill explained that the Cabinet approved the business plan on an annual basis in relation to funding. He stated that Members could have a briefing on this but he was not sure that it was within this Committees remit to scrutinise the business plan of another body.

(7) RESOLVED that the latest developments on the Turner Contemporary project be noted and a briefing be given to Members, or a report submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on the annual business plan for the Turner Contemporary

98. Adult Drug and Alcohol Services in Kent
(Item B6)

(1) Mrs Andrews introduced a report which explained that the Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT) commissioned a range of treatment services across Kent in order to prevent problematic substance misuse, reduce drug and alcohol related crime and supported the long term recovery of people affected by drug and alcohol misuse. KDAAT had performed well in recent years and had increased the number of people coming into treatment and completing it successfully. The recently published Public Health White Paper and National Drug Strategy were focusing on recovery and re-integration of people affected by drugs and alcohol and KDAAT had been piloting a new recovery focussed approach to treatment in Gravesham and Swale. Learning from the pilot would be used to reshape local drug and alcohol services from 2011/12 onwards. She stated that Kent was nationally recognised as a leader in this field but she knew that KCC could not deliver the strategy on its own and it was important to encourage partners to pool budgets to bridge any gaps in service.

(2) Mr Hirst referred to the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse and stated that nearly all the issues in the government programme had been highlighted by the Select Committee review. He emphasised the importance of redressing the balance in funding between drug and alcohol services. He mentioned the importance of drawing upon the good project work that Essex County Council were doing in relation to treatment. He stated that this was a big opportunity to empower individuals who wished to give up drugs or alcohol.

(3) In response to a question on how to help children affected by drugs and alcohol, Mrs Andrews confirmed that there were ongoing substance misuse parents projects. In the focus areas and in Thanet there was a real emphasis on the family rather than just treating the individual. Where there were children involved the link was made to Social Services. She also referred to the Hidden Harm Strategy which had been embedded into everyday practise. She explained that regarding how to stop young people getting involved with drugs in the first place, there was an element of preventative work which had to be integrated with the rest of Children and Young Peoples Services. Mr Gilbert explained that part of young peoples services was early intervention services which included raising awareness.

(4) Mr Hill stated that in the five years that he had had this portfolio, KDAAT had done better and he had been impressed with their success. However there was an uncertainty about funding from other sources.

(5) Mrs Andrews confirmed that the consultation on the future of local drug and alcohol services would close in March and, in addition to an on line consultation, the views of GP's and other stakeholders were being sought.

(6) RESOLVED that (a) the changes in policy and plans for drug and alcohol services in Kent outlined in the report and the comments made by Members be noted.

(b) the Committees support for KDAAT's forthcoming consultation on the future of local drug and alcohol services be noted.

99. The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading

(Item B7)

(1) Ms Bromley presented a report which updated members on activity relating to the "*Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading – Involving the Whole Community*" and sought their comments on, and suggestions for, the content of a strategy document which would encapsulate the approach. Ms Bromley referred to World Book Night on 5th March 2011. She also offered to attend any Local Boards/Forum meetings.

(2) Members made the following comments and suggestions on ways in which they could be champions for literacy and reading :

- as the majority of Members were school governors, this would be a good starting point for looking at this strategy.
- volunteer reading in schools was a good model especially when older people were involved as it gave an opportunity for intergenerational links.
- the importance, when trying to engage with young reluctant readers of making sure that there was material, in whatever format, available which reflected the things that they were interested in was emphasised.
- schools should also encourage reading of whatever type of books young people preferred, for example factual books rather than fiction books, to get engagement with reading.
- Suggestions for further investigation included a voluntary mobile reading service

(3) RESOLVED that the report, comments made by Members on the draft text in the document attached at Appendix One and the suggestions on the ways in which KCC elected Members might act as champions for literacy and reading in their local communities be noted.

100. Winter Weather Emergency Planning and Response

(Item B8)

(1) Mr Cloake introduced a report which set out the current position regarding snow and winter weather emergency planning and business continuity management across KCC. It also provided a case study to demonstrate an overview of the dynamics of a response when such an event occurs.

(2) In response to a question, Mr Cloake confirmed that the Emergency Planning team did communicate with the rail companies. The rail companies recognised that they did have an issues with communicating with the public and knew that they need to address this.

(3) Mr Cloake explained that in order to keep Kent moving in winter, there were pre-planned routes which were gritted. The public were able to obtain information during winter emergencies from KCC website and via the media. During a winter emergency the team responded to specific issues that were drawn to their attention and these were dealt with on a priority basis.

(4) The Committee expressed their thanks to Mr Cloake and his team for all the work they had done to keep Kent moving during the recent winter emergencies.

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

101. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the progress of the Select Committees on Extended Services and the Student Journey. In relation to the new Select Committee on the Student Journey which was due to start its work in the Spring, the Chairman explained that the age range for this Select Committee was 12 – 22 and would include the time when young people were making choices about subjects which may have an impact on career choice. The important thing was to make young people the focus of the review and to engage with them on their terms. This would include young people who were excluded from school.

(2) RESOLVED that the update be noted and the executive summary of the report from the Select Committee on Extended Services be endorsed.