

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 25 July 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs T Dean (Chairman), Mr G Cowan, Mr R F Manning, Mr D A Hirst, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr M J Jarvis, Mrs J P Law, Mr R J Lees, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr M J Northey, Mr J E Scholes, Mr C P Smith and Mr J R Bullock, MBE (Substitute for Mr R E King)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr D Farrell, Mr D Frost, Cllr Pam Hawkins, Ms T Miah, Mr L Knight and Mr D Nicholls

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms A Honey (Corporate Director, Customer and Communities), Ms A Slaven (Director of Service Improvement), Mr N Baker (Head of Kent Youth Service), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview)) and Mr A Webb (Research Officer to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2011 (Item A4)

(1) RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2011 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

29. Committee Membership (Item)

(1) The Chairman advised Members that Mrs Jean Law had replaced Mr Robert Brookbank on the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

30. Follow-up Items from Cabinet Scrutiny Committee (Item A5)

(1) Referring to the recommendation relating to the item KCC's Performance Management Framework, the Chairman explained that the meeting with the POSC Chairmen, Leader, Deputy Leader, Leaders of the other parties and Mr Lees was due to be held after the meeting of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee note the follow-up items report and responses to previous recommendations.

31. Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held on 15 July 2011 (Item A6)

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee approve the notes of the Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held on 15 July 2011.

32. Kent Youth Service - Commissioning Model Public Consultation

(Item C1)

Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member, Customer and Communities, Ms A Honey, Corporate Director, Customer and Communities, Ms A Slaven, Director of Service Improvement, Mr N Baker, Head of Integrated Youth Services, Mr D Farrell, Save Our Services, Ms T Miah, Chair of Kent Youth County Council, Mr D Frost, Maidstone Coalition of Resistance, Mr D Nicholls, National Secretary, Community and Youth Workers in Unite, Ms P Hawkins, District Councillor, Middle Deal & Sholden Ward, and Mr L Knight, Former Trustee, Aylesham Youth Club, were present for this item.

(1) Mr Hill introduced the item, explaining that:

- the decision taken at Cabinet was to consult
- it would be a genuine consultation, because it was what the young people of Kent deserved and what he and his officers needed to inform the proposals
- Kent had an excellent Youth Service, which he supported greatly
- rather than being driven by savings the proposals were an opportunity to reform, reshape and update the Youth service
- that the proposals were based on three important principles:
 - the 'jewels in the crown' (the Duke of Edinburgh Award, outdoor education and youth participation) would be preserved
 - a robust in-house service would be maintained; and
 - that the proposals would be fully discussed and consulted upon before implementation

(2) Mr Baker gave a presentation about the proposed new operating model of the Kent Youth Service (KYS), which covered:

- The challenge
- The proposal
- Rationale
- The offer
- The plan – direct delivery
- The plan – commissioning
- National context; and
- Consultation

(3) The external witnesses were then invited to give their statements:

Dara Farrell, MYP, Save Our Services

(4) Mr Farrell welcomed Mr Hill's comments on his approach to the consultation; he felt that there was great concern among young people across the county, having seen proposals which suggested that some youth centres were to close. He spoke of his own experience as a young person growing up in a single parent family in Stanhope, how involvement of the Youth Service had helped him go on to meet borough councillors, county councillors and MPs and then represent Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) all over Europe, whereas many of his peers had already done prison sentences.

(5) Mr Farrell expressed a view that, whilst he agreed that there should be a consultation, it should have been preceded by discussions with young people. He went on to express the following concerns:

- that the voluntary sector might not be supported by the use of Youth Service centres and the advice of staff in future
- that the number of street-based youth workers may be reduced; that the large number of valuable face-to-face contacts with young people would diminish; and that current level of provision and its corresponding benefits to young people would not be maintained
- that 'hubs' in the proposals were presumably chosen due to accessibility, but that other factors such as deprivation should have been taken into account
- that private companies and the voluntary sector would replace youth workers with three years of training, and that new providers would have to turn a profit

(6) In response to questions from Members, Mr Farrell also stated that:

- that more, rather than less, officers in the Youth Service should be working to help support the voluntary sector
- that money from sources such as Kent's Big Society Fund or the money being spent by Government on the National Citizen Service could be used to finance the Youth Service as an alternative to cuts
- that the Equality Impact Assessment could be more detailed, including the potential effects on local communities

Tamanna Miah, MYP, Chair of Kent Youth County Council

(7) Ms Miah felt that youth services presented life-changing opportunities and cited a study which showed that joining a youth club could improve educational attainment. She stated a number of other benefits of youth centres, including:

- that they provided somewhere for young people to go, and reduced incidences of young people congregating on the streets
- that they led to a reduction in antisocial behaviour

(8) Ms Miah expressed a view that young people should have been involved during the formulation of the proposals and urged that they be consulted and involved throughout the process. She was also concerned that the long term benefits which had resulted from investment in youth services may be lost, and made the point that investment in preventative services avoided costly interventions in future. Ms Miah was also worried about the quality of youth services being affected by the move to the commissioning model, as a result of voluntary and community sector youth workers not having the same level of training or experience as in-house staff. She suggested establishing young commissioner groups, in which young people would be trained to quality assure or inspect the services and to take part in the commissioning process.

(9) In response to questions from Members, Ms Miah also stated that she would be willing to get involved in the design and commissioning of services, that a group would be formed within KYCC to look at this and that young people would have a meaningful role to play.

Daniel Frost, Maidstone Coalition of Resistance against Cuts and Privatisation

(10) Mr Frost paid tribute to KYS, stating that it was delivered to a high standard and was a service of great value to the people of Kent. He referred to a user survey carried out by KYS in 2010, which found that 4 out of 5 respondents felt they had gained confidence as a result of the service and a majority found it easy to get to their nearest centre or project. Mr Frost expressed concern at the potential impact of the savings and felt that the proposals had not been thought through properly, and that some of the passages were vague.

(11) In reference to the proposals for Maidstone, Mr Frost conveyed his misgivings about a possible paucity of provision in relation to its large population of young people and its geographical area, and in particular a lack of accessibility to youth services for young people living in villages in the east of the borough. Referring to the £1.2m set aside for commissioning and the fact that this was a 'starting point', he expressed a view that the proposed model may end up costing more money than the current efficient system of direct delivery.

(12) In response to a number of questions from Members, Mr Frost also made the following points:

- that KCC's core provision existed precisely because there were no alternative providers willing or able to do so
- that KCC should have had conversations with potential providers, rather than assuming they would come forward to provide services
- that he had concerns that some providers, e.g church groups, may not be able to provide appropriate support to minority communities

Doug Nicholls, National Secretary, Community and Youth Workers in Unite

(13) Mr Nicholls stated that CYWU had always held KYS in high regard, and KYS had received good Ofsted reports despite comparatively low spend per capita. He referred to a recent Parliamentary Education Select Committee report which congratulated the youth services sector on making limited resources go a long way, and informed Members that, on average, every £1 spent on youth services generated £8 of spend in the voluntary sector, with investment in youth services avoiding higher spending in other services. Mr Nicholls also pointed out that per capita spend on youth services in Kent had declined in recent years, and that the proposals should be seen in the context of reducing the direct provision of an already depleted budget.

(14) Mr Nicholls welcomed a number of elements of the report, including:

- the consultation, and the union's opportunity to participate in the discussions
- the commitment to maintaining professional terms and conditions through the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) terms and conditions
- the commitment to informal education and personal and social education as the heart of youth work
- the recognition of youth work as a universal service, with open-access provision

(15) Mr Nicholls cited a number of examples of councils where commissioning out youth services had failed, including Bromley, Cumbria and Westminster; he felt this

demonstrated that there was no evidence that commissioning out services would work and there was a risk that it may end up costing more than the current model. He stated that organisations that were committed to youth services were already in partnership with their local council.

(16) In response to questions from Members, Mr Nicholls made a number of points, including:

- There was not money in the voluntary sector to replace any reduction in council funding; fund-raising formed part of youth workers' training and they would already be aware of any sources of funding available
- A range of potential providers were asked about moving into youth services by a Parliamentary Education Select Committee, and they had not demonstrated a will to do so
- Launching the consultation would not help identify new sources of funding or organisations wanting to become involved in youth services provision, due to the lack of funding and new companies in the sector
- Most youth centres were already contributed to by local volunteers and expecting them to run centres without the infrastructure and professional advice would be a retrograde step
- Studies had shown the benefits of youth services included reductions in crime, vandalism, teen pregnancy and anti-social behaviour, and that without positive activities, services such as police and health would have greater involvement.
- That he would not expect young people to travel to youth centres if there was a cost, or if they had to travel from one town to another
- That the consultation documents were comprehensive, well-argued and adequate to enable public discussion, but adaptation and clarification (particularly regarding what measures would compensate any reduction in front line delivery) would help ensure the proposals were popularly understood.

Councillor Pam Hawkins, District Councillor, Middle Deal & Sholden Ward

(17) Ms Hawkins spoke about the Linwood Youth Centre in Deal, how it had been successful as a youth centre, and how a number of groups also made use of the building. She expressed concern that if the centre was closed, the nearest hub under the proposals would be 9.5 miles away, and young people would be unlikely to travel there, and that outreach work would not be successful in reducing instances of young people hanging around on street corners. Ms Hawkins also spoke of the other organisations that used the centre, and the valuable work they had done, particularly in helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds. She felt that if there were reductions to the funding of youth services, it would impact on a whole generation of young people, as well as wider society.

(18) In response to questions from Members, Ms Hawkins made a number of points, including:

- Youth services in Kent were being run efficiently and should not be dismantled
- Bus services would not be adequate for young people in her area to travel 9.5 miles to the nearest proposed hub, and she felt that young people would tend only to go to a youth centre in walking distance

- Youth work undertaken by volunteers in her area could be expanded if there was adequate funding and safeguarding

Lawrence Knight, Former Trustee, Aylesham Youth Club

(19) Mr Knight, who had been involved in three charitable trusts in his community, advocated partnership with communities and innovation. He cited the example of Aylesham Youth Club, where a management committee took over financial responsibilities for the running of the club. Mr Knight also cited an example where a scrutiny meeting of Dover District Council had gone out into the community and spoken to young people to find out what they wanted, and he urged that young people be listened to during the consultation process.

(20) Mr Knight made the point that areas of deprivation would need to be considered as part of the proposals. He also spoke of the need to be realistic about the fact that there would not be lots of providers queuing up with funding to take over services. Mr Knight also felt it was important to know what provision already existed in communities, and cautioned that not every community had people who could draw up plans, etc.

(21) In response to a question about how the service could be made more efficient, Mr Farrell felt that the efficiencies that could have been made had been made and that trying to make further savings would result in a threadbare service, and Mr Frost felt that management savings would be the only option.

(22) The Chairman explained that the running order of questions would be as follows:

- Budget and/or other savings
- The shape of council provision that would remain under the proposals
- Commissioned services
- Other questions

Budget and/or other savings

(23) Responding to a question about what reductions would be made to the KYS budget, Mr Baker explained that:

- there would be a reduction in direct provision of £1.7m
- there would be an increase in partnership award grants to voluntary organisations from £360k to £1.2m (although more funding might be accessed, for example in partnership with district or borough councils)
- the net result would be a reduction of approximately £900k

(24) Referring to the written question submitted by Mr Copeland, the Chairman asked whether the Council could make a commitment to provide 50% of the capital funding required to open a Youth Café in the Stag in Sevenoaks. Mr Hill explained that he had a totally open mind and the purpose of the consultation was to consider any option which enabled Kent to deliver a first-class youth service.

(25) In response to a question about uncertainties related to the Localism Bill would be managed in relation to capital assets, Mr Hill explained that he would deal with the situation when it arose, and Mr Baker stated that this had been raised both in the

consultation documents and with colleagues in Property Group. Mr Baker explained that there were plans to take a paper to Cabinet for Members to consider with a list of options, including gifting a centre or providing a long term lease, before going to tender in early 2012.

(26) In respect of the source of the total budget, and whether this included Government funding, Mr Baker explained that it was mostly KCC-based, except the Early Intervention Grant (EIG) from Government, which had had the ring-fencing removed. The Government had committed to continue providing EIG funding into the future.

(27) Further detail in relation to the budget and savings was elicited during questions from Members, including that:

- the proposed reduction of staff by 64.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) related to approximately 190 staff, many of whom worked part time hours.
- current thinking was that the Big Society Fund would provide a mixture of loans and grants to community groups, but loans were favoured because they enabled funding to be recycled
- the 'skeleton service' which might be used to mitigate the risk of the required savings not being met in 2012/13 related to the service ceasing over the summer holidays and reverting to the 'core offer'
- the External Funding Officer kept track of the funding opportunities available and the budget would be supplemented by funding from Public Health, Kent Drug and Alcohol Team, the Youth Offending Service and others
- the only fixed points were having a better youth service and making a £900k saving, due to the fact that the Customer and Communities budget was being reduced by 35%

The shape of council provision that would remain under the proposals

(28) In response to questions from Members, Mr Baker stated that:

- the centres proposed as hubs were selected by the senior management team and representatives from the voluntary sector, using a number of criteria, which Mr Baker undertook to provide after the meeting (*post meeting note: paragraph 7.3 of Appendix A of the agenda papers contain these criteria*)
- the proposals included a balance of open access across the districts, with a commissioning budget which could be more targeted depending on the needs of the local community, including deprivation

Commissioned services

(29) Replying to a question about how buildings would be disposed of, if no alternative provider came forward, Mr Hill stated that it would be necessary to look at the circumstances in each area, but if a specific building was no longer required it would be sold.

(30) Referencing a point made at Cabinet about the possibility of greater capacity for commissioning from community organisations in more affluent areas, a question was asked how this might be managed. Mr Hill explained that the appetite in each area for provision by community organisations was not yet known, but that there might be

greater spirit in more deprived areas, and with targeted funding small investments could result in large returns. Ms Slaven added that, should the proposals go ahead, issues around where to target resources would be dealt with under the service specification process.

(31) In response to a query about what control the Council intended to exercise over the commissioning process, Mr Baker explained that:

- the Council was consulting on the needs analysis and outcomes framework that would be used with providers.
- Direct provision would continue to be delivered by professionally qualified youth workers, but it would be unlikely that professional qualifications would be an absolute requirement for commissioned providers
- the Council was committed to driving up quality across both direct and commissioned provision, including by use of a quality assurance framework
- two workforce development coordinators would be looking at training opportunities for staff across the service

(32) Ms Slaven made the point that the quality of provision in the voluntary sector was excellent, and she felt that there should be no implication that it was of a lower standard than that provided by KCC, although it would be important to ensure that quality was maintained through the appropriate award of contracts through the tendering process.

(33) Referring to examples cited earlier of other Councils where outsourcing youth services had not worked, a question was raised about whether this had been taken account during the formulation of the proposals. Mr Baker explained that he had spoken to Councils around the country, and many had looked at moving to a commissioning model, but it would be premature to draw conclusions either way although those who were further ahead with the process had already received significant interest from voluntary organisations.

(34) A number of other points were made in response to questions from Members, including that:

- Representatives from Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Services and Kent Youth had been consulted during the formulation of the proposals
- A supplementary finance sheet could be produced which would show investment in youth services additional to core funding
- A simpler document would be produced alongside the consultation documents which would contain the salient points of the proposals
- That the list of intended consultees was not exhaustive, and the police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and colleagues in parish councils were already involved

Other questions

(35) In response to further questions from the witnesses, the following points were made:

- The Christchurch youth centre would be considered in the same way as any other youth centre which may have to be disposed of under the proposals

- The Stag youth café had previously not been successful when put in front of the Youth Capital Fund for funding, but it would be reasonable to think about how youth work could be delivered in other settings
- There would be a clear role for quality assurance across both direct and commissioned provision, through a quality assurance framework and a programme of face-to-face visits

(36) The Chairman proposed, and Mr Cowan seconded, that the Committee recommend that a letter be written to Government suggesting that a dedicated, ring-fenced fund be allocated for youth work in the future. The motion was not carried.

(37) The Chairman proposed and Mr Cowan seconded, that the Committee require implementation of the decision to be postponed, pending reconsideration of the matter in the light of the Committee's comments by Cabinet. The motion was not carried.

(38) Mr Manning proposed and Mr Bullock seconded, that the Committee express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision. The motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee:

(39) Thank Mr Hill, Ms Honey, Ms Slaven, Mr Baker, Mr Farrell, Ms Miah, Mr Frost, Mr Nicholls, Cllr Hawkins and Mr Knight for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions.

(40) Welcome the undertaking given by the Cabinet Member that the comments and suggestions made had been noted and would be incorporated, possibly as an appendix, into the main consultation document. Furthermore, welcome the assurance given by the Cabinet Member that a succinct and user-friendly summary would also accompany the main consultation proposals.