

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 14 November 2008.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice-Chairman), Mr R B Burgess, Ms S J Carey (Substitute for Mr J D Simmonds), Mr B R Cope, Mr J A Davies, Mrs T Dean, Mr C G Findlay, Mr R W Gough, Mr J E Scholes and Mr D Smyth

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A J King, MBE, Mr R A Marsh and Mr R J Parry

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Bole (Head Of I C T Commissioning), Miss J Clarke (Head Of Communications & Media Centre), Mr D Cockburn (Executive Director, Strategy, Economic Development & ICT), Mr P Kennedy (Resources Manager), Mr M Lemon (Head of Policy), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Ms T Oliver (Director Of Strategic Development And Public Access), Ms M Peachey (Kent Director Of Public Health), Geoff Wild (Director of Law and Governance), Mr A Wood (Head of Financial Management) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

111. Minutes

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

112. Chairman's Announcements

(Item)

(1) The Chairman referred to a very helpful paper which had been prepared by Mr R Hardy and sent to all Members of the Policy Overview Committee following consideration of the Complaints item at the September meeting.

(2) All Policy Overview Committees had been asked to consider whether or not they wished to set up an Informal Member Group to look at the Medium Term Plan in more detail and identify priorities and areas for savings. He emphasised that Policy Overview Committees could choose whether or not to have such a group and that discussion at it would supplement and not replace discussion of the Medium Term Plan at the main meeting.

(3) Mrs T Dean added that she and Dr M Eddy had recently attended a meeting with the Leader and Mr A J King about the Policy Overview Committees trialling pre-scrutiny. The Leader had welcomed the idea and would shortly be writing to all Policy Overview Committees about it.

113. Financial Monitoring Report: Corporate Services 2008/09

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Wood introduced the report and pointed out that there had been very little change in the projected outturn since the last meeting, the one small increase being in Democratic Services due to the demands of covering the education appeals season.

(2) In response to a Member's question, he confirmed that the £200,000 saving shown against Kent TV was a genuine saving and had not been generated by the timing of funding. He offered to provide a public/press statement, with the Head of Corporate Communications, to clarify the situation and avoid public misunderstanding.

(3) RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the Directorate be noted.

114. Medium Term Financial Plan - 2009/10 to 2011/12: Chief Executive's Directorate

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Wood introduced the report and emphasised that the report did not make any recommendations of where savings should be achieved as Members were asked to offer suggestions in the meeting or at the IMG. He said that the target savings figure for the Directorate was approximately £6-7m. He and colleagues from the Business Units who were also present answered questions of detail from Members. In discussion, Members highlighted the following concerns:-

- (a) The pace of recent economic change was unprecedented and KCC needed to support and reassure the public and the local business economy at a time of great fear and uncertainty. The public would also need somewhere to go for reliable information.
- (b) It was important not to overlook the scope to identify and bring forward items which would be of financial benefit to the County Council for the future, and to look at opportunities as well as threats.
- (c) It was important to look at decisions about services from the public's point of view and consider how the decisions to be taken would appear to the public.

(3) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted, and pressure set out in Appendix 4 to the report, be acknowledged.

At the end of the meeting, Members agreed to establish an Informal Member Group to look in more detail at the Medium Term Plan and address what is asked in recommendation (c) of the report, namely, to identify and express Members' relative priorities for services and to indicate, broadly, areas and type of savings, efficiencies and income generation that Members consider could realistically be achieved.

115. Effect of the Downturn in the Economy on Corporate Services

(Item B3)

(1) Mr Wood introduced the report and emphasised that Corporate Services and the Chief Executive's Departments' budgets would not be immune from the effects of the rapid change in the national economy.

(2) Members noted that this item was very closely related to the previous items on today's Agenda and the discussion at the Informal Member Group would need to take account of all the related issues.

(3) RESOLVED that the impact that the current economic condition is having, or could have, on the Chief Executive Department's budgets be noted.

116. Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

(Item B4)

(1) Mr Bole introduced the report and answered detailed questions from Members about service provision. He pointed out that KCC's IT team/centre had been awarded a new "Standard of Excellence" award (previously the Charter Mark).

(2) In discussion, Members paid tribute to IT staff for their efficient, patient and sympathetic approach when helping Members with IT problems, and expressed concern that many IT staff are called upon to attend KCC premises out of hours and at weekends to address problems with the system. This attendance was not covered in their contracts of employment and Members expressed the view that sufficient resources should be allocated to cover the service which was expected.

(3) Members also expressed disappointment at the failure of the KCC e-mail system for two and a half working days, plus a weekend, which did not support the Council's stated expectation that all Members subscribe to and use the KCC's central e-mail system.

(4) RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted.