

23 May 2008

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY OVERVIEW CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee held at Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 23rd May, 2008.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice Chairman), Dr M R Eddy, Mr D Smyth, Mr G Rowe (substituting for Mrs T Dean), Mrs P A V Stockell (substituting for Mr C J Law) and Mrs E M Tweed (substituting for Mrs S V Hohler).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P D Wickenden, Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

17. Membership

(Item 1)

The Committee noted that Mrs S V Hohler had replaced Mr P W A Lake and Mr Ridings had replaced Mr J B O Fullarton on the Committee.

18. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2008

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

19. Select Committee – Topic Review Programme Work Programme – Update

(Item 4)

- (1) The Committee noted that the Alcohol Misuse Select Committee recommendations which had been considered by the County Council at its meeting on 3 April 2008 were already being taken forward by a Working Group established by Mr Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Public Health. Linkages had been made with the Working Group taking forward the recommendations for the Personal, Social, Health, Education (PSHE) Select Committee.
- (2) An action plan would be prepared for submission to the Corporate Policy Overview Committee in September/November and the Select Committee would be reconvened in April 2009 to receive a report on the progress with its recommendations a year after it was considered by Cabinet.
- (3) The Committee noted that a conference on Alcohol Misuse was being organised to take place at the University of Greenwich, Kings Hill, West Malling on 10 July 2008. This conference would provide a further opportunity to launch the Select Committee report.
- (4) The process for this Select Committee had used a number of innovative practices which might be appropriate for other Select Committees. These included:-

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- (a) A facilitated discussion with young people from the Marlowe Academy in Ramsgate to enable the Select Committee to understand the experiences of this group of young people regarding the use and misuse of alcohol; and
 - (b) in the final preparation of the report the Select Committee ensured that all the partner organisations who had contributed to the report (and for some would have responsibility for implementing the recommendations) were involved in their preparation before being agreed.
- (5) At its previous meeting the Committee had agreed that the Work Programme for Autumn 2007 to Spring 2008 should be:-
 - (a) Accessing Democracy;
 - (b) Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
 - (c) Access to Healthcare (a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Topic Review).
- (6) The Committee concluded that as soon as resources became available the next Select Committee after those set out above would be "Provision of Activities for Young People".
- (7) The Committee noted that an additional Policy Overview Research Officer post had been added to the Overview and Scrutiny team to support the Select Committee Topic Reviews. It was hoped that an officer would be in post by July/August. This would enable a review to be started early in the autumn.
- (8) The Committee noted the progress with the Accessing Democracy Select Committee which was due to finish its evidence gathering phase by the end of June 2008. This Select Committee was using a number of methods in addition to the established hearing session mechanism. These included insight gathering exercises, forums, meetings, conducting interviews as rapporteurs and reporting back.
- (9) Preparatory work for the Select Committee on Autistic Spectrum Disorder was well advanced and an inaugural meeting of the Select Committee would take place in June.
- (10) The Committee noted that the dedicated resource to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would, when time permits, undertake a Topic Review on Access to Healthcare. The Committee noted that the pressure on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme was enormous and as a consequence representations have been made by the Chairman and Members of the Committee to the Leader and Chief Executive to increase the resources available to the Committee.
- (11) It was also clear that during recent discussions between the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chairmen and Chief Executives of the two Primary Care Trusts across the administrative county of Kent that they would like to see this piece of work started as soon as possible. The Primary Care Trusts had indicated that they would contribute what they could in the way of resources to assist this process.

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- (12) Since the agreement of the Programme at the Committee's last meeting the Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee had asked to establish a Select Committee to refresh the work undertaken by a Select Committee which included representatives of Medway Council on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) Domestic Services in 2003 and to update the work of the Committee to identify the best rail passenger services solution for Kent both in terms of:-
 - (a) the immediate benefits of the solution in terms of journey times and improved services to London around Kent and mainland Europe; and
 - (b) the long term benefits of the solution in terms of the regeneration of Kent and the impacts on the wider rail network and transport in the County.
- (13) Programming and refocusing of the topics which Members wish to review continues to present a challenge.
- (14) A suggestion was made that it might be helpful if once a Topic Review has been agreed by the Committee that a cross-party group is identified to undertake in conjunction with the Research Officer the preparation of the terms of reference, the scope for the Review and the potential witness lists so that the Review is narrow and focussed which often is difficult to achieve.
- (15) Members were reminded that the Parliamentary Select Committee model is to look at a topic narrow and deep rather than broad and all embracing.
- (16) The Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager currently had 1 ½ FTE Research Officers supporting the Select Committee Topic Review Programme, which will increase by 1 FTE when a new officer is recruited. In addition, the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager had one Research Officer whose time was entirely dedicated to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (17) In addition to the Research Officer resource there were three Democratic Services Officers to support the Policy Overview Committee and Select Committee activities.
- (18) The Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager proposed that subject to the agreement of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee that a further Democratic Services Officer to work specifically for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be useful.
- (19) At the last meeting of the Committee there was a discussion on the way forward for building capacity for the Policy Overview Committees. It was a challenge for the Policy Overview Committees to exercise their terms of reference fully and to conduct their business effectively in five one day meetings per year.
- (20) This is a particular challenge for the Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee. The Committee noted that the Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee were due to receive a report at their next meeting which would suggest the establishment of an IMG on Building Schools for the Future. The Committee were invited as the Comprehensive Performance Assessment was due to be published in early June to discuss this issue along with

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the recommendations from the CPA at the Committee's next meeting on 10 September.

(21) As an interim measure which might assist Members in focussing the work of Policy Overview Committees officers preparing reports for a Policy Overview Committee were being asked to identify which part of the Policy Overview Committee terms of reference the item was seeking to address:-

- (a) Policy Development;
- (b) Performance Monitoring; or
- (c) Responding to consultation?

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (a) noted that the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse had presented its final report and commended its innovative processes which will be used where and when appropriate for future Select Committees;
- (b) agreed to establish a cross-party Informal Member Group (1:1:1) to consider:
 - (i) the development of a protocol/communication strategy for publishing Select Committee reports;
 - (ii) whilst the Committee was sympathetic to the request of the Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee to conduct a piece of work on Passenger Rail Services the Committee did not have the resources to deploy. It therefore suggested that the Environment and Regeneration POC should explore with the Environment and Regeneration Directorate and the Leader's office resourcing this piece of work;
 - (iii) how mini reviews and a rapporteur scheme could be developed to build capacity for the Policy Overview Committees including the Cabinet's views on how the reviews can be launched in a more positive manner for the County Council;
 - (iv) a report setting out the views of this Informal Member Group be considered at the Committee's next meeting.
- (c) noted the progress of the Select Committee Topic Review for Accessing Democracy and Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
- (d) agreed that the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People will start its work when the new Policy Overview Research Officer is in post;
- (e) noted that the dedicated Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Research Officer will shortly undertake a review into the transport aspect of 'Accessing Healthcare';
- (f) noted that a bid had been made for a graduate from the Graduate Development Programme offering a place from 1 October 2008 and ask that

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the Chief Executive be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 10 September 2008 to discuss with the Committee the ongoing issues around resources;

- (g) a business case be prepared for a dedicated Democratic Services Officer for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- (h) a small cross-party group of Members be established when a topic review has been identified to work with the Research Officer to focus the terms of reference for the review.

20. The Policy Overview Committees – Timetable 2009

(Item 5 – report by Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

- (1) The Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager reported that he was preparing a draft paper for the Policy Overview Committees Timetable for 2009 and that further work had been undertaken in preparing a discussion paper by the Director of Finance on improving the Budget timetable to give greater opportunity and time to Policy Overview Committees and Cabinet Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise, investigate, challenge and comment upon Cabinet's Budget and Medium Term Planning process.
- (2) There were also issues for the programming of the Policy Overview Committees to ensure that when the Committees are receiving financial monitoring information it is as up to date as possible for the Policy Overview Committees following consultation by the Cabinet.
- (3) There was also the issue of competing pressures on the Policy Overview Committees timetable for consideration such as Towards 2010 and maybe the replacement for the Annual Plan and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- (4) To take this work forward in advance of the Committee's next meeting the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager sought the Committee's agreement to share this information with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Liberal Democrat Spokesman of the Committee and invite comments from all Committee Members and then to report back to the Committee the action taken.
- (5) Dr Eddy requested that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee's involvement in these processes should also be considered.