

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Communities Policy Overview Committee held in the The Village Hall - Kent Life (Formally the Museum of Kent Life), Lock Lane, Sandling, Maidstone , ME14 3AU on Wednesday, 25 March 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs S V Hohler (Chairman), Mr T J Birkett (Vice-Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr G Cowan, Mr A R Chell, Mr D A Hirst, Mr R E King, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr M J Northey, Mrs E D Rowbotham, Mr G Rowe and Mr C T Wells

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Bainbridge (Director of Community Safety & Regulatory Services), Mrs G Bromley (Strategic Manager, Libraries and Archives), Mr D Crilley (Director of Community Cultural Services), Ms J Edwards (Director of Policy and Resources), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)), Ms A Honey (Managing Director Communities), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance and Asset Management), Ms A Slaven (Director Youth Services and KDAAT) and Mrs S Sparks (Strategic Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

119. Membership

(Item A1)

It was noted that Mr D Brazier had replaced Mrs E Tweed as a member of this Committee

120. Minutes - 13 January 2009

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

121. Portfolio Holder and Managing Director's Update

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Hill and Ms Honey gave an update based on the list of topics that they had circulated with the papers for the meeting and answered questions from Members, which included :-

Turner Contemporary

(2) In response to a question from Mr Birkett, Mr Hill confirmed that the partnership took the issue of parking for visitors to Turner Contemporary very seriously and that he and Ms Honey had met with the Leader and Chief Executive of Thanet District Council and had raised this matter.

Youth Services

(4) As a result of questions from Mrs Rowbotham, officers undertook to provide her with a briefing note on the qualified youth worker vacancy at the Aylesham Youth Club, including access to application forms.

(5) In relation to the HOUSE project, Ms Honey confirmed that the outcomes from this project were being evaluated. One of the factors to emerge so far was that the most popular day for young people to use it was Saturday. The Youth Service would be reflecting on this and other findings from the project when they were available. In response to questions, Ms Honey explained that if staff were required to work in a different way this would be subject to negotiation with the unions.

RESOLVED that the update be noted and a report be submitted to a future meeting on apprenticeships, including the strategy and action plan.

122. Financial Monitoring Report : Community Services 2008/09

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Shipton presented the regular report to this Committee on the forecast outturn against budget for the Communities portfolio based on the third quarterly monitoring report and subsequent exception report to Cabinet. Officers answered questions from Members on this report.

(2) Regarding the overspend on the Coroners' Service, Mr Bainbridge stated that he had met with a senior official in the Ministry of Justice. It was hoped that the Coroners' bill would alleviate some of the problems which had led to an overspend. He stated that the Local Government Association were of the view that this service should be directly funded by central government.

(3) Mr Shipton clarified that the £612k net overspend on central costs related to one off costs in the central budget.

(4) In relation to a question, Ms Slaven undertook to provide Members with a briefing note on the decision making process for allocating monies from the Youth Opportunities Fund.

(5) In response to a comment on vacancy management, Ms Honey explained that the Directorate did not have a blanket approach to this and acknowledged that in some areas, such as the youth service, it was crucial to maintain staffing levels and this approach stipulated that there should be no impact on frontline service delivery. She emphasised that vacancy management was about extending the period between someone leaving a post and a new person being recruited.

(6) Ms Slaven undertook to provide Members with a briefing note on the Youth Service's succession planning, including trainee youth workers and apprenticeships.

(7) RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the directorate for 2008/09, based on the third quarterly monitoring report to Cabinet, be noted.

123. An Alcohol Strategy for Kent

(Item B3)

(1) Ms Slaven presented the draft Alcohol Strategy for Kent which sets out the way forward for agencies across Kent to work in partnership to prevent the harm caused by alcohol misuse. It aimed to provide a structure for the development of treatment programmes, a preventative strategy for adults and young people and a community approach to issues such as policing, licensing and trading standards. It set in context the current resource allocation and the improvements necessary to ensure that the County of Kent has in place an effective and responsive system. Members asked questions and made comments, which included the following:-

- The work of the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse was commended for recommending the development of an alcohol strategy for partnership working in this complex area.
- The amount of important work done by the voluntary sector was highlighted, and the County Council should look at how we can help and support them in their work.
- Concern was expressed about the different levels of service provision between East and West Kent.
- It was pointed out that there tended to be a focus on dealing with the high profile aspects of alcohol misuse, but this was only the tip of the iceberg as there were a lot of hidden problems.
- The importance of GPs being trained to recognise underlying alcohol problems was highlighted, so when patients presented with other symptoms it would enable them to signpost early intervention. There should therefore be a stronger mention in the strategy of training for GPs in alcohol awareness and interventions available.
- In relation to the results of the trading standards test purchases (page 22) these were targeted at areas where it was believed there was an issue with underage drink purchase. Mr Bainbridge explained the outcomes for those that were found to be selling drink to underage purchasers.
- The inequality of funding for alcohol misuse treatment and prevention measures compared with other substance misuse was emphasised.
- Mention was made of the importance of young women being made aware of the damage to fertility that binge drinking can cause.
- There was a need for agencies to work together to help mitigate the adverse effect that alcohol misuse can have on families.
- The effective way that the HOUSE project had been used to put over messages to young people about the adverse effects of alcohol misuse was commented upon.
- It was important that successful local projects were rolled out across the county.
- The positive tone of the strategy was welcomed.

(2) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the contents of the strategy and the comments made by Members, be noted; and
- (b) the progress of the strategy to broader consultation with partners and communities be noted.

124. Draft Hidden Harm Strategy

(Item B4)

(1) Ms Slaven introduced a report on the draft Hidden Harm Strategy for Kent which focused on delivering improvements in outcomes for children and young people who were affected by drug and alcohol misuse by their parent or carers. Members asked questions and made comments, which included the following:-

- Concern was expressed about the possible duplication between this strategy and the Alcohol Strategy. Ms Slaven explained that the Hidden Harm Strategy arose from the abuse and harm to children and young people as a direct result of substance misuse, and there was no duplication of effort with the two strategies, which were cross referenced to each other during their development.
- In response to a question on why the Strategy did not cover the effect of smoking on children in a family setting, Ms Slaven stated that the Hidden Harm Strategy was about the direct physical and psychological impact of substance misuse on children and young people.
- A Member stated that although, a large number of children who ended up as looked after children were in that situation as a result of substance misuse, at adoption hearings there was very little mention of this factor.
- At the bottom of page 42 there is mention of the number of looked after children in Kent but there is no context around this.
- Members highlighted the need to overcome the fear of both children and parents that if the substance misuse problem were revealed, and help sought then the family may be split up, was highlighted. Maybe there is a need for a body that is semi-independent of social services to which those involved could turn as this may help to mitigate this fear.
- The emphasis on the child, rather than the family as a whole, made it difficult to tackle these challenging issues.

(2) RESOLVED that the comments made by Members be noted and this Committee receive a final version of the Strategy, and consequent action plan, together with periodic reports on progress.

125. Integrated Youth Support Strategy

(Item B5)

(1) Ms Slaven introduced a report which summarised the content and progress of the Integrated Youth Support Strategy and its accompanying implementation plan. The strategy and implementation plan were subject to formal consultation through the Kent Children's Trust Partnerships. Both documents were circulated with the report.

(2) Members commended this as an excellent strategy which complemented the work of the recent Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People.

RESOLVED that the development and progress of the Integrated Youth Support Strategy and the implementation plan be noted.

126. National Year of Reading (NYR): a Legacy beyond 2008

(Item B6)

(1) Mr Crilley and Mrs Bromley presented a report which highlighted achievements and activity in Kent during the National Year of Reading (NYR), with a particular focus on the contribution made by services in Communities. They also confirmed proposals to develop and implement a Reading and Literacy Strategy in order to maintain the momentum that has been developed.

(2) Members welcomed the report and the proposed strategy. They made a number of suggestions including the possibility of having mobile libraries visit schools at the end of the day when parents were collecting children. Also mentioned was 'Oi' magazine, which was produced by young people for young people, and the possibility of this being available in libraries, in addition to an increase in the number of other magazines for young people.

(3) RESOLVED that the activity that has taken place in Kent during the National Year of Reading and the continuing momentum of this work be noted.

127. Museum of Kent Life

(Item B7)

(Mr Brazier declared a personal interest in the above item as KCC's representative on the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Kent Life and remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion on this item.)

(1) Mr Crilley and Mrs Sparks introduced an update report on the transfer of the Museum of Kent Life to a commercial operating company (Continuum). Mr Brazier, Chairman of the Trustees, set out the background to this, from the Trust's perspective, and stated that the staff and friends of the museum were happy with the new arrangements. It was noted that the improvements made to the site and the publicity would result in an increase in visitor figures from 60k last year to an anticipated 100K this year.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

128. Equalities and Diversity

(Item B8)

(1) Ms Edwards presented a report which set out the Directorate's priorities for action relating to Equality and Diversity in 2009/11, in the context of national and corporate changes.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

129. Select Committees - update

(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which brought them up to date with the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People, which had just produced its report and would be submitting it to Cabinet and County Council meeting shortly. Suggestions for future topic reviews were also invited.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the recommendations, as set out in the executive summary to the report of the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People, be endorsed and

(b) Members email suggestions for potential Select Committee Topic Reviews to the Democratic Services Officer for consideration by the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee.