

By: Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager

To: Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee – 10 September 2008

Subject: Publicising Select Committee Topic Review and Launching Select Committee Topic Review Reports

Summary: This report sets out the views of an IMG which has considered how the County Council could improve the publishing and launching of Select Committee Topic Review report. It recommends a protocol for incorporating in the County Council Constitution

Introduction

1. As agreed at the meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee on 23 May 2008, the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee IMG met on 25 July 2008 and considered a report on the above topic. A copy of the Notes of this meeting are included on the Agenda of today's meeting.

Publicising of Select Committee Topic Reviews

2. (1) It has become clear from the views expressed by Members that there is often a difficulty in publicising the work of Select Committees via the local media. Looking at the Centre for Public Scrutiny Website and from contact with colleagues in other local authorities, this is a common challenge for Overview and Scrutiny.

(2) Some of this arises from the local press's lack of understanding of the work of Select Committees as opposed to the much clearer Committee system. There is also the issue of the press being decision-focused and therefore reporting on the work of Cabinet and Planning Application Committees, rather than Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

(3) The POCC IMG acknowledged that this was a challenging area and agreed that the example of the press release from the Greater London Assembly and the Protocol for Public Relations and Scrutiny from Telford and Wrekin Council, along with comments made by Members should form the basis of a draft Protocol to be submitted to this meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee for consideration.

(4) Attached as an Appendix is a draft Protocol that has been prepared on this basis.

Launching of Select Committee Topic Reviews

3. (1) The POCC IMG at its meeting on 25 July 2008 also considered the issue of establishing a process for the launching of Select Committee Topic Review Reports. It was acknowledged that Members of Select Committees put a lot of work into producing their reports and although this was recognised when the report is considered by Cabinet and the County Council, it is also important, especially for those witnesses who had contributed to the report and partners who may have been involved in the review, that

the report is launched as widely as possible so that it has the potential to achieve the maximum impact both internally and externally for the benefit of the residents of Kent.

(2) No examples of a protocol for launching of Select Committee Topic Reviews by other authorities have been found.

(3) Members of the IMG suggested the following way forward for launching of Select Committee Topic Reviews.

(4) The IMG felt that the most effective time to launch a Select Committee report was at a formal meeting of the County Council when the majority of County Councillors would be present. However, the IMG would strongly recommend that the launch of a Select Committee report should be a very early item on the County Council Agenda and suggested this should be after questions and the report by the Leader of the County Council.

(5) The IMG would also recommend that the Select Committee items should be allowed sufficient time to have a constructive debate. This will be dependent on the Topic Review. Members of the IMG anticipated that this would probably be a minimum of two hours - but could be longer.

(6) The IMG also suggested that it would be helpful if the Chairman of the Select Committee and other cross-party Members from the Select Committee had an input into that part of the County Council agenda to determine who should be invited to come along to speak and to agree the length of time this item should take.

(7) The IMG was firmly of the view that the debate on Topic Review items should be led by the Select Committee Chairman and Members of the Select Committee, rather than the Cabinet Members. If this is the view of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee there will need to be a dialogue with the Chairman of the County Council and the Cabinet on this proposal.

(8) Members also stressed the importance of encouraging Kent TV to assist in launching and publishing of Select Committee Topic Reviews.

4. Recommendations that:-

- (a) that subject to the views of the Committee and other relevant Members, the attached draft Protocol for publicising Select Committee Topic Reviews, be approved; and
- (b) that the suggested process for the launching of Select Committee Topic Reviews via County Council meetings if approved, be discussed with the Chairman of the County Council and the Cabinet prior to consideration by the Selection of Member Services Committee who will need to consider the recommendations and the possible amendments to the Constitution.

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Background Documents: None