

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 23 May 2007.

PRESENT: Dr M R Eddy (Chairman), Mr D Smyth (Vice-Chairman), Mr A R Bassam, Mr C J Capon, Mr C Hart, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr P W A Lake, Mr C J Law, Mr T A Maddison (substitute for Mr R Truelove), Mrs M Newell, Mr M J Northey (substitute for Mr J B O Fullarton), Mr G Rowe (substitute for Mrs T Dean) and Mrs P A V Stockell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wale, Assistant to the Chief Executive and Mr S C Ballard, Head of Democratic Services.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Membership

Members noted that Mr R Truelove had been appointed to serve on the Committee in place of Mr R J E Parker.

2. Minutes

(Item A2)

- (1) Mr Capon queried why Minute 73 (Kent TV) did not include his question asking the Chief Executive whether he had thought of seeking the views of KCC staff on his performance. The Head of Democratic Services explained that the Minutes were not a verbatim report and aimed only to summarise the main issues raised by Members on each item.
- (2) RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee – Standing Report to May 2007

(Item A3 – Report by Assistant to the Chief Executive)

RESOLVED that the report on the actions taken as a result of the Committee's decisions at previous meetings, and the updated report on progress with Select Committee Topic Reviews, be noted.

4. Directorate Business Plans 2007/08

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that three separate Informal Member Groups (1/1/1 – Members to be nominated by the Group Spokesmen) be established to review the following Unit Business Plans for 2007/08 during the autumn and then report back to the Committee:-

1. Kent Highway Services (E&R)
2. Libraries and Archives (Comms)
3. Community Safety (Comms)

5. DfES Consultation on Schools, Early Years and 14-16 Funding
(Item C1)

- (1) Mr N J D Chard, Cabinet Member for Finance; Dr T R Robinson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families; Ms L McMullan, Director of Finance and Mr K Abbott, Director, Finance and Corporate Services, Children, Families and Education Directorate attended the meeting to brief the Committee on this matter.
- (2) Following presentations by Ms McMullan and Mr Abbott, Members discussed the issues raised with the Cabinet Members and officers. Mr Chard said that he would welcome suggestions from the Committee for points to be included in the County Council's response to the DfES.
- (3) RESOLVED that:-
 - a) Mr Chard, Dr Robinson, Ms McMullan and Mr Abbott be thanked for attending the meeting and briefing Members, with particular congratulations to Ms McMullan and Mr Abbott on the clarity of their presentations;
 - b) The Cabinet Members for Finance and Education & School Improvement be requested to include in KCC's response to the consultation paper, the points agreed by the Committee as set out in Appendix 1 to these Minutes; and
 - c) The Cabinet Member for Finance's agreement that KCC's response to the Consultation Paper should be circulated to all Members of the Committee be welcomed.

DfES Consultation on Schools, Early Years and 14-16 Funding

Points recommended by the Committee for inclusion in the KCC response to be sent to the DfES in respect of their consultation on Schools, Early Years and 14-16 Funding:-

1. General

1.1 The School Funding system must not be altered in isolation. The DfES should work with the Treasury and the DCLG to ensure that local authority funding is considered in the round.

2. Distribution of Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG)

2.1 Future DSG distribution should be on the basis of "Spend Plus" rather than a return to the old formula-based system.

2.2 The clawback of DSG after its distribution each year must be ended, so the move to an October count for school pupils is supported, as this would allow the final DSG figure to be known earlier. An October count for Early Years pupils should also be introduced as soon as possible.

2.3 More effective targeting of deprivation through the use of more accurate commercially-produced indicators, such as MOSAIC, is supported.

3. Schools Funding

3.1 To impose a 5% levy on school reserves would create a perverse incentive for schools to spend their reserves on non-essential items. In any case, the new balance control mechanism has not yet been given a proper chance to bed in. If there is to be a levy on school reserves then there must be a clear definition of how the resulting savings should be recycled back into schools funding.

3.2 The proposal for 3-year budgets for schools is supported.

4. Specialist Vocational Diplomas at 14-16

4.1 A specific grant for funding Specialised Vocational Diplomas at 14-16 is supported, but there are concerns that all or most of the additional funding thus provided could be clawed back by a requirement on schools to make 3% per annum efficiency savings.

5. Funding the Free Entitlement for Under 5's

5.1 Concerns should be expressed about the additional costs likely to arise from bringing the funding systems for the maintained and the PVI Early Years sectors into line.

5.2 In calculating DSG for Early Years pupils, the DfES should assume that all eligible children will take up a place. This would reflect Government policy on Early Years provision.