

ASSESSMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEW

* - sections to be filled in by the proposer of the topic

*Subject of Proposed Review:- Biodiversity

*Reason for the Review:-

Enquiries from a couple of constituents initially caused me to have a look at KCC's current strategy with regards biodiversity. In fact, while we have done work on this within other studies, the County Council does not have a biodiversity strategy per se. However (see accompanying document), the council does have a statutory obligation to ensure biodiversity is appropriately considered through all council functions.

I then explored the Select Committee model with a number of experienced members and officers to gain their perspective on the value of these committees and their experiences with previous ones. The feedback was mostly favourable.

I also consulted with a couple of individuals involved in biodiversity projects within the county, including one (ex-RSPB South-East) who has worked on the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (KBAP) (www.kentbap.org.uk). His view was that: "Anything that furthers our understanding and consequent preservation of sites and species in Kent can only be a good thing - and there is no reason why KCC shouldn't be a main player in the process".

I also met with KCC's own relevant officers, comprising Sarah Anderson (Flood Risk and Natural Environment Manager) and William Moreno (Senior Biodiversity Projects Manager).

I wanted to see if these experts, inside and outside of KCC, felt that a Select Committee on biodiversity would be a valuable addition to the current work that is going on across Kent. Again, the feedback was positive and Sarah prepared the attached document that eloquently sets out the case for a Biodiversity Select Committee.

*Issues to be covered by the Terms of Reference:-

1. To build on existing council and external expertise to bring biodiversity considerations to the fore in more of the council's decision-making.
2. To better inform decision-making on the value of biodiversity in relation to the county's economy, health and well-being (in the latter, for instance, the study could consider the preventative benefits of biodiversity and the resultant long-term cost savings).
3. To consider how KCC can support current and future external biodiversity projects.
4. To study the potential for improving biodiversity across the council's existing and future estate.
5. To consider how KCC can improve awareness of biodiversity across Kent, including through mainstream education.

***Scope of the review:-**

To study current biodiversity initiatives, inside and outside KCC, to identify where KCC can add value in relation to the Terms of Reference, above. This would include consideration of funding opportunities where specific projects and gaps are identified.

The Select Committee would produce a report and presentation for full council setting out its findings and proposals. Via KCC's communications team, it would also publicise the study and final, approved, report.

***Purpose and objectives of the Review:-**

The aim is fundamentally to bring the vital area of biodiversity into greater focus and give it better importance in decision-making than at present. Many of the worrying trends set out in the attached document appear to be accelerating (such as loss of farmland bird species, moths and butterflies) but biodiversity is at the centre of our legacy to future generations, plus having a pivotal role in the current economic prosperity, physical and mental health and wellbeing of our residents.

Proposer of the review - (Please print name and sign)

Martin Whybrow (Independent Group/Green Party, member for Hythe)

To be completed by the Directorate/Cabinet Member(s)

Are there any reasons why this review should not be put forward for inclusion in the work programme for 2014/16? (see Note 2 below)

No

Will the review support the achievement of "Facing the Challenge"? If yes, please identify aim(s) and give details:-

Integrating Services: As identified through the development of a Sustainability Assessment as part of our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the work of organisations and partnerships such as the Kent Nature Partnership, the delivery of biodiversity objectives can significantly improve health and wellbeing outcomes (as well as economic opportunities) and this review can provide an opportunity to identify where there are opportunities for delivery and support of multiple objectives across the organisation.

How will the review contribute to corporate objectives and priorities?

Through this review, the Select Committee could contribute to a number of corporate objectives and strategies including:

Kent Environment Strategy: Growing the Garden of England, A strategy for environment and economy in Kent commits Kent County Council and partners to 'value our natural, historic and living environment - optimising the real economic and social benefits of high environmental quality while protecting and enhancing the unique natural and built-in character of Kent'.

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy: In outcome 2 (Effective prevention of ill health by people taking responsibility for their health and wellbeing) it is acknowledged that for a robust delivery of the strategy, wider factors affecting short and long term physical and mental health need to be considered including access to green space.

The Council also holds responsibilities under the Biodiversity Duty of the NERC Act (2006) to ensure biodiversity is appropriately considered throughout all Council functions.

How will this review have an impact on KCC policy development and/or help to influence national policy?

Through undertaking a review of the value of biodiversity and the services it provides to Kent's economy and resident's health and wellbeing, KCC will be better placed to identify opportunities and risks and integrate these into policies and strategies as appropriate. In addition, the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for KCC will inform KCC policy

development and can also influence national policy.

Biodiversity 2020 is a national strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. It sets out the Government's ambition to halt overall loss of England's biodiversity by 2020, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for the benefit of wildlife and people. The Kent Nature Partnership has developed targets for Kent which contribute towards Biodiversity 2020, but the role of Kent County Council in its delivery could be better refined through this review.

There are a series of policies and guidance from Central Government, for example biodiversity offsetting and payment for ecosystem services. However these are in the main in pilot stage and so this review could further inform national policy development through feeding back learning to Government and prepare us for any future legislation on this.

How will this review add value to the County Council and residents of Kent?

There are significant opportunities for a review into biodiversity to add value to the County Council and residents of Kent. Biodiversity and the natural environment is a key part of Kent's unique character, which draws people to live, work and visit adding to the county's economy. A healthy natural environment provides a number of services and systems that add to society and the economy, such as flood management, water and air regulation, agriculture and natural resource commodities, climate change mitigation, recreation and tourism and health and wellbeing. A series of examples have been given in the supporting document to this form but in summary:

Economic: The economic benefits of biodiversity and a healthy natural environment are well documented on a national level and this review could provide an opportunity to further refine the many local benefits provided and embed these into our strategies and planning as appropriate.

Health and Wellbeing: With the integration of Health and Social Care, there are significant opportunities for the Council to consider how biodiversity and the natural environment can support the health and wellbeing of Kent's residents and where opportunities may arise for long term cost savings through prevention of ill health from improved access to quality green space and the benefits this can bring.

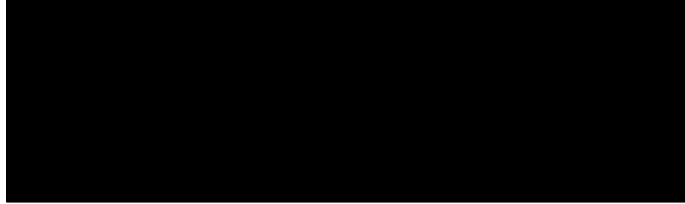
KCC Estate: There are potential opportunities for improving biodiversity across the county through assessing potential measures that could be integrated into the management of the current and proposed KCC estate. This could provide significant opportunities to improve networks across the county to benefit wildlife, reduce maintenance costs and, in addition, can support health and wellbeing of those who use the buildings (see health and wellbeing). In addition, through integration of biodiversity considerations at the outset of planning and decision making, it is more likely that planning requirements will be met, saving time and money in the long term.

Does the review need to be completed within a specific timeframe? If yes, please give details:

No

Any additional comments from the Portfolio Holder/Corporate Director:-

Portfolio Holder's Signature:-



Strategic Director's Signature:-

Contact Officer:-

Date:-

