

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 8 April 2010.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough, Mr A J King, MBE, Mr R A Marsh and Mr J D Simmonds

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Bole (Head Of I C T Commissioning), Mr D Godfrey (Public Policy), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mrs T Oliver (Director of Strategic Development and Public Access), Mr D Pugh (Head of the Kent Brussels Office), Mr D Shipton (Finance Strategy Manager), Mr D Tonks (Head of Audit & Risk), Mr N Warren (Consumer Monitoring Manager) and Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

44. Minutes - 14 January 2010

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting hold on 14 January 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed as a correct record.

45. Financial Monitoring Report : Corporate Services 2009/10

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Shipton introduced the third quarter's budget monitoring report for 2009/10 which was submitted to Cabinet on 29th March 2010 for CED.

(2) Officers undertook to circulate to Members information on the oil price indicator used and why this was the best option, a copy of the answer given by the Cabinet Member for Finance at the meeting of the County Council on 1 April 2010 on oil prices and the paper referred to by the Cabinet Member for Finance on oil prices. Ms McMullan agreed to show currency fluctuations in future reports.

(3) RESOLVED that the projected outturn for the Chief Executive's Department and Financing Items for 2009/10 based on the third quarter's monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

46. Shared Services work in Kent

(Item B3)

(1) The Committee received a report on the continued development of formal and informal partnerships and joint working structures to create shared services and more effective collaboration since the Kent Commitment was signed between Kent County Council and the District and Borough Councils in Kent in January 2007.

(2) At the January 2010 meeting of this Committee a detailed report was received on the payroll and HR aspects of shared services, this report covered the ongoing work of the East Kent Joint Arrangement Committee (involving the Districts of Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet, plus KCC); the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (involving the districts of Ashford, Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells, plus KCC); the shared services activities between the remaining districts and the work of Kent Commercial Services in support of shared services and shared procurement in Kent. Mr Godfrey was present to answer questions on behalf of Mr Hardy.

(3) In relation to the East Kent Joint Scrutiny Committee, the issues of duplication of debates at this Committee and meetings of constituent Districts was raised. Also the difficult role of District Members who were expected at the Joint meeting to set aside their views as Members of a specific District.

(4) There was discussion on the fact that the majority of shared services were horizontal rather than vertical and therefore the role of the County Council in this was questioned. One of the suggested reasons for this was the high overheads of services provide by the County which were higher because of operating county-wide services, compared to those proved at a local level.

(5) Mr King referred to the work that was being carried out on the Kent Re-commitment, which was being undertaken by a Group chaired by Mr Bowles, and included other District Council Leaders. This Group would be submitting a report to Local Authority Leaders across Kent and once it had done this the conclusions could be shared with this Committee for discussion in relation to the County Councils role.

(5) RESOLVED that

(a) the report and comments made by Members be noted.

(b) update reports on shared services work in Kent be submitted to this Committee two or three times a year.

(c) when the report on the Kent Re-commitment being produced by a Group of Members has been agreed by Local Authority Leaders across Kent, it be discussed by this Committee.

47. Citizens' Panels - update

(Item B4)

- (1) Mr Warren introduced a report which informed the Committee of the establishment of the Kent & Medway Citizens' Panel, set out the current position regarding membership and partners and outlined the proposed activities for 2010/11.
- (2) In response to a question, Mr Warren gave the example of a question in a recent survey on operation stack, the response to which had been successfully used as a lobbying tool.
- (3) Mr Warren explained that once someone signed up to be a member of the Panel they remained on the mailing list until they indicated that they wished to come off, there was no obligation for them to respond to every survey.
- (4) The importance of avoiding duplication with surveys carried out by different authorities/partners was emphasised.
- (5) It was suggested that the panel were unrepresentative but Mr Warren explained that IPSOS MORI were commissioned to ensure that a representative survey was produced.
- (6) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted.

48. Total Place

(Item B2)

- (1) Mr Gough and Mrs Oliver introduced an update on the Total Place pilot and future direction of Total Place.
- (2) The issue of focusing on a particular area for example the work in Margate and Cliftonville West leading to the problems being moved to another area was raised.
- (3) A Member expressed the view that the barriers to the pilot as set out in the final report were not extensive enough and they should not be underestimated at a local level. There was also the issue of the territorial barriers in central government and the lack of commonality at national level, for example some government departments were exempt from Stamp duty. These barriers need to be overcome if we were to move forward with the rationalisation of assets. It was important that legislation relating to Total Place was enabling rather than proscriptive. In relation to the proposal in Appendix 5 to co-locate the public section back office functions in Tunbridge Wells, a Member pointed out that this was only one of 8 options that had been put forward and that there were a number of barriers, for example expiry dates of leases.
- (4) In relation to the references to Margate in the papers a Member asked that an effort be made to ensure that a balanced view was given rather than an emphasis on the negative aspects of the area.

(5) The issue of transfer of ownership of assets from one body to another was raised as something that must be done by agreement amongst willing partners.

(6) In response to a question on Member involvement in Total Place, Mr Gough stated that in the early stages a small number of District and County Members had been involved. He anticipated there being frequent items to this Committee on Total Place. A key issue that would need to be considered would be the role of Members in the scrutiny of services across a "Place".

(7) Mr Gough emphasised that the County Council was not interested in empowering a mechanism for central government to take control of Council assets. It was difficult to get horizontal co-operation especially linked to the centre. It was essential that elected authorities played a leading role in the process.

(8) In response to a question on the figures within the report, Mrs Oliver explained that extrapolations had been used in order to meet the deadline for submitting the report.

(9) Mr Simmonds emphasised the need for quick financial wins from Total Place and expressed concern that a lot of the timescale for Total Place was longer term.

(10) Mr King reinforced three key points, the first was that this should be a coalition of the willing, secondly it was important that democratically elected Members who represented Government at a local level took a lead in this process, as there was a real opportunity to bring together agencies of central government and get them to work more effectively. Finally he stated that Total Place was not a universal solution and it could only be achieved if there was trust between the tiers of government and they came together in a constructive way.

(11) RESOLVED that the progress on this key activity for Kent be noted and there be an update to the September 2010 meeting of the Committee.

49. CED Risk Register - update

(Item B8)

(1) Mr Tonks presented an update to the Committee on the latest content of the CED Risk Register.

(2) RESOLVED that the report and appendix be noted.

50. Ministry of Defence Welfare Pathway pilot in Kent.

(Item B5)

(1) Mrs Oliver introduced a report which updated Members on the Welfare Pathway and the next steps. The Welfare Pathway was an extension of the existing Gateway model focused on the Armed Forces Community. There was a significant drive to launch the Kent pilot by November and since then, work had focused on establishing the operational framework to deliver a coherent service. The next few weeks would see a significant drive to finalise these arrangements and ensure the

service was then promoted more widely to the Armed Forces Community and that the feedback from the pilot informed local and national policy discussions.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted and that there be an update to the November 2010 meeting of the POSC.

51. International Affairs Group Update

(Item B6)

(1) Mr King, Mr Marsh and Mr Pugh introduced the regular update report to the Committee on Kent's International and European activities co-ordinated by KCC's International Affairs Group and answered questions from Members.

(2) In response to a question Mr Marsh explained that Interreg funding was targeted at certain issues. He explained that a bid in relation for Tourism for Kent of £1.2m had been successful and this in turn had contributed to the winning of a top tourism award.

(3) Mr Pugh confirmed that he and his colleagues were happy to discuss with District Council colleagues how the Brussels office could assist them. Mr Marsh suggested that a list of qualifying criteria for European funding be sent to Tunbridge Wells and other District Council colleagues.

(4) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

52. ICT Strategic Plan

(Item B7)

(1) Mr Bole presented a report which provided an update to Members on the ICT Strategy and Broadband availability across the county. Members comments and questions were invited.

(2) A Member highlighted the issue of inadequate broadband access in rural areas which was affecting a lot of small businesses that had located there. Mr Bole confirmed that approximately 30,000 small or medium businesses had insufficient broadband access. He referred to an appendix to the report which set out ways to influence improved broadband access across Kent. The root cause of the problem was underinvestment in Kent broadband, of the 135 exchanges in Kent only 19 were large enough to attract investment.

(3) The Chairman undertook to ensure that the Scrutiny Board, at its meeting on 22 April 2010, include consideration of broadband infrastructure in its discussion on 106 agreements.

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

53. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the current topic review programme and invited them to submit suggestions for future Select Committee topic reviews.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.