

24 January 2008

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Communities Policy Overview Committee held on Thursday, 24 January 2008 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake (Chairman), Mr L Christie, Mr A R Chell, Mrs C J Dagger, Mr R E King, Mr C J Law, Mr T A Maddison, Mr M J Northey, Mr R Pascoe (substitute for Mrs S V Hohler), Mr G Rowe and Mrs E M Tweed.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services.

OBSERVERS: Mr P Carter (Leader) and Mr N Chard (Cabinet Member for Finance)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Ms A Honey, Managing Director, Mr D Shipton, Head of Finance and Asset Management, Mrs A Slaven, Director of Youth Offending and Substance Misuse, Mr C Bainbridge, Director of Community Safety and Regulatory Services, Mr D Crilley, Director of Communities Cultural Services, Ms J Edwards, Director, Policy and Resources and Ms D Fitch, Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

58. Minutes – 7 November 2007
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

59. Portfolio Holder and Managing Directors Update
(Item B1 – Oral Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Ms A Honey, Managing Director for Communities)

(1) Mr Hill updated Members on the following issues:-
Library Users Survey

(2) Mr Hill reported that the Library Users Survey had been carried out and had shown a positive increase over the past two years against the background of a national reduction in service use. Mr Hill undertook to bring to the Committee national comparative figures on user satisfaction rates for libraries when these were available so that these could be compared with the local figures.

Opening of the Margate Library/Gateway

(3) Mr Hill informed the Committee that the Margate Library/Gateway had opened on 7 January 2008 and it was proving very successful. A large number of people had visited on the opening day and the formal opening will take place on 15 February 2008. This was the first of the Library/Gateways and it would be replicated when the opportunity arose.
Ashford Youth Club

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(4) Mr Hill reported that the Ashford Youth Club opened on 7 January 2008; this was a new build following a PFI at the school.

Kent School Games

(5) Mr Hill informed the Committee that on 27 November 2007 the Kent School Games had been launched and 300 young people had involved in this event.

Adult Education Centre - Folkestone

(6) Mr Hill reported that the new Adult Education Centre would be opening in Folkestone in March which would create links between Adult Education, the Library Service and the Creative Quarter.

Turner Contemporary

(7) Mr Hill stated that on 20 February 2008 the planning application would be considered by Thanet District Council. When this process had been completed, the project would be submitted to SEEDA and the Arts Council for funding.

(8) Mr Hill undertook to submit to a meeting of this Committee, information on the regeneration benefits of the Turner Contemporary Project and what effect it would have on the local area.

Young Consumer of the Year

(9) Mr Hill reminded Members that the Young Consumer of the Year for Kent Final was being held at County Hall that day and invited Members to attend.

Alcohol Seminar

(10) Mr Hill informed Members of an Alcohol Seminar, led by the Stronger and Safer Communities Group, during which a number of issues been raised relating to the services that Community provided and steps would be taken to address these. There was a strong feeling that KCC and its partners should take a national lead on this issue.

(11) Ms Honey introduced Mr D Cloake the new Head of Emergency Planning.

(12) Ms Honey updated the Committee on the following issues:-

Youth Service

(13) Ms Honey informed Members that the line management of the Youth Service would be moving from the Director of Community Cultural Services to the Director of Youth Offending and Substance Misuse with effect from 1 April 2008.

Youth Offending Service – Inspection

(14) Ms Honey informed Members that the Youth Offending Service inspection had been held during the week of 7 January 2008. It had been carried out by 13 inspectors and had involved a lot of staff time. The inspectors had reviewed 108 case files. The initial response from the inspectors would be completed in a few weeks time and the draft report available in March with the final report published on 5 May 2008. The feedback from the lead inspector had been positive and Ms Honey commended work carried out by the Director of the Youth Offending and Substance Misuse and her team.

Joint Area Review (JAR)

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(15) Ms Honey reminded Members that alongside the inspection for the JAR there was also an enhanced youth inspection being carried out.

(16) RESOLVED that :-

- (a) the update and responses to questions were noted;
- (b) a report on the regeneration impact for Margate of the Turner Contemporary would be submitted to a future meeting;
- (c) a report would be submitted to the Committee on national comparative figures for user satisfaction rates for Libraries;
- (d) the POC to be kept informed of additional burdens being placed on services.

60. Communities Budget Monitoring 2007/08

(Item B2 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Ms A Honey, Managing Director for Communities. Mr D Shipton, Head of Finance and Asset Management was present for this item)

(1) The Committee received their regular report on the forecast outturn against the budget for the Community Services Portfolio. In paragraph 3.1 of the report, Mr Shipton highlighted the main variances.

(2) Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions which included the following issues:-

- Adult Education enrolment – concern was expressed about the drop in enrolment for adult education. Officers undertook to submit a report to the next meeting of the Policy Overview Committee on the drop in enrolments for Adult Education including the impact of increasing prices compared to the national picture.
- In relation to the Gravesend Library, Mr Hill undertook to ensure that local Members were involved in the development of proposals.
- Concern was expressed about the timing of the monitoring reports and the time that elapsed between them being produced and being submitted to the Policy Overview Committees.
- In relation to page B2:7 –Youth Offending Services Grant for the Youth Justice Board, it was confirmed that this was an annually renewable grant although it was anticipated that it would be at a stand still figure with no increase for inflation.
- It was suggested that it might be helpful to use youth centres to promote the Freedom Pass which would make them more accessible for young people.
- Page B2:16 –Ashford Library and Learning and Information Centre – in relation to the disposal costs mentioned, it was clarified this was for the disposal of a site purchased for a specific project and did not relate to the library itself.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) that the projected outturn figures for the directorate as at the at the second quarter be noted;
- (b) a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the POC on Adult Education

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61. 2007/08 – Performance Update

(Item B3 – Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Ms A Honey, Managing Director for Communities. Mrs J Edwards, Director, Policy and Resources was present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report which summarised “in year” performance information in advance of the annual review of performance which would be reported to the Committee in June 2008. Members were invited to ask questions and make comments on the information provided. These included following issues:-

- Members were informed that special funding provisions were being made for both disabled and able bodies sports men and women in the form of special grants in preparation for 2010. It was confirmed that there were restrictions in relation to attracting sponsorship for the Olympics until after the next Olympic games had been held.
- Concern was expressed by Members about the different cycles running for Towards 2010 and the annual plan monitoring and that it would be helpful to have these two timetables running at the same time.

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

62. BUDGET 2008-09 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2008-09 TO 2010-11

(Item B4 – Report by Mr Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Ms A Honey, Managing Director)

(1) The Committee considered the Communities Directorate’s Draft Budget proposals set out in the Draft Budget 2008-09 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2008-2011 and also the report which was circulated specifically relating to the key areas of these documents for Communities.

(2) The Cabinet Member and Officers introduced each section of the Revenue Budget and Capital Budget for the Communities Directorate and answered questions raised by Members of the Committee.

(3) Mr Hill, Ms Honey, Mr Shipton, Mr Crilley, Ms Slaven, Mr Bainbridge and Ms Edwards answered questions from Members about the following issues:-

MTP 2008/09 to 2010/11

(a) Base Budget Transfers to and from other Portfolios

(4) In a response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton confirmed that after the start of 2008/09 it would not be necessary to transfer funds from other Portfolios to Communities as the transition to the new Communities Directorate would be complete. In reply to a question from Mr Law, Mr Shipton confirmed that £92,000 transfer for 2008/09 was a net figure which included gross expenditure and income.

(5) In response to a question from Mr Maddison, Mr Shipton confirmed that the loan to the Adult Education service for the 2006/07 over spend was an internal arrangement between the Finance and Communities portfolios

(b) Pay and Prices

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(6) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton explained that 2.5% had been provided for in the 2008/09 Budget for all pay groups (including staff in the Kent Scheme and national schemes) and in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2% has been provided for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. The amount for 2010/11 is more than 2009/10 to take account of the cumulative effect.

(c) Service Strategies and Improvements

(7) In response to a question from Mr Chell, Mr Shipton confirmed that for the specific grants transferring into the main grant settlement i.e. food hygiene, enforcement of intellectual property rights, and animal feed, officers had only been able to identify the same amounts as received in the current year. There was no increase for inflation or additional responsibilities. In relation to enforcement of intellectual property rights, Mr Bainbridge confirmed that nationally £5m of grants were allocated in the current year and the Government has stated this will be increased to £7m next year. However, it has not been possible to identify any additional money in the Revenue Support Grant settlement. There was also meant to be additional money to implement energy performance certificates but it has not been possible to identify this either.

(8) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton explained that the cost of early retirements following the restructuring of the library service have been netted off against the saving while the early retirements following the restructuring of the Cultural Development Unit are shown separately. He explained that the reason was the Library saving represented a reduction in net expenditure for the portfolio while the Cultural Development saving was offset against reduced income and was no net saving. He agreed to consider how savings from restructuring and costs of early retirements are presented in future Medium Term Plans to ensure greater consistency.

(d) Income Generation

(9) Members were concerned that the proposed increase in fees for Adult Education courses would result in reduced student numbers and therefore have a detrimental affect on gross income. Ms Honey confirmed that the service has carried out an enormous amount of detailed work in this area and agreed to bring a report to the Committee which set out the strategies for Adult Education tuition charges. Mr Shipton agreed that a more accurate wording in relation to Adult Education fees would be "to increase the yield from tuition fees".

(10) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton confirmed that some registration fees are statutory and are set by Government, for example, birth and death certificates. Mr Bainbridge confirmed that the proposed increase in fees mainly related to wedding ceremonies conducted in County Council premises and explained the different types of service that the Registration Service was able to provide. In the main the increases relate to ceremonies in Kent's six main Registry offices with the aim of making these self funding over the next few years. This would require significant increases in fees over time. The proposed increases in fees in KCC venues work out at approximately 47 – 50%, and the proposed increase for commercial venues are 10-11%. Research had shown that KCC venues were popular and therefore it was reasonable to ask people to pay more to ensure the costs of the service were covered. It was noted that there were still a number of choices available to people in relation to wedding venues.

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(11) In a response to a question from Mr Koowaree, Mr Bainbridge stated that in relation to the registration of births, this service cost more to provide than the County Council was able to get back in statutory fees.

(12) In response to a question from Mr Law relating to the figures for income generation for the Youth Service, Mr Shipton confirmed that in the past we have only shown KCC's net contribution towards the running cost of Youth centres. Under the budget proposals for next year it is planned to show the gross cost and all the income generated by centres.

(13) In response to a question from Mr Law relating to the figures for income generation for the Youth Service, Mr Shipton confirmed that these were net costs and did not show the increase in gross expenditure and gross income. They only showed KCC's net contribution to the centre. In future the gross costs and income would be shown.

(14) Ms Slaven, in relation to a question from Mr Law explained that a room in the Whitstable Youth Centre was used during the day time by the Young Persons Substance Mis-use Team the Young People service (KDAAT) is grant funded and only use the premise core during office hours.

(15) In relation to the question on the Youth Offending Service, Ms Slaven replied that the national grant from the Justice Board and the amount the local authority contributed was reflective of the national agreement for the funding of Youth Offending services and no significant change had occurred.

(16) Ms Slaven reaffirmed that officers were passionate about increasing the amount of provision for young people. The target of increasing income by the letting of youth centre premises would not be achieved at the expense of reducing the time that young people could use centres. A recent survey of young people had shown that they wanted their centres open for longer periods of time and discussions were being held with colleagues in District Councils and others in order to try to achieve this.

(17) Officers agreed to brief Mr Law outside the meeting to clarify the issues he was raising in relation to the Youth Service and Youth Offending Service and a reconciliation statement on the proposed and presentation changes to income will be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

(e) Efficiency Savings

(18) In response to a question from Mr Northey regarding use of computers in libraries, Mr Shipton confirmed that libraries operate an open access policy and that consideration has been given to charging for excessive use but rejected as it would cost as much to collect the charges as the amount raised. Mr Crilley undertook to look at the issue that Mr Northey raised in relation to computer use in a library in Canterbury.

(19) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Hill explained that the £120,000 in grants that the Community Safety Unit provided to CDRPs (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) towards Community Safety Projects and the £60,000 towards Warden projects were something that had been introduced when CDRPs were first set up. At that time CDRPs were poorly funded but now they receive significant funds and therefore this small amount of money put in by KCC was no longer appropriate. He reaffirmed that KCC's priority is the Community Warden Scheme at a cost to KCC of over £3m a year.

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He confirmed that every CDRP area has its share of Community Wardens which represents a significant contribution on the part of KCC.

(20) In response to a question from Mr Chell, Mr Hill confirmed that whether or not the Warden Service received financial assistance from the CDRP depends on the decisions of the individual CDRPs.

(21) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Bainbridge confirmed that the Registration Service for births and deaths had a number of sub-offices and it was intended to examine opportunities to relocate services into other Communities facilities e.g. Adult Education centres, thus delivering efficiency savings not reducing the footprint of KCC services. It was a question of looking at the number of offices that we had, where they were located and where it was possible to rationalise. He noted that all registration staff were now KCC employees and KCC thus had more influence over their deployment.

(22) Mr Bainbridge also confirmed that the Registration Service has invested in new software which will enable the service to deliver some staffing efficiencies as well as premises savings.

(23) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton confirmed that the savings figures for 2009-10 of £2.684m and 2010/11 of £812k were indicative figures only and that the actual figures would need to be agreed as part of the annual budget process for those years.

(f) Budget Book 2008/09

(24) In response to a request from Mr Christie, Mr Shipton undertook to supply a comparable figure for Strategic Management in 2007/8. He confirmed that in the 2007/08 budget book the costs of Strategic Management had been apportioned to individual services and that the changed presentation enabled consistent comparison with other portfolios.

(g) Capital Budget

(25) Mr Hill undertook to bring a paper on all of the Portfolio's Capital Plans to this Committee within the next six months.

(h) Kent History Centre

(26) In response to a question from Mr Law, Mr Hill offered to give a presentation to Policy Overview Committee Members as soon as possible taking into account any commercially sensitive issues at the time.

(i) Village Halls and Community Centres – Capital Grants

(27) In response to a question from Mr King, Mr Hill explained that the figure for Village Hall and Community Centres Capital Grants had been £300,000 for a number of years, it had then been increased four years ago to £450,000. However, experience had shown that there had been insufficient applications resulting in an underspend since this figure had been increased, and therefore it is proposed to reduce it back down to the £300,000 per year. Mr Shipton added that the reason only £173k of spend was shown for 2007/08 and £529k planned for 2008/09 was due to slippage of actual payments.

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(28) Concern was expressed by Members that the high cost of building a village hall and the difficulty of attracting funding from other bodies meant that the £100k cap on KCC contributions resulted in many schemes becoming unviable. Ms Honey agreed to circulate the criteria to Members.

(j) Risk Assessment – MTP Page 54

(29) In response to a question from Mr Christie, Ms Honey confirmed that there were a large number of staff within Communities who were employed for less than half time of the time of a full time equivalent, particularly in areas such as the Youth Services, Registration and Adult Education.

(30) RESOLVED

(1) that the Budget 2008-09 and Medium Term Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11 for the Community Services Portfolio be noted along with the responses made to the questions from Members;

(2) that the Managing Director of Communities and her staff be thanked for their hard work in achieving this proposed budget.

63. Select Committee – Topic Reviews - Update

(Item C1 – Report of the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the progress of the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse and the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme. Members were advised that the topic put forward by this Policy Overview Committee, “Provision of Activities for Young People” would be considered by the Policy Overview Co-ordinating on 14 February 2008 for inclusion in the work programme. The Committee emphasised their strong support for this topic being prioritised in the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme.

(2) RESOLVED:-

(a) the progress on the Select Committee for Alcohol Misuse be noted; and

(b) it be noted that an update on the topic “Provision of Activities for Young People” will be submitted to the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee on 14 February 2007 and that this Committee strongly supports its inclusion in the work programme.