

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Board held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 1 February 2011.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Mr P W A Lake (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A D Allen, Mr C J Capon, Mr M C Dance, Mrs T Dean, Mr C Hibberd and Mr K Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R J Lees, Mr A J King, MBE and Mrs E Green

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership), Mr P D Wickenden (Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager) and Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

39. Minutes - 3 November 2010

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

40. Select Committee update

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Wickenden presented an update report on the Select Committee work programme. The Select Committees on Extended Services and Renewable Energy had submitted their reports to Cabinet on 29 November 2010 and to Council on 16 December 2010. The three Select Committees in the current work programme were Dementia, Educational Attainment and The Student Journey. These reviews were in the early stages of carrying out their work. He made the point that currently at least two of these were likely to be ready to submit their report to County Council in December 2011. He was mindful that, in order for them to be given full consideration, it was preferable that only one Select Committee report was received at any County Council meeting and he would work with Select Committee Chairmen to achieve this.

(2) Mrs Dean, Chairman of the Select Committee on Dementia, gave an update on the way in which the Select Committee were developing their Terms of Reference and the use of focus groups. The first focus group of professionals had already met and identified 25 key issues. The Committee wished to organise a focus group of carers to inform the Terms of Reference, but it would mean making support available for carers to enable them to attend. However, there was no budget available to provide this and she requested the Board to look at whether resources could be made available.

(3) Mrs Dean also raised the request from her Select Committee to webcast some of their evidence gathering sessions as a large number of people had an interest in

the review subject but would not be able to attend sessions. She suggested that some of the more formal Select Committee sessions could be webcast. Mrs Dean explained that a number of carers had expressed the wish to tell their story, but it was important the decisions on how this was recorded and made available were treated with sensitivity. She suggested that it would be appropriate to webcast evidence gather sessions involving professionals and to use webcasting later in the Select Committee process.

(4) The Chairman pointed out that there were resource issues if all Select Committees meetings were webcast. Mr Wickenden stated that a fixed amount of hours were specified under the new webcast contract and hours outside of that would be chargeable. There was also a balance to be struck between getting the best from witnesses and wider engagement though webcasting. Mr Kit Smith reinforced the need for a balanced approach to the webcasting of Select Committee sessions. Although webcasting could be a good tool for keeping the public informed the webcasting of Sessions could restrict the type of debate that was held and stifle freer participation.

(5) Mrs Green expressed the view that the decision should be made on an individual Select Committee basis and that earlier evidence gathering sessions did not necessarily lend themselves to this as in some reviews they may contain personal accounts on sensitive issues. She agreed that the later stages of the review may be a better time to use the webcast, unless there were other sessions that contained broader issues of wider interest. A number of Members agreed with this point of view.

(6) Mr King stated that the Select Committee process was one of the most innovative processes of the Overview and Scrutiny business and had grown in stature over the past ten years. It demonstrated the contribution that Members can make when there a topic was looked at in depth. In relation to webcasting, different Select Committee required different approaches. Webcasts should be used in situations where there was a need for a wider contribution. There was an opportunity to use webcasting to enable people with an interest in the Select Committee to follow the progress of the review. He suggested that the appropriate time to use webcasting was at the final stages of the review when the Committee were debating what would be included in its final report.

(7) Mr King then emphasised the importance of looking at what the next steps were for taking the Select Committee progress forward and to ensure that outcomes were used in the formation and delivery of policy by the County Council. Mr Capon highlighted the need to ensure that the outcomes of Select Committees were acted upon. It was important that there was proof of having listened to the public and genuine consultation in order for localism to work.

(8) Mr Dance reflected on his experience as a Chairman of Select Committees and emphasised the power of the quality of the report writing. He suggested that Select Committees should invite the Cabinet Member(s) to come along to a meeting of the Select Committee as a witness to give them the opportunity to express their views.

(9) The Chairman suggested that the Select Committee should have more direct contact with the Cabinet Member(s) and there should be engagement at the end of

the process to get feedback from the Cabinet Member on how the recommendations from the review would be taken forward.

(10) Mrs Dean referred to an unsolicited endorsement of the work of the Alcohol Misuse Select Committee which she had heard from a panel member at an event she had attended. It had been said that the Alcohol Select Committee had carried out the best piece of work in the field which had been invaluable in bringing together professionals and had made a shift in that field.

(11) RESOLVED that:

(a) the progress of the Select Committee topic reviews on Renewable Energy and Extended Service be noted,

(b) the progress and timescales for the Select Committees on Educational Attainment and Dementia and the Student Journey be approved.

(c) draft guidelines for the webcasting of Select Committees be produced and submitted to the Board for approval.

(d) officers seek a solution that would enable the carers to attend a focus group to assist the Select Committee on Dementia.

41. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

(Item 6)

(1) Mr Wickenden introduced a report which set out a request from the Kent LINK to set up a Select Committee to look at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

(2) Mrs Allen welcomed the proposal that Members look at the issues around the suggestion that insufficient services were being provided by CAMHS particularly for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. She pointed out that following an Ofsted inspection Health colleagues were required to produce an action plan, she was concerned that KCC would take on a service that was not fit for purpose and would like to have advice on how to take this forward.

(3) Mr Wickenden stated that the only resource that he had available to carry out any work on this would be the Health Overview and Scrutiny Research Officer.

(4) Mr King explained that once the new staffing structure was in place there would be the central research capacity to focus on issues such as this, however this matter was urgent. He referred to work being carried out in Children's Social Services and it was important to link into that.

(5) Mr Hotson stated that it was important to talk to the Cabinet Member, it was important to work as a team and to talk to the new interim officer.

(6) Mrs Dean did not feel that a Select Committee was the way to take this forward, she suggested that it should be delegated to the three party spokesmen to decide how to proceed.

(7) Mr Hotson suggested that the group spokesmen (and Mr Dance) should meet with the Directors to discuss a way forward with this issue. Mrs Allen stated that it was important to discuss this with the Children Trust Board and the Preventative

Services to see where they targeted resources. It was key that resources were targeted at an early stage. There should be an early meeting, maybe an IMG lasting a couple of days to try to put together a way forward with Health and other colleagues.

(8) Mrs Allen suggested that in the meantime health colleagues should be asked how far they had progressed with their action plan and whether it was possible to produce a joint action plan with KCC. It was noted that Kent LINK had requested to participate in the discussion.

(9) RESOLVED that a meeting be arranged as early as possible with Mrs Allen, Mr Dance, Mrs Dean, Mr Lees and Mr Christie to meet the two relevant Directors for their input and report back to the next meeting. (If necessary the group spokesmen will be asked to agree to set up an emergency IMG to start the process).

42. Sharing of good practice

(Item 7)

(1) Mrs Dean drew Members' attention to a pilot on KCC's budget setting process which was being run by Mr Wood at West Malling Primary school on Thursday 3 February 2011, and invited Members to attend.

(2) Mr Dance explained that following his POSC District visits on Regeneration, a District by District report for Member and partners was being collated. It was important that the knowledge built up by the POSC as a result of their District visits was utilised. He stated that consideration was being given to what the POSC would do next and a suggestion was visits on a thematic basis, for example looking at Kent as the "Garden of England" which could involve visits to East Malling, Hadlow College, Brogdale and Thanet Earth.

(3) RESOLVED that the updates be noted.