

CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Customer and Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 8 July 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs E M Tweed (Chairman), Mr R B Burgess, Mr A R Chell, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr H J Craske, Mrs E Green, Ms A Hohler, Mrs J P Law, Mr J M Ozog, Mr C P Smith (Substitute for Mr A T Willicombe), Mr R Tolputt
Mrs C J Waters

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms L A Bett, Mrs M Blanche (Policy Manager), Mr S Carter (Extended Services Lead Manager), Mr D Crilley (Director of Customer Services), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms C Herbert (Arts and Regeneration Officer, West Kent), Ms A Honey (Corporate Director, Customer and Communities), Ms C McKenzie (Sustainability and Climate Change Manager), Mr M Scrivener (Business Information Manager), Ms S Staples (Head of Kent Arts Development Unit) Mr K Tilson (Head of Finance for Policy and Resources)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

3. Minutes - 5 & 6 April 2011

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 5 and 6 April 2011 are correctly recorded and that they be signed as a correct record.

4. Portfolio Holder and Corporate Director's update

(Item B1)

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

Libraries Update

(2) Mr Hill referred to the ongoing review of Library provision which was taking note of significant developments across the County. Progress with this was dependant upon the Localism Bill which included the right to transfer assets to communities and would give them the right to buy. There would be a report on this to the next meeting of the Committee.

(3) Mr Chittenden asked for confirmation that there was not a draft strategy on the Libraries Service. Mr Hill confirmed that there was no formal plan, they were looking

at provision across the county and awaiting the passing of the Localism Act, before producing a strategy.

(4) Mr Hill reported that Gravesend Library was due to open on 4 October 2011 and good progress was being made. Ashford Library would be opening on 18 July 2011 and he was pleased with what had been achieved there. He encouraged Members to visit the Library. The formal opening would take place in October 2011.

(5) Mr Hill stated that he was pleased with the progress with the implementation of the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) system which was halfway through its roll out. The response from the public, including the elderly, had been good and positive comments had been received about the improvement in speed of service.

(6) Mr Hill informed the Committee that work on the Kent History and Archive Centre was ahead of schedule and the building was due to be handed over by Christmas and would open in Spring 2012.

(7) In response to a question on whether RFID had led to an increase in books being stolen, Ms Honey confirmed that she was not aware of any increase but it was something that would be monitored.

Registration of births and deaths.

(8) Ms Honey reported on the possibility of Kent taking over Bexley Councils registration service, this was awaiting approval from the General Registration Office. Ms Honey confirmed that the intention was for Bexley to come under Kent for registration purposes and that Bexley Council would be making a contribution towards the cost of the service. She also highlighted the issue that had arisen with the closure of Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup leading to an increase in births at Darent Valley Hospital. An agreement had been reached with Bexley Council to manage the increase in registration of births.

(9) Ms Honey referred to the pilot work being carried out for Libraries to take on responsibility for the registration of births. The pilot had shown that this was a sensible way forward.

Vulnerable Learners

(10) Ms Honey mentioned the recent vulnerable learners project, involving 80 vulnerable learners who were traditionally difficult to place in employment and training. A full review of this project was currently being carried out.

Restorative Justice

(11) Ms Honey explained that the pilot had now been rolled out across the Kent. As part of phase 1 the Police had trained 1,600 officers to carry out restorative justice. Over 1,200 crimes and 350 incidents had been dealt with via this method. She referred to the EU Restorative Justice Conference at Canterbury Christ Church University on 13 July 2011 and undertook to inform Mrs Law whether District Council Cabinet Members had been invited to this non KCC event.

(12) Mr Hill reported that the first meeting of this Ambition Board (putting citizens in control) had taken place. The County Council were represented by Ms Honey, Mr Sweetland and himself. It was early days for the Board but Mr Hill offered to bring a report on Ambition Boards, which were the link between the Kent Forum and Locality Boards, to a future meeting of the Committee when more information was available.

Annual VCS conference

(13) Ms Honey referred to the Annual Voluntary and Community Sector Conference which had been held on 7 July 2011 in East Kent. The consultation on the Kent Partners Compact had been launched at the Conference. The Compact was crucial for the voluntary sector and their relationship with statutory partners including District Councils. She offered to supply information to any Member on request.

Turner Opening Previews and Actual 13th – 16th April 2011

(14) Mr Hill reported that since its opening in April the Turner Contemporary had received 148,000 visitors. Its annual target of visits was 150,000. The feedback had been very good and there had been a positive effect on the old town. He emphasised the importance of sustaining this success.

Paralympics Announcement – 20th May 2011

(14) Mr Hill informed the Committee that Kent would be the venue for the Paralympic Road Cycling in 2012.

Visit by John Hayes to Sittingbourne Skills and Centre – 24th May 2011

(15) Mr Hill reported that the Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (John Hayes MP) had visited the Sittingbourne Skills Centre. He had expressed a particular interest in the work being carried out with Vulnerable Learners and had asked for a briefing note.

Meeting with Kent MPs -8th June 2011

(16) Mr Hill stated that the meeting with Kent MP's had been constructive and provided an opportunity to discuss options for the future on issues such as libraries.

(17) RESOLVED that the update be noted

5. Current developments in Community Learning and Skills (CLS) including changes to reduced fees for older learners in adult education

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Forward presented a report which provided an overview of the challenges faced by Community Learning & Skills, including information on the way in which the unit was responding to National developments in post -16 education and changes to concessionary fees for those over 60 in adult education classes.

(2) Mr Forward answered questions from Members and noted comments which included the following:-

- It was confirmed that the Skills Funding Agency's key role was funding.
- Mr Forward explained that the concession regime for older people applied to a wide range of subject areas.
- It was confirmed that lip reading courses would continue to be provided free of charge and that a partnership had been formed with Hi Kent.
- Regarding online enrolment, Mr Forward explained that it was a much more cost effective way of dealing with course applications. Colleagues in libraries' were able to offer free advice to the public about registering for adult education courses on line. Officers were aware that there were a small group of older learners who were likely to be resistant to using IT, and therefore they would continue to offer alternative ways to register for courses.
- Mr Forward confirmed that all members of the focus groups were over 60 years old.
- Mr Forward stated that he believed that the 36 day consultation period was adequate and that he was happy with this arrangement.
- Mr Forward explained that one of the reasons why consideration was given to setting up membership schemes was the reluctance of older people to claim income related concessions.
- Mr Forward undertook to supply Mrs Green with details of the consultation carried out in Thanet and also which benefits gave access to concessions and to supply Mr Chittenden with the details of the consultation carried out across Kent.
- A view was expressed that the prioritisation of courses designed to improve people's work-skills was the right thing to do.
- The potential for people to share skills, which was a recommendation of the Select Committee on Extended Services, was mentioned.
- Regarding access to further education loans, Mr Forward explained that there was a working group considering how this might operate. This would impact on some vocational course but there was no detailed information available yet.
- It was confirmed that there was currently no discount for booking online, however this would be introduced in the near future.

(3) RESOLVED that the Committee's comments on the response of Community Learning & Skills to national changes to Learning & Skills funding and policy and the changes to concessions for older learners, the mitigations and potential benefits of the membership scheme be noted.

6. KCC Apprenticeships (Item B3)

(1) Ms Bett updated the Committee on the latest position regarding the employment of Apprentices following the completion of their Apprenticeship within KCC.

(2) Ms Bett answered questions from Members and noted comments which included the following:-

- The detailed report made it clear that a KCC apprenticeship was a good career opportunity.

- Ms Bett confirmed that there was a small drop out rate but that 76% of KCC apprentices had completed their apprenticeship, of the rest some had moved on to Further Education and others had left for personal reasons.
- Ms Bett explained that the scheme did not duplicate the work of Connexions, as Connexions worked with those not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs). The apprentice scheme aimed to enhance, not duplicate, the work of Connexions who often refer young people in to the Apprenticeship scheme
- A Member pointed out that poor transport links in certain areas of the county should not be a barrier to young people being able to access apprenticeships. Ms Bett mentioned that she was part of a working group looking at assistance with travel young people of 16 – 19.
- Ms Bett confirmed that more than 133 KCC apprentices had obtained permanent employment. She also explained that some young people after completing NVQ level 2 went on to take level 3.

(3) RESOLVED that the latest position regarding the employment of Apprentices following the completion of their Apprenticeship within Kent County Council be noted.

7. Locality Boards

(Item B4)

(1) Ms Blanche presented a report which informed the Committee of the early development of the Programme to deliver the vision for bespoke Locality Boards in Kent. The report also looked at the steps Kent County Council need to take in order to operate effectively as partners in the Locality Boards.

(2) Mr Hill and Ms Blanche answered questions and noted comments from Members which included the following:-

- In response to a questions on whether District Council were going to be asked to contribute to the funding of Locality Boards, Ms Blanche confirmed that in due course they would be looking at funding. In Swale and Gravesham the District Council had provided all the secretarial support and KCC had provided support at senior manager level.
- Ms Blanche explained that no pressure was being put on District Councils to establish a Locality Board for their area, it was important to move at an appropriate pace for the District.
- In relation to a question on the progress with establishing a Locality Board in Thanet, Ms Blanche reported that discussions were being held with the Leader of Thanet District Council.
- Mr Hill stated that it was still early days for Locality Boards, they provided a real opportunity for District and County Members to work together. There was not a one size fits all. The aim was to have all Locality Boards up and running by the end of 2012.
- There were positive comments about the potential for Locality Boards to bring together Members from District and County for the benefit of the area.

- The importance of Locality Boards being effective and not just discussion bodies was emphasised.
- It would be interesting to have a progress report on the Locality Boards that have met e.g. Swale and Gravesham, and to know who attended, what was on the agenda and outcomes and timescale.
- Mr Hill explained that the core Members of the Locality Boards were District and County Members. He gave the example of Ashford which had decided to have a core board and then a functional board under that consisting of Officers.
- There had been a meeting with the Leader of Shepway Council with another meeting scheduled, things were moving in the right direction, in that District.
- Concern was expressed about what would happen with certain things in the interval between the Local Strategic Partnerships being disbanded a Locality Board established.

(3) RESOLVED That Members comments on the substance of this report and the development of a Members briefing to demonstrate the emerging Locality Board function be noted.

8. Cultural Baton and Cultural Spend in Kent

(Item B5)

(1) Ms Staples and Ms Herbert presented a report which gave an overview of the Kent Cultural Baton and plans for the new phase to be launched in spring 2011.

(2) Ms Staples and Ms Herbert answered questions and noted comments from Members which included the following:

- Ms Herbert confirmed that the Cultural Baton was due to visit Dover and Folkestone. Information on the location of the Cultural Baton was circulated to Members via the weekly Members Information Bulletin.
- Further information was requested on the outcomes from young people not in education, employment or training referred to in the report.
- Officers stated that the Cultural Baton was very popular and that there was a waiting list of organisations/areas that wished to host it.
- Regarding engaging with young people, the Youth Arts Manager had a line management relationship with the Youth Service which helped to identify opportunities.
- In relation to the cost of the Cultural Baton, Ms Staples explained that it had been purchased for £30,000 and was a rare 1950s Airstream caravan, which had been adapted for use as the Baton, it has a drop down side so that it can open and be a performance space or be a closed work space. It has a re-sale value and post 2012 consideration will be given as to whether to continue to use it to or to re-sell it to offset the original cost.
- Ms Staples confirmed that the Cultural Baton received a lot of local press coverage, as the Baton was hosted in areas there was also a lot of word of mouth publicity for it prior to its arrival.

(3) Ms Staples gave an update on the financial performance of the Arts Development Unit for 2010/11. Ms Staples answered questions and noted comments from Members which included the following:

- Ms Staples explained that the unit worked to attract funding from the Arts Council and advised on and supported a range of bids from £5,000 to £90,000.
- Members noted the good job done by the unit to attract national funding in a challenging climate and that they had been successful on behalf of Kent compared to other areas.
- In response to a question on the range of arts covered by the unit, Ms Staples stated that although visual arts had been identified as a particular strength, there also worked on other areas such as outdoor arts. As Kent was not a County with one built venue to serve every resident it was important to ensure that there were events that residents across the County can attend. Theatre was also a very significant element, and she referred to the new Marlowe theatre opening in Canterbury in October. She was confident that arts provision in Kent was reaching all age groups.
- The important work that the unit carried out with District Councils on integrated projects was mentioned.

(4) RESOLVED that the success of the Kent Cultural Baton, and its continuing contribution to maximising opportunities around London 2012 Games and the financial performance of the Kent Arts Development Unit be noted.

9. Communities Services Portfolio Financial Outturn 2010/11

(Item B6)

(1) Mr Tilson introduced a report which summarised the 2010/11 financial outturn for each of the service units within the Communities Services Portfolio. Previously outturn reports to POSCs had included performance outcome information but this was now covered in the separate Core Monitoring report

(2) Mr Crilley undertook to provide Mrs Green with information on the modernisation of Broadstairs Library including the partnership work with Community Learning and Skills regarding a shared facility and the consultations with staff and users.

(3) Mr Tilson confirmed that if some areas of the Directorate exceeded their savings target this did not mean that other areas did not have to achieved their savings targets. It was his responsibility at the end of the year to have a balanced budget across the Directorate, but every part of the Directorate were required to find efficiencies and it was recognised that some area had more scope for delivering savings than others.

(4) It was noted that the first meeting of the POSC budget IMG would be held on 26 July 2011 and that there was one vacancy on the Group.

(5) RESOLVED that the revenue and capital financial outturn for 2010/11, including rollover of funding for committed projects and changes to capital programme and the potential impact of variations since the 2011/12 budget was approved be noted.

10. Savings Monitoring Report

(Item B7)

- (1) Mr Tilson introduced a report which set out the process to ensure the delivery of the 2011/12 budget savings allocated to the services overseen by this POSC and illustrated this with a PowerPoint presentation.
- (2) RESOLVED that progress against the delivery of the savings covered by the Committee be noted.

11. Core Monitoring

(Item B8)

- (1) Mr Scrivener introduced a report which informed the Committee about key areas of performance and activity across KCC, with a particular focus on indicators within the Customer & Communities Directorate. The report included headlines from 2010-11 performance outturn monitoring.
- (2) A Member commended the “tell us once” service which been very helpful during a recent bereavement.
- (3) Reference was made to the success of the Community Wardens, and Mr Hill stated that he would do his best to protect this service for as long as he could.
- (4) Ms McKenzie presented a report which summarised the progress towards delivery of the KCC corporate commitments under the Kent Environment Strategy, emerging issues and gaps in delivery.
- (5) In response to a question from a Member, it was agreed that information be provided to Members of the Committee on the use of front facing services to inform the public how they could save money through energy efficiencies.
- (6) Ms McKenzie confirmed that Canterbury City Council was one of the few Districts that had produced a Green Audit.
- (7) Regarding the figures for energy use in Schools, Ms McKenzie pointed out that the data included a severe winter period.
- (8) RESOLVED that the overall progress made by KCC and the Customer and Communities Directorate, especially the reaccreditation to ISO14001 be noted and celebrated and that the priorities and recommended approach outlined in Section 3 and 4 be approved.

12. Single Performance Framework

(Item B9)

- (1) Mr Fitzgerald introduced a report which reminded the Committee that KCC was currently developing the performance framework for delivering ‘Bold Steps for

Kent' which would go to County Council for approval on 21 July 2011. The report set out the steps being taken to finalise the performance framework.

(2) RESOLVED That the draft milestones and measures of success and the next steps as set out in section 3, above be noted.

13. Select Committee - update

(Item C1)

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

(2) RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference of the Select Committee on the Student Journey be endorse and that Members advise the Democratic Services officer of any items that they would like to suggest for inclusion in the Select Committee topic review programme.

14. Extended Services Select Committee - Action Plan

(Item C2)

(1) Mr Carter introduced a report which provided Members with a proposed action plan for the recommendations of the Extended Services Select Committee which had been produced in the context of the current resource environment. It was noted that the Select Committee would be reconvened later in the year, or early 2012, to receive a report on progress with the recommendations.

(2) Mr Burgess, the Chairman of the Select Committee, made some comments about the proposed actions. In relation to recommendation 3 relating to the Kent Children's Trust, and the proposal that no further action be taken, he stated that it was important to continue to try to persuade groups of schools to form consortiums to provide extended services. He referred to the potential to use the pupil premium for extended services. Mr Burgess acknowledged that recommendation 14 was aspirational and that no funding was available. He encouraged Members to use some of their Members grant for projects which would raise the profile of extended services.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and the accompanying action plan, in response to the Extended Services Select Committee, be noted.