

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 8 July 2010.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr I S Chittenden (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A D Allen (Substitute for Mr K Smith), Mr A R Chell, Mr K A Ferrin, MBE, Mrs J A Rook and Mrs E M Tweed

ALSO PRESENT: Mr K G Lynes, Mr J A Kite and Mr A Wickham

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Ms B Cooper (Director of Economic Development) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

24. Membership - to report that Mr A R Chell and Mrs J A Rook have joined the Committee in place of Mr R W Bayford and Mr J A Kite respectively
(Item A1)

The Committee noted the change of membership and Mr Chell and Mrs Rook were welcomed.

25. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2010
(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

26. Meeting Dates for 2011
(Item A5)

Members noted that the following dates have been reserved for the Committee's meetings in 2011:-

Tuesday 18 January 2011 – 2.00 pm	Friday 23 September 2011 – 10.00 am
Friday 1 April 2011 – 10.00 am	Wednesday 16 November 2011 – 10.00 am
Friday 24 June 2011 – 10.00 am	

27. Regeneration and Economy - A District Perspective: Reports back from visits to Ashford on 30 April and Sevenoaks on 25 May (Oral)
(Item B1)

Before starting the Committee's main business, the Chairman requested and received the Committee's agreement to consider the reports in the B Section as

urgent business, as the papers had not been placed in the public arena with the required notice.

Ashford – 30 April

1. Members made the following comments about what they had seen and heard in Ashford:-

- a) the amount of regeneration work going on in Ashford was impressive, and Ashford Future is working well;
- b) not enough emphasis had been placed on the future, eg the 1,200 new houses planned for North Ashford;
- c) the completion of Smartlink will be important for Ashford, as Park and Ride might not work well there;
- d) the quality of new build was good, and fits in well with existing developments. Quality of building is key; KCC should support and encourage quality development; and
- e) it would be helpful to know if more Eurostar train services are planned for Ashford, but this is not yet known. Ashford has a good future with Eurostar services if it chooses to embrace it.

Sevenoaks – 25 May

2. Members made the following comments about what they had seen and heard in Sevenoaks:-

- a) the extremes between the standards of living evident in various parts of Sevenoaks district was surprising and eye-opening. The different areas each had very different sets of issues;
- b) the difficulties in addressing the issues around New Ash Green was of significant concern. It was once an award-winning development. Some parts of the development had apparently been newly painted before the party visited;
- c) Members discussed the possible options for improving the New Ash Green site. Compulsory purchase would be difficult as the site was owned by three different parties, but the potential commercial value of the site could be used to encourage the owners to improve it; and
- d) the neatness of the well-run residential area of the Barnfield gypsy site was spoilt by the rubbish and waste metal dumped on the approach road. This is a fire hazard next to fields of dry grass and should be cleared up by the KCC, although it was acknowledged that this area had been cleared previously, at some expense, and the benefit had been temporary.

Future visits

3. Miss Grayell reminded Members that the next visit would be to Thanet on Monday 26 July. Thereafter, the final four visits would be arranged for the autumn months.

28. Presentation - Briefing from Kent Economic Board

(Item B2)

The Chairman reported that, since the publication of the agenda, and in response to a request from Ms Cooper, he had agreed to defer this item until a future meeting. The discussion then will focus on the development of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

29. Sector Strategy : A sector-based approach to economic development (presentation)

(Item B3)

1. Mr Gill presented a series of slides which set out the employment patterns across a number of employment sectors; the public sector, retailing, manufacturing, etc. He pointed out that:-

- further modelling is being done on the likely pattern of public sector job losses across Kent;
- a programme of 'sector conversations' with businesses will be taken forward from September 2010 to March 2011;
- a specific strategy for the low carbon sector (*Low Carbon Opportunities for Growth*) has been prepared. In addition, a strategy in support of the creative industries sector is in preparation. Both these strategies presented a menu of possible actions, and robust feasibility studies would be needed to support any investment that KCC would seek to make; and
- workshops had been held as part of the preparation for a series of sector conversations.

2. In debate, Members expressed the following views/concerns:-

- a) reliance on the retailing and wholesaling sectors was a concern, especially when set against the long-term decline in employment in sectors such as manufacturing;
- b) when talking about the 'big employers' in Kent, strategy documents usually/often meant large single-site employers, but some of the national supermarket chains (for example) probably employ many more people than these, given the number of store sites across the county;
- c) a key role for the public sector is in providing the right conditions in which private investment can take place. In this context, the Cultural Strategy was vital in making Kent an attractive place to choose to live

and work. All REDPOSC Members would be sent a copy of the cultural strategy; and

d) broadband provision would also help make Kent an attractive business location, and provision/improvement of broadband access in rural locations was a priority.

3. RESOLVED that the information give in the presentation be noted, with thanks.

30. Draft Kent and Medway Housing Strategy

(Item B4)

1. Mr Horton introduced the report and updated the Committee on progress made since his last presentation on the draft housing strategy at the POSC's March meeting. Members' contributions at that meeting had been taken into account, and the consultation period had ended on 21 May. The final strategy was planned for an October launch date.

2. Mr Horton answered a number of questions from Members, and the points highlighted in debate were as follows:-

a) Members expressed differing views about the timing of the final strategy and whether or not it was prudent to wait for the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in October, as the strategy might have to be changed to take account of this. Mr Lynes added that, although some changes might have to be made to the strategy later, he thought it was wise to be ready and have partners in place to be able to move ahead with it as soon as possible after the CSR;

b) developers generally did not find social housing an attractive proposition, so some social housing could be provided instead via the No Use Empty initiative;

c) District Councils now had more freedom to depart from regional plans and quotas for housing, but developments which had already been granted planning permission would still be built;

d) Members asked for information about the consultation exercise, and Mr Horton undertook to provide information on the process and the consultees who had been involved; and

e) the housing strategy would not include specific detail from Local Development Frameworks, and discussions between the KCC and District Councils about how the two could be linked would be discussed at a Leaders' meeting on 15 July.

3. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks.

31. End of Year Budget Outturn Report 2009/10 and Business Plan Outturn Report 2009/10

(Item B5)

1. Mr Shipton introduced the report and said that the outturn situation of the Unit's budget was as expected. Each of the County Council's POSCs was being asked to discuss and decide how and when it wished to be involved in the setting of its budget, and whether or not each wished to establish an Informal Member Group (IMG) to look in detail at its budget options.

2. Members expressed a range of views about the need for and value of having an IMG. Several Members felt it was not necessary due to the size and structure of the Unit budget; all were agreed on the value of clear and timely information; concern was expressed that if the Committee did not take control of a review of its budget, someone else might take on this control; it was difficult to decide on the need for an IMG without knowing what level of savings the Unit was being asked to make.

3. The Chairman suggested, and it was agreed, that he and the Vice-Chairman meet with officers to find out the scale of the required savings, and then a decision be made by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on whether or not an IMG was necessary and, if so, set this up later.

4. Mr Lynes agreed with the view that the Unit's budget was very small, and pointed out that relationships are the key tool to regeneration success. A small cut in budget would have a magnifying effect on the KCC's ability to lever in funding from other partners/sources. The Unit had already made cuts of between 15 and 18% of its budget.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the revenue and capital financial outturn for 2009/10, including rollovers for committed projects and changes to the capital programme, be noted;
- b) the performance outturn for 2009/10 be noted; and
- c) the Chairman and Vice-Chairman meet with officers to find out the scale of the required savings, and then a decision be made by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on whether or not an IMG was necessary and, if so, set this up later.

32. Update on Major Projects

(Item B6)

1. Ms Cooper presented the report and answered questions from Members. Points highlighted were as follows:-

- a) a business case had been prepared for Smartlink at Ashford, but there was not yet any funding available against which to bid. Smartlink remained a priority, and the KCC would continue to support it;

- b) Members expressed differing views about the merits of pursuing aspirational projects; and
 - c) officers were congratulated on what had been achieved so far with the funding available.
2. RESOLVED that the progress against each of the projects and bids seeking funding from the Regeneration Fund be noted.

33. Update on Select Committee Work
(Item C1)

RESOLVED that the update be noted and that Members notify Miss Grayell of any topics they wish to put forward for inclusion in the 2010/2011 Select Committee topic review work programme.