

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, 18 November 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, Mrs E Green, Ms A Hohler, Mrs J P Law, Mr J M Ozog, Mr R Tolputt, Mrs C J Waters and Mr A T Willicombe

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE and Mr K Smith

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms C Anley (Head of Libraries and Archives), Ms L A Bett, Mr W Gough (Interim County Manager (Supporting Independence Programme)), Ms A Honey (Corporate Director, Customer and Communities), Mrs Kendal (County Delivery Manager - Gateway), Ms A Slaven (Director of Service Improvement), Mr K Tilson (Finance Business Partner - Customer & Communities), Ms S Woodward (Margate Task Force Programme Manager) and Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

28. Minutes - 15 September 2011

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2011 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

29. Portfolio Holder and Corporate Directors update

(Item B1)

(1) In the absence of Mr Hill, who was unwell, Ms Honey updated Members on the issues listed in the paper circulated with the agenda and answered questions from Members.

Matt Burrows, the new Director of Communications & Engagement

(2) Ms Honey informed the Committee that Mr Burrows, who was currently Head of Communications at Croydon Council, would be taking up the post of Director of Communications and Engagement on 1 December 2011.

Update about the restructures taking place in Customer Services and Service Improvement Divisions

(3) Ms Honey stated that consultations had recently started to reshape the Customer Services and Service Improvement Divisions. All Members had been informed. Staff would be informed next week about how this was going to be taken

forward. The intention was to have the Head of Service appointed by Christmas and the new structure in place early next year.

Localism – update

(4) Ms Honey drew attention to the Localism Act 2011 which had received royal assent on 14 November 2011. This was the biggest transfer of power to local government in a generation.

(5) In relation to Locality Boards, Ms Honey informed Members that there had been meetings of Locality Boards in five District/Borough areas. It was intended that by April 2012 a further two Locality Boards would have met. Work was continuing with Districts/Boroughs around the shape of their Locality Board arrangements as there was not a one size fits all. It was intended to create a sharepoint arrangement for Members and Directors to share information on Locality Boards.

Launch of South East Dance : 27 September 2011

(6) Ms Honey stated that the directorate were working with Hextable School regarding their amazing dance facilities.

Regeneration and Renewal Awards Ceremony : 29 September 2011

(7) Regarding the Regeneration and Renewal Awards Ceremony, Ms Honey stated that she had attended the award ceremony with Mr Hill and Mr Carter. The Turner Contemporary had received an award for the best use of Arts and Culture in regeneration.

Gravesend Library Reopening : 4 October 2011

(8) Ms Honey reported the official reopening of Gravesend Library.

Marlowe Theatre Opening : 4 October 2011

(9) Ms Honey referred to the opening of the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury and commended the achievement by Canterbury City Council.

Ashford Gateway Launch - 7 October 2011

(10) Ms Honey mentioned the successful launch of the Ashford Gateway, which was becoming a great community facility.

Joint visit with Chief Constable to Rotterdam

(11) Ms Honey reported on the visit to Rotterdam that Mr Hill had made with the Chief Constable, it had been a successful visit and they had seen some interesting technology which it may be possible to use in Gateways.

Cyclopark.- Gravesend

(12) Mr Sandhu reported that he had attended the BMX southern region league event held at the Cyclopark. This had been a very successful event attended by 1600 participants and their families. This had been used as an opportunity to test the

facility for this type of event and complaints from residents about noise etc were acted upon promptly. He also reported the receipt of a cheque for £10,000 from the National Lottery and Sport England for equipment.

(13) RESOLVED that the update and the comments made by Members be noted and a visit be arranged to one of the new libraries (Gravesend or Ashford), if Members visit Gravesend Library arrangements be made for them to also visit the cyclopark.

30. Customer Services Strategy

(Item B2)

(1) Ms Kendal gave a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the draft Customer Services Strategy. The Strategy was presented to the Committee as part of the consultation process ahead of formal Member approval. This Strategy is a critical element of the Council's strategy map that will underpin the transition from organisation-centric to citizen-centric public services, and crucial for delivery of the Bold Steps ambitions.

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

- The importance of improving feedback to residents who have reported a problem was mentioned. Ms Kendal emphasised the need to have a reporting/feedback system across the Council, and acknowledged that there was work to do to align current systems. This was an aspiration within the strategy. It was suggested that a system where residents could be informed of the receipt and progress with their issue via email would be helpful.
- There are issues relating to some third party websites, where members of the public may use these in the belief that the issue has either been received by or will be passed to the County Council in a timely manner. Ms Kendal noted that often this is not the case. There is a need to make the Kent.gov website clearer to the public, particularly where residents would like to express a compliment, report a problem or make a complaint.
- The importance of the County Council bringing customer care in line with private sector organisations and learning from them was emphasised.
- It was important to get the message out to the public about the good services that the County Council provides so that a feel good factor about the County Council can be generated.
- The role of Members being a critical interface with residents. Providing feedback on the satisfaction and experience of residents in Kent, and the importance of this communication channel.
- Members commended the excellent "Tell Us Once" service. It was suggested that consideration should be given to linking this service with a method to stop junk mail to a deceased person. Ms Kendal reminded Members that this was a new, national system. It is hoped that it will develop further to accommodate out of Kent enquires.
- The importance of using plain English free of jargon when communicating with the public was emphasised.
- In relation to the skills and knowledge of staff dealing with the public, Ms Kendal explained that the Gateway programme had a consolidated knowledge database available to staff and partner agencies working across the Gateway

network. This is a web based system. The knowledge and skills were not limited to staff in Gateway, but also for Contact Centre, Library and Children Centres and other council staff.

(3) RESOLVED that the Committee's comments on the Customer Service Strategy be noted

31. Delivering Sustainable Libraries

(Item B3)

(1) Ms Honey and Ms Anley introduced a report which outlined the approach being developed to deliver sustainable library services for the future.

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

- The Chairman confirmed that there had not been a previous libraries paper discussed by the Conservative Group.
- Members were assured that the Locality Boards would have the capacity and necessary support to deal effectively with the key issues of Libraries and the Youth Services that were being put before them.
- Members suggested that in order for effective consideration to be given to the provision of library services at a local level the following information would need to be supplied to Locality Boards or other local Members that would be considering this issue:-
 - Information on the condition of library buildings in the area.
 - Available support from the County Council to volunteers who wished to run a library.
 - If there were any libraries that it was intended to retain, it should be made clear to the Locality Boards etc, so that they did not spend time discussing them.
 - How to manage and balance the financial situation across the District/Borough to get an effective outcome.
- Ms Anley confirmed that there would be a comprehensive information pack for the Locality Boards, and other local meetings which would include detailed information on all libraries in their area. The Equality Impact Assessment, attached to the report gave an indication of some of the demographic information that would be provided. Information would also be provided on the County Council's statutory duty in relation to library provision. The information packs would be available by the end of December 2011.
- It was confirmed that no savings were contained within the 2012/13 of Medium Term Financial Plan but that libraries were delivering other savings in relation to Radio Frequency Identification, management and other efficiencies.
- Ms Anley emphasised that the use of volunteers was only one of a range of models, which could work in specific types of communities. She gave the example of Sandgate Library which shared premises and staff cost with the Parish Council.
- A Member asked what would happen if the local people did not want a library to close but no one came forward with a plan to keep it open. Ms Anley confirmed that local need and demand would be taken into consideration.

- A Member emphasised the importance of Local Members factoring in future growth when considering library provision for their area.
- In response to a question on mitigating the risk of judicial reviews, Ms Anley stated that the public was not a cohesive body and it only took one individual to raise a judicial review, therefore it was essential that the process for reaching decisions on libraries was defensible.
- Ms Anley confirmed that the lack of a self service system, did not make it more likely that a library would close, she explained that the selection of libraries for self service was based on financial grounds, i.e. savings on staff costs verses the cost of introducing self service.
- The feasibility of looking to the Big Society to take over some of the County Councils services was questioned.
- As some areas did not have Locality Boards, and of those that did have Locality Boards some of their Membership was not as wide as other areas, the issue of question of equality of consideration for each of the areas was raised, It was suggested that steps should be taken to ensure that there is a consistence in the organisations involved in each area. Ms Anley explained that where currently there was not a Locality Board, the Local County Councillors would be consulted on who else should be involved in the discussions in their District. Other solutions to library provision would enable joined up services and savings. It was important to talk to a wide range of people such as schools, the health service, shops in order to explore different options.
- The Chairman referred to the model at Cranbourne in Cambridgeshire, which she had visited with Ms Anley, where the library was within the medical centre which worked really well.
- Regarding the supply of books to a small library, Ms Anley stated that books held locally were only a small part of the stock of the whole county which can be accessed from every library through the County reservation service, were books could be reserved on line to be delivered to any library in the County. The Town Centre Libraries were the ones where the majority of issues were made and were most heavily used. In the small community libraries acted as a hub and the stock could be refreshed by circulating it.
- A Member referred to the way forward with putting libraries in Gateways.
- Ms Anley confirmed that over the past 9 years, 7 libraries had been closed, including the merger of Springfield and St Faiths in Maidstone, the others were very small community libraries, which now had a mobile library service.
- Mr Ozog requested an update on the footfall figures for libraries.
- Ms Anley referred to the growth in e-book usage but stated that it was still a very small percentage of total issues and there is and will remain for the foreseeable future, a place for hard copy books, the library service were offering people a choice.

(3) RESOLVED that the proposed approach be noted.

32. Kent Big Society Fund

(Item B4)

(1) Ms Honey gave a verbal update on the current situation regarding the Kent Big Society Fund. She stated that there would be a written report to the January meeting

of the Committee when by which time there would be a firm proposal. She stated that good progress was being made and expressed her gratitude to her colleagues in Business Strategy for the work that they had carried out. She referred to the work with the Kent Community Foundation, a professional provider, who would operate the fund on behalf of the County Council. The priority areas for the Big Society Fund were about growing social enterprises across Kent, developing new social ventures and supporting existing social enterprises in Kent with a focus on jobs and growing the economy, especially relating to youth unemployment.

(2) Ms Honey explained that it was intended that this fund would be recyclable, in order to maximise its value, also consideration would be given to other organisations and funds to leaver in other resources. There had been a lot of discussion about the level of the loan and work was still being carried out on this. It was hoped to have a soft launch in December 2011 and a full launch in January 2012.

(3) Ms Honey confirmed that the intention was to give unsecured loans to social enterprises who were not able to get funding from any other source. The Kent Community Foundation would carry out the due diligence checks.

(4) Ms Honey stated that proposals from organisations who wanted to take on council services, for example youth centres and libraries, would be considered for a loan from this fund.

(5) RESOLVED that the update be noted and a full report be submitted to the January meeting of the Committee.

33. Budget 2012/13 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13 to 2013/14 *(Item B6)*

(1) Mr Tilson introduced a report which identified the latest forecasts for next year's budget and the financial plans for the following years. This included an analysis of the overall financial outlook for the whole council, appraisal of the existing plans for 2012/13, an update on the budget pressures facing the Customer & Communities portfolio and recommendations from the Informal Member Group on areas for budget savings, the latter being presented by the Chairman.

(2) The Chairman referred to the meetings of the IMG on the Budget. Due to low attendance it had been difficult to make recommendations. However what did emerge was that Mr Hill and Ms Honey had already made substantial saving over the previous few years and therefore it came down to Members thinking about which areas they wished to prioritise. The Chairman invited Members to submit their suggestions for priorities for savings in light of the overall financial outlook for the next three years to Mr Hill or Ms Honey as soon as possible.

(3) It was requested that a copy of the statutory functions for the Directorate be circulated to Members of the Committee. Mr Tilson pointed out that a number of services such as Community Wardens had a mixture of statutory and discretionary services so a simple split is not easy. Mr Tilson commented that discretionary services included the Wardens, Arts and Sports and therefore we are back to the well rehearsed arguments of these valued services being under the microscope once

more. Even removing these three services in its entirety would save only £5m against the authority's target of £110k over the two years 2013-15.

(4) It was suggested that once Locality Boards were established across the County there would be an opportunity for them to have a place based view of services.

(5) Ms Honey explained that there was a need to look at all services and assess how best to provide them within available resources.

(6) RESOLVED that the comments made on the pressures outlined for the Corporate Services portfolios and the update from the IMG on the Budget be noted.

(POST MEETING NOTE - In relation to paragraph (2) the Chairman emailed all Members of the Committee. No suggestions were received for savings in light of the overall financial outlook for the next three years.)

34. Customer and Communities POSC - IMG on the Budget - verbal report (Item B7)

It was noted that the update from the IMG on the Budget had been given as part of the consideration of the previous item.

35. Apprenticeship Strategy - update (Item B8)

(1) Mr Gough referred Members to the paper which outlined the progress made with the Apprenticeship Strategy, a copy of the Strategy was circulated with the papers for the meeting and comments were invited.

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

- The major concerns for small businesses in taking on apprentices were the paperwork involved and the financial cost. Mr Gough stated that consideration was being given to providing grants to assist small businesses with taking on a apprentice,
- A Member suggested that an apprenticeship could be shared by more than one small business to give a wider range of experience. Mr Gough explained that young people were encouraged to put together packages themselves with a number of employers to make up a full time apprenticeship.
- Mr Gough stated that regarding apprenticeships with national companies, the work at that level was left to the national apprenticeship service, the County Council concentrated its efforts on Kent businesses.
- It was suggested that there should be a commitment by employers to take on young people after they had completed their apprenticeship.
- Greater use should be made of Members contacts in their areas to promote apprenticeships and the support available from the County Council.
- Officers agreed to inform Members of the outcome of the Interreg European Funding Bid.

(3) RESOLVED That the Apprenticeship Strategy and comments made by Members be noted.

36. Vulnerable Learner Apprenticeship Project Update

(Item B9)

(1) Ms Bett introduced a report which provided an overview of progress in the Vulnerable Learner Apprenticeship Project, which commenced in 2010. Ms Honey explained that, following the success of this project, it was intended to explore securing additional funding for a smaller scale project next year.

(2) Mr Gough expressed his thanks to his team for their work in creating 1200 jobs for young people.

(3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

37. Update on progress with combining the Consultation, Communication and Engagement functions - verbal update

(Item B10)

RESOLVED that this item be deferred to the January meeting of the Committee.

38. Community Budgets

(Item B11)

RESOLVED that this item be deferred to the January meeting of the Committee.

39. Financial Monitoring 2011/12

(Item B12)

(1) Mr Tilson presented a report which identified the latest forecasts for this year's budget and explained the current position that the directorate was reporting.

(2) RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the directorate for 2011/12 based on the latest monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

40. Select Committee - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received an update report on the progress of the Select Committee on the Student Journey. Mr Kit Smith, Chairman of the Select Committee on the Student Journey presented an update on the Committees proposed areas of recommendation.

(2) The Chairman informed Members that the Scrutiny Boards on 2 November 2011 had agreed to establish a Select Committee on Domestic Abuse.

(3) RESOLVED that the draft areas for recommendation proposed by the Select Committee on the Student Journey, and the establishment of a Select Committee on Domestic Abuse be noted.

41. Margate Task Force progress report (Item B5)

(1) Ms Woodward presented a report on Margate Task Forces' progress. She explained that policy and strategy work on Margate Task Force started in July 2009 as one of three key themes in Kent's Total Place submission. The resultant scoping exercise highlighted the disproportionate public services demands and expenditure (£110 million per annum) in Kent's two most deprived wards – Margate Central and Cliftonville West. An implementation model, primarily based on a 'Task Force' multi-agency team, was launched in September 2010. The report reviewed progress to date, challenges to delivery and priorities moving forward.

(2) Ms Woodward, Ms Honey and Ms Slaven answered questions and noted comments from Members which included the following:-

- In relation to the neglect of rented accommodation and the anti-social behaviour of tenants, Ms Woodward explained that if the landlord was a registered social landlord then they were responsible for the management of their tenants. If they were private landlords the District Council would have the authority to issue enforcement notices in relation to for example litter on private land.
- Concern was expressed about the relaxation of requirements/standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's).
- The number of Looked after Children placed in this part of Kent from out of the County was still an issue. Member expressed their strong support for the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services in lobbying Central Government on this matter.
- In relation to the placement of adult offenders back into the community, Ms Woodward confirmed that there was a close working relationship with colleagues in the probation service and that work was being carried out to look at the fifty high risk offenders to see what key interventions they received.
- Regarding Community Budgets and how many families had been identified in the Margate Taskforce area to be part of the scheme, Ms Slaven explained that there was a report giving further information on the scheme later in the meeting. However, the two Margate Task force wards were not identified as a distinct area within the Community Budget programme as the agenda for this focussed on other residential areas in Thanet. The focus is around intergenerational worklessness and the population in these wards tended to be transitional and no significant numbers of families were identifiable. This area was not excluded from this agenda as Ms Woodward was involved with the Community Budget programme.
- Officers undertook to circulate a copy of the brochure on "Live Margate" to Members
- Ms Honey confirmed that it was not the intention to build luxury housing but to ensure that there was a better mix of provision by bringing derelict buildings back into use as family housing. These would initially be for rent but as time went on they could be sold and the funding recycled.
- Ms Slaven stated that displacement was always an issue when trying to improve an area. It was important to monitor the impact on surrounding areas.

She confirmed that the area was being managed as well as possible with the resources available.

(3) Officers undertook to respond to all Members of the Committee on the following questions raised by Mrs Law where a response was not available at the meeting:-

- More information was requested on the Judicial review of the mandatory selective licensing scheme and the Committee be informed of the outcome of the Judicial Review of Selective Licensing in due course.
- A copy of the hard evidence that would be collated to measure progress with street scene enforcement (referred to in paragraph 2.23 of the report) be provided.
- Information was requested on how neighbourhoods and volunteers were being engaged within their communities to improve ownership of the local area and civic pride,
- Details of the nationality of those Nationals from A10 Eastern European States referred to in paragraph 2.38 of the report be provided.

(4) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted and the Delivery Plan including targets for the Task Force be circulated to Members when available. .