

COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of A meeting of the Communities Policy Overview Committee held at Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 2nd April, 2008.

PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake (Chairman), Mr L Christie (Vice Chairman), Mr A R Chell, Mrs V J Dagger, Mr D A Hirst, Mr R E King, Mr C J Law, Mr T A Maddison, Mr M J Northey, Mr G Rowe and Mrs E M Tweed.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services.

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms A Honey, Managing Director, accompanied by Mr D Shipton, Head of Finance and Asset Management; Mrs A Slaven, Director of Youth Offending and Substance Misuse; Ms J Edwards, Director, Policy and Resources; Mr C Hespe, Head of Sports, Leisure and Olympics and Paralympics ; Mrs F Staples, Head of Arts Development; Mrs S Holt, Kent Manager for the 2012 Games, Mr I Treacher, Assistant Head of Trading Standards; Mrs J Doherty, Policy Manager; Mrs M White, Head of Extended Services (CFE) and Mrs C A Singh, Democratic Services Officer (Overview and Scrutiny).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

64. Minutes - 24 January 2008

(Item 2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2008 are correctly recorded subject to Mrs Dagger's initials being amended to read "V J" and that they be signed by the Chairman.

65. Portfolio Holder and Managing Director's Update

(Item B1 – Oral Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Ms A Honey, Managing Director for Communities)

(1) Mr Hill updated Members on the following issues:-

Kent Library and History Centre

Mr Hill stated that there would be a presentation on the Kent Library and History Centre later in the year in conjunction with an update on the directorate's capital programme.

(2) Mr Hill advised that a site had been identified for the Kent Library and History Centre on James Whatman Way in Maidstone, at the junction with Royal Engineers Road. Invitations for the press launch on 17 April 2008, at which the name of the preferred developers would be announced, would be sent out in the week of 7 April 2008. The plans for the new Centre would be submitted to Maidstone Borough Council in due course for planning approval and the Committee noted that a report on the Centre and its services would be submitted to a future meeting.

Turner Contemporary

(3) Mr Hill advised that, on the 20 February, planning permission had been granted by the Thanet District Council Planning Committee. A formal application for funding had been submitted to the Arts Council and a bid had also been submitted to SEEDA. Responses to both of these are expected in July 2008. He also advised that the development of the Rendezvous site would be overseen by Gleesons who had just been appointed as preferred developer and Ms Honey advised the Committee that the former Marks and Spencer store in Margate was now being used as gallery space in which successful exhibitions had already taken place.

(4) In response to a question regarding the legal costs incurred in seeking to recoup the monies spent on the original design Turner, reported in other papers to this Committee as a cost of £300k, Mr Hill advised that recovering the money had been a decision by the County Council and money therefore needed to be spent to cover legal costs of doing so. He felt that the County Council had every chance of recouping the money spent on the original design and part of the settlement would cover the costs of achieving this.

(5) Mr Hill advised the Committee of the following formal openings and award ceremonies that had taken place since the POC last met:-

- 3 February: the Try-Angle Awards presentations at the Winter Gardens in Margate
- 15 February: the opening of Thanet Gateway in Margate
- 21 February: the launch of the Ashford Library and Gateway project
- 7 March: the presentation ceremony for the first Communities Directorate Quality Service Awards
- 12 March: the Adult Education Cube Centre opened in Folkestone
- 19 March: the presentation ceremony for participants in the Criminal Justice Progression Awards scheme, 10 of whom were former KDAAT service users
- 21 April: the launch of the National Year of Reading.

Inspections

(6) Ms Honey informed Members that the report on the recent inspection of the Youth Offending Service would be published in May 2008; and that the reports on the Enhanced Youth Inspection, the Joint Area Review of Children's Services, and the Corporate Assessment, would all be published on 3 June 2008. She confirmed that the next step would be the development of improvement action plans arising from the recommendations.

Kent School Games

(7) The inaugural Kent School Games, which had been launched in November 2007, has already involved 450 schools. There will be 515 competitions, leading up to the Finals in June and July 2008. The Opening Ceremony for the Finals, on 14 June 2008, will be attended by Dame Kelly Holmes.

Select Committee: Alcohol

(8) Ms Honey reminded Members that the Alcohol Select Committee report would be discussed at the County Council meeting on 3 April 2008 and that KDAAT would be leading on the subsequent development of an Alcohol Strategy. She also noted that a proposal for a debate on alcohol later in the year, involving the Kent Youth County Council and the County Council, was also being considered.

(9) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The update and responses to questions be noted
- (b) A report on the Kent Library and History Centre be submitted to the Committee at a future meeting.

66. Financial Monitoring Report : Community Services 2008/09

(Item B2 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member and Ms A Honey, Managing Director) (Mr D Shipton, Head of Finance and Asset Management was present for this item to answer questions)

(1) Mr Shipton advised that the timing of monitoring reports, to more closely align POCs and the quarterly reports to Cabinet was being addressed corporately. He then highlighted four main areas of concern within the revenue budget for 2007/08 identified in the report, as follows:- ;

- (i) Adult Education is still forecasting a £330k in-year deficit and would not be able to repay the loan of £500k granted to cover part of the 2006/7 deficit. The latest MTP includes provision for this loan to be repaid over two years. Mr Shipton advised that a paper on the Adult Education strategy to increase the yield from tuition fees included in the MTP would be brought to the next Policy Overview Committee meeting on 2nd June.
- (ii) The Coroner's Service is another area of concern due to the overspend on costs related to investigations. In the latest monitoring the overspend has been reduced to £206k following renegotiations on mortuary fees with hospital trusts and with Medway Council. This is in spite of the Coroners' pay award for this financial year which has added an additional £40k spend. The net overspend of £200k has been covered by underspends elsewhere in the Directorate.
- (iii) Mr Shipton advised that the Arts Unit has undergone a major restructure to deliver a more strategic role. This new structure means the service can manage expenditure within the existing budget following the withdrawal of external grants.
- (iv) Mr Shipton advised that the fourth main area of concern relates to the Library Service and the loans of audio visual materials. The Library Service has developed a new strategy to target its market resulting in a planned £120k reduction in the income budget. The service is managing this planned reduction through reduced expenditure on consumables.

(2) In order to balance the budget to cover overspends on Coroners, Arts and Youth Offending the Strategic Management Team had agreed a £500k reduction in spending on non essential non staffing budgets. This would balance the overall portfolio budget other than Adult Education.

(3) In response to a question on whether the variances could be shown as an overall percentage, Mr Shipton advised that total variance for each unit and all variances over £100k were reported to Cabinet. He agreed to look into adding a column in the table for each unit identifying the percentage variance.

(4) Mr Shipton explained that the in-year variance in Adult Education was due to the original 24,000 estimated enrolments not being achieved (only 17,000 students enrolled in quarter 2). This appears to be a national trend arising from uncertain financial markets. Members were reassured that the future strategy aims to increase the yield from fees and not the level of fees.

(5) In response to a question on why the County Council paid for the Coroners, Mr Shipton advised that this was a historical arrangement. The County Council has written to Government suggesting the service should be funded by a specific grant.

(6) In response to a question regarding the restructuring of Adult Education, Mr Shipton advised that there had been some delays in implementing the new structure as consultation with staff had led to some changes to the original plans.

(7) In response to a question on the drop in income from the loan of audio visual materials and whether this could be made up, Mr Shipton advised that the service was expecting to be a further £130k down on the revised target. The service had been able to carry out other merchandising in libraries e.g. through selling vouchers to get data from national census to cover the shortfall.

(8) A Member of the Committee suggested that a questionnaire be sent to all Members of the County Council requesting ideas on Adult Education and that members could ask their local communities for their ideas too. This suggestion was acknowledged and will be taken into account during future planning.

(9) In response to a question, Mr Shipton advised that Coroners were employed by the Crown. Although Kent County Council held the budget it has no control over their pay award which is set by the JNC and linked to other members of the judiciary. The Committee was advised that Ms Honey had written to the government regarding the increase in expenditure but to date had received no response. In reply to whether the Youth Service and KDATT budgets were protected Mr Shipton advised that each Unit had its own agreed budget but that, during the year, they had been set an appropriate target to reduce expenditure on non-essential, non-staffing budgets in order to balance the budget at year-end.

(10) Mr Shipton then spoke on the Capital Programme. He advised that the programme published in the recent 2008/09-10/11 MTP was more realistic than in previous years and that, in order to overcome previous slippage, a feasibility study is carried out on each proposed scheme before it is included in the Capital Programme. He gave the example of the Edenbridge project that had been delayed due to planning issues and was part of the £400k slippage.

(11) In response to a question on whether Directorates worked with each other when engaging in a project Mr Shipton confirmed that this was the case - citing the example of the Ashford Gateway where a number of services across the Authority are represented.

(12) In response to a question on the reduction of calls through Consumer Direct South East in 2007/08 compared to 2006/07, Mr Shipton advised that Consumer Direct operated through the Call Centre under a contract with Trading Standards South East Ltd based on the number of calls received. The number of calls was down this year thus reducing income and he advised that renegotiations had taken place to compensate for the reduction. Furthermore, a reserve had been set up when the service was first established in case of this eventuality and the service had also been awarded a quality bonus. If the reduction in calls continues the Directorate would need to look to other authorities that may wish to join the scheme under the same contract.

(13) RESOLVED that:-

- a) The projected out-turn figures for the Directorate as at the third quarter be noted;
- (b) The questions asked by Members and the responses be noted.
- (c) A report on Adult Education yield from fee income be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

67. Cultural Olympiad

(Item. 3 Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member and Ms A Honey, Managing Director) (Ms S Staples, Head of Arts Development, Mr C Hespe, Head of Sport, Leisure, Olympics and Ms S Holt, Kent Manager for 2012 Games were present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report advising of the context of the Cultural Olympiad and of its potential scope. The report also summarised the national position and identified the opportunities for Kent.

(2) In response to a question on how the wealth of history, literature and rich culture mix within Kent could be tapped into, Mr Hespe advised that many organisations and festivals would be taking part and that discussions were taking place with corporate colleagues regarding international marketing of Kent festivals. He added that a successful London tourism campaign had been led by Visit Kent to promote the County as a day trip destination and that Culture was a key component of this.

(3) In response to a question regarding the legacy of the Olympics and Cultural Olympiad Mr Hespe advised that there were discussions taking place with a wide range of agencies regarding this, because achieving lasting benefit for the county was a key priority.

(4) Members of the Committee queried the constant use of "young" throughout the report and suggested that the older generation would also have a contribution to make to the Olympiad. Mr Hespe advised that there was an emphasis on youth values within the guidelines for the Olympiad, but agreed that it would be important that Kent's offer was relevant for all ages

(5) A Member recommended that the “re-enactment of Maidstone” could be a means of promotion and Ms Holt confirmed that English Heritage was a represented on the Kent 2012 Arts Sectoral Task Group, which was leading on the Cultural Olympiad offer from Kent.

(6) A Member suggested that, in the context of achieving lasting benefit, it would be important to encourage and incorporate a wide range of diverse events within the Cultural Olympiad to show the rich mix of culture within Kent. In response to a further suggestion that the events leading up to and during the 2012 Olympics should be recorded as part of Kent’s Heritage, Ms Holt advised that Screen South was one of the groups which fed into the Kent 2012 Campaign and that the London 2012 Games would be the first that is fully digitally recorded.

(7) RESOLVED that:-

- a) the scale and range of opportunity arising from the Cultural Olympiad be noted;
- (b) the need for a flexible and proactive approach towards maximising the potential of the Cultural Olympiad for communities and creative sectors within Kent, be noted; and
- (c) the Members’ questions and responses be noted.

68. Cold-Calling Trial Zones

(Item B4 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services, Ms A Honey, Managing Director) (Mr I Treacher, Assistant Head of Trading Standards was present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report which gave the background to the experimental establishment of a Controlled Cold Calling Zone in Cranbrook, drew conclusions, and identified the next steps.

(2) Mr Treacher outlined how the Controlled Cold Calling Zones operated and in response to a question confirmed that Age Concern was involved and included the use of the alert messenger.

(3) In response to a number of questions concerning working with other agencies, Mr Treacher outlined good working relationships with Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators and Community Wardens.

(4) He also confirmed, that Trading Standards were careful not to alarm the elderly or vulnerable with messages relating to cold calling and that the service had been using intelligence links with the Kent Police and Community Wardens to target their work.

(5) In response to a question regarding priority for vulnerable people being supplied with door chains, Mr Treacher advised that his team worked closely with the Handy Van and Home Safe service through Mr Stuart Beaumont, Head of Community Safety.

(6) Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation for the work undertaken by the Community Wardens who played an important role in identifying

and speaking to the elderly and vulnerable in their local community. Mr Treacher agreed that they provided a key link by acting as the “eyes and ears” of the community and thus providing an important source of intelligence.

(7) RESOLVED that the report and the Members question and the responses be noted

69. Strategy for Supporting Parents in Kent

(Item B5 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Communities and Ms A Honey, Managing Director) (Ms J Doherty, Policy Manager and Ms M White, Head of Extended Services (CFE) were present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report which summarised the content and progress of the draft Strategy for Supporting Parents in Kent, with particular reference to the services in the Communities Directorate.

(2) The draft Strategy was subject to a formal consultation through the Kent Children’s Trust Partnership until 25 April 2008. The Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee had also been given the opportunity to consider the draft strategy.

(3) Following a presentation from Ms White, members of the Committee were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions which included the following:-

- In response to a question regarding absenteeism from school and the need for robust monitoring systems, Ms Slaven advised that monitoring systems were in place and that there were established processes for helping to children and young people to return to school.
- In response to concerns regarding school exclusion which were illustrated by a member’s experience of a particular case, Ms White advised that the Parenting Support Strategy was designed to integrate with and influence other key plans and processes. For example, where children experience bullying, a help line is being piloted to offer parents support and advice.
- A comment was made that the full strategy document uses the phrase ‘fathers and mothers’ rather than ‘parents’ to reinforce the importance of fathers. Ms White acknowledged that the summary report had only used the word ‘parents’ and apologised for this.
- She also confirmed there would be a commitment to consultation with hard to reach groups and that the 1211 doorstep surveys carried out by BMG to inform the strategy had included wards of high deprivation. This had been complemented by 9 focus groups, 2 of which were fathers. She noted that there would also be engagement with Children’s Centres, voluntary groups, Home Start and YMCAs.
- The issue of children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan (“on the risk register”) because of parental alcohol or substance misuse was raised. It was suggested that a greater focus be given to these families and Ms Slaven highlighted projects already in train such as ‘Hidden Harm’, and the Sunlight Project working with primary schools in the Thanet area.

- A member suggested that numeracy and literacy were of particular importance for vulnerable groups.
- Concern was raised about trying to bring together the needs of all parents and vulnerable families in one strategy. It was suggested that this might not achieve a useful balance. It was further suggested that the importance of wider communities for children's development should be reflected in the document. Ms White said she understood that DCSF requires a single strategy, but the strategy in Kent would look at the particular needs of vulnerable parents, including those for whom, the misuse of alcohol and drugs was a factor.
- The emphasis on fathers' roles in children's development was welcomed.

(4) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The development of the Parenting Support Strategy be noted;
- (b) The comments and responses to questions by Members of the Committee be noted.

70. Communities Risk Register 2008/09

(Item B6 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Communities and Ms A Honey, Managing Director. Ms J Edwards presented this item)

(1) The Committee considered a report which identified the strategic risks that were managed and controlled within the Communities Directorate.

(2) In response to a question on why it was felt there was a higher risk in relation to dependence on external funding than on fee income, Ms Edwards advised the Committee that the Directorate services depended significantly on both, but that there was more control over securing the latter.

(3) RESOLVED that the Communities Directorate Risk Register for 2008/09 be noted.

71. Select Committees - update

(Item C1 – Report by Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) The Committee received a report outlining the progress of the Select Committee on alcohol misuse and the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme.

(2) In answer to a question, Members were advised that an application for a six month placement from the Graduate Development Programme, for the period April - September 2008, to support the work of Select Committees, had been unsuccessful; and that further application would probably be made for a placement from September – March 2009. Members raised their concerns that the role of Select Committees had proved to be extremely successful but the programme was limited by the resources available.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- a) the progress on the Select Committee on Alcohol Abuse be noted;
- b) the update on the Select Committee Topic Review Programme be noted;
- c) the update from the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee be noted and that the Chairman express the cross-party support of this Committee for the work of the Select Committees and the need for those Committees to be resourced effectively .