

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview Committee held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday 27 March 2008.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Ms A Harrison (Vice-Chairman), Mr R H C Bliss, Mr R B Burgess, Mr B R Cope, Mr J A Davies, Mrs T Dean, Mr C Findlay, Mr J I Muckle, Mr R Parry, Mr J E Scholes, Mr J Simmonds and Mr D Smyth

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P Carter, Leader, Mr N Chard, Cabinet Member for Finance, Mr A King, Cabinet Member for Policy and Performance and Mr G Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Public Health

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Fitch, Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

77. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman subject to it Minute no 80(h) being amended by the addition of "The peer review would be used across Directorates."

78. Notes from the meeting of the Local Petitions and Call for Action IMG held on 20 February 2008.

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the notes be noted

79. Financial Monitoring Report: Corporate Services 2007/08

(Item B1 – Ms L McMullan, Director of Finance and Mr A Wood, Head of Financial Management were present for this item)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the projected outturn figures for the Chief Executive's Directorate as at the third quarter.

(2) In relation to Capital Receipts and the £20 Anticipated in the Medium Term Financial Plan for the 2007/08 financial year, Mr Wood reported that as at the end of the previous week approximately £15m had been realised and it was hoped that the remaining £5m would come in before the end of the financial year.

(3) Mr Gilroy undertook to share the final draft of the Kent Works review with this Committee.

(4) Ms McMullan and Mr Wood questions from Members on the CED Budget Monitoring report.

(5) Issues covered by Members included the following:-

- In response to a question from Ms Harrison, Mr Wood confirmed that £3.3m from the Kent Property Enterprise Fund had been used as a one-off payment to support the 07/08 revenue budget. Ms McMullan explained the process for using the £3.3m Capital Receipt from the Kent Fund to support the revenue budget.
- In relation to a question on the remaining amount of the target for Capital Receipts, Mr Wood stated that this was looked at each quarter along with corporate property and consideration was given as to when the spend was likely to happen. He emphasised that KCC always ensured that it was getting the best market price for the asset even if this meant that it was not realised within the target period. .
- In response to a question from Ms Dean, Ms Oliver confirmed that “What’s On in Kent” was hosted by Kent TV but there could be a Link from Kent.gov to this.
- In relation to a question from Mrs Dean on Capital Receipts for Building Schools for the Future Programme, Mr Wood stated that there was a total capital receipts target of £187m in the Medium Term Plan which needed to be delivered. Where a back-to-back receipt cannot be delivered until new provision was in place, prudential borrowing was built in to the revenue budget to reflect the need for short-term bridging finance. A new group was being set up to look closely at how the £187m was being delivered.
- In relation to a question on the percentage allowed for disposal costs, Mr Wood confirmed that the figure that officers normally worked to was an average of 5% but it varied depending on the scheme and sometimes it was necessary to spend more on disposal to gain a higher receipt.
- In response to a question on the underspend on personnel and development in two key areas, Mr Gilroy confirmed that the contract for health checks was in place and the programme was due to be implemented before the end of Spring.
- In response to a question from Mr Hotson on how much the Council had made from interest earned on cash balances, Mr Wood confirmed that it was approximately £3.5m above the budget figure. Ms McMullan explained the work of her Treasury team and how they worked with a company called Butlers on a daily basis. Butlers also reviewed KCC’s Treasury function on an annual basis.
- In response to a question from Mrs Dean on how the £3.5m gained from the financial markets had been dealt with in the budget process, Ms McMullan stated that the 08/09 budget fully reflected this higher level of interest income. She confirmed that there was a total underspend of £7m.

- Mrs Dean asked whether at a future meeting the Committee could receive a list of land to be disposed of she acknowledge that this would need to be an exempt paper.

(6) RESOLVED that the projected outturn figures for the directorate as at the third quarter be noted.

80. Kent-Virginia Project and Smithsonian Festival Outcomes
(Item B2)

(1) Mr King presented a report which reminded Members that at Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 12 December 2007 it was decided that the International Activities Annual Report 2006-7 should be referred to Corporate Policy Overview Committee for consideration of whether the expenditure on Kent/Virginia and Smithsonian represented 'good value for money.'

(2) The report provided an update on the successes and outcomes of the Kent-Virginia Project and Kent's participation in the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

(3) Mr King answered questions from Members which included the following issues:-

- In response to a question from Ms Harrison relating to whether a cost benefit analysis had been carried out prior to Kent involvement, Mr King replied that when KCC began its search for a United States partner in 1999, they did not do a cost benefit analysis as there was nobody else doing this type of thing to compare with. This was Kent being innovative in the truest sense. Looking at the specific example of the Smithsonian KCC looked at the evidence that was available in Scotland in relation to the tourism impact of working with the US. He stated the sometimes it was necessary to take a long term view of outcomes.
- Mr King in response to a question from Mr Smyth stated that although the direct flights from Kent to Virginia had not been successful, it had put the idea in people's minds which was worthwhile.
- In response to a question from Mrs Dean, Mr King stated that he did not think that the 40 participants at the Smithsonian Folk Festival had suffered significant financial loss but he undertook to confirm this writing. He also stated that the traders were aware in advance that the Smithsonian put a 50% mark up on goods. Going to the Smithsonian Folk Festival was part of the process of developing trade connections and Linkages between Virginia and Kent.

(4) The Chairman congratulated Mr King and his small team for their achievements.

(5) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report and comments made by Members be noted

- (b) the successes of the Kent-Virginia Project and Kent's participation at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 be endorsed.
- (c) it be noted that the Annual International Report would be submitted to either the June or the September 2008 meeting of this Committee.

81. Gateways Update

(Item B3 – Ms T Oliver, Head of Strategic Development Unit was present for this item)

(1) Ms Oliver introduced a report which updated Members on the progress of the Gateways across Kent and presented feedback from users.

(2) Mr Gilroy and Ms Oliver answered questions from Members which covered the following issues:-

- It was noted that the possibility of Gateways being involved with Kent Health Watch had been raised at the meeting of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 26 March 2008. Ms Oliver stated that Gateways could be as involved if required and in any case could signpost to Health Watch.
- In response to a question from Mr Simmonds on whether Gateways could assist with the issue of rural post offices, Ms Oliver referred to the Gateway in Tenterden and the post office which had been going to close anyway. She stated that she was not sure that Gateways were the answer to solving the post office situation in rural areas, Gateways are aimed mainly at high footfall areas. Mobile Gateways could perhaps carry out some of the non monetary roles of post offices in rural communities but to use them for the monetary role would raise security issues.
- Members who had a knowledge of Gateways in their area stated how helpful they were as a referral point for the public.
- Ms Oliver, in reply to a question from Mr Smyth regarding Ashford Borough Councils financial contribution to the Gateway, stated that when the original Ashford Gateway had been set up there was not a financial commitment required from Ashford Borough Council. However, the new Gateway which was part of the library development and being led by the Communities Directorate and the Gateway team was pursuing these discussions.
- In response to a question from Mr Smyth relating to whether the new Ashford Gateway would have conference rooms as the original one did, Mr Oliver explained that the original idea of putting conference rooms in the Ashford Gateway was to generate income from the private sector. However, in reality these rooms were mainly used by KCC and Ashford Borough Council staff. There will be interview rooms available in the new Gateway but discussions were ongoing as to whether having conference rooms was a good use of space.

- In response to another question from a Member, Ms Oliver stated that it was important to manage the flow of customers and to have the right services in the right place. She stated that they were mapping the customer profile and were looking for external funding to do this in more detail, thereby learning more about their customer base.
- In relation to a question from Mr Muckle on the engagement of Dartford Borough Council with Gateways, Ms Oliver stated that Dartford Borough Council had been approached by the Gateway team but at this stage, the council were not keen to engage in Gateway discussions. All other district and borough councils were engaged in discussion although they were at different stages.

(3) Mr Gilroy invited Members to visit the new Margate Gateway. He stated that attempts were being made to negotiate with Government departments to ask them to consider decentralise some of their services so that they could be accessed via Gateways.

(4) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members be noted

82. Draft Communication Strategy

(Item B4 – Ms T Oliver, Head of Strategic Development Unit was present for this item)

(1) Ms Oliver presented the draft Communication Strategy and update on the consultation process so far. A copy of the draft strategy was circulated with the papers for the meeting. She confirmed that the Draft Communication Strategy needed to be finalised by the summer. She emphasised that this was an early draft and welcome comments.

(2) Members made comments on the draft strategy which included the following:-

- Ms Harrison reminded Members that there were two informal Member Groups, one on Member Information and the other on Member Development. The Leader stated that in relation to the two Member IMG's he saw them producing separate pieces of work to this draft communication strategy.
- Mr Smyth whether the Strategic Communications Board mentioned on Page 10 had any Member participation. Ms Oliver replied that the Chairman was Mr Gilroy and there were Members of the Directorate Management Team in addition there was Mr King as Portfolio Holder. Mr Smyth stated that it would be helpful to have a representative from both the Labour and Liberal Democrat Group on the Strategic Communications Board. *The Leader confirmed that he was happy to have additional Members from other Groups on the Board.*
- In relation to Member Information, the importance of Members receiving relevant information in a timely manner was emphasised.

- Also mentioned was the need for including reference to Freedom of Information.
- Mr Davis raised the issue of the KCC branding the importance of ensuring that the logo was not amended but used in its correct form.
- Members mentioned the need to ensure that the final document did not contain jargon which was one of the issues raised in the strategy itself.

(3) Members were invited to submit any additional comments to hollie.snelson@kent.gov.uk

(4) It was suggested that the strategy should be considered by the other Policy Overview Committees.

(2) RESOLVED that the draft strategy and the comments made by Members be noted.

83. Kent Health Watch

(Item B5 –Mr M Lemon, Policy Manager, Kent Department of Public Health was present for this item.)

(1) Mr Gibbons presented a report which updated Members on progress towards the implementation of Kent Health Watch following discussions between the Chief Executives of KCC and the two Kent Primary Care Trusts. Mr Lemon reported that he would be meeting with PCT colleagues the following day to finalise the protocols between KCC and health.

(2) Mr Gibbons and Mr Lemon answered questions from Members which included the following:-

- In response to a question, Mr Gibbons stated that Kent Health Watch would add value and would help to ensure that sure some of the issues that had caused problems during the past 12 months were avoided.
- In response to a question from Ms Harrison as how Kent Health Watch would differ to the role in signposting of Citizens Advisory Bureaux (CAB) or Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALs), Mr Gibbons stated that in relation to the CAB people often had to wait for an appointment. Kent Health Watch would use KCC's 25/7 contact centre.
- The Leader stated that he was delighted that both the Primary Care Trusts were now viewing Kent Health Watch as adding value. If it had been running two or three years ago it could have picked up the pattern of complaints about Maidstone Hospital and potentially save lives. He

acknowledged that the information gathered by Kent Health Watch would become more useful and it was built up over a number of years.

- Mrs Dean made the point that the Health Service complaints system was exceptionally complicated for the public to navigate and that it was not true to say that the complaints process did not work it was that no one listened.
- Mrs Dean stated that although Kent Health Watch was independent of the Health Service, when it came to social care it would be difficult for it to demonstrate equal independence. She believed it was necessary to look at the governance of Kent Health Watch. The Leader said Kent Health Watch could in the future be run by an independent organisation but it was important to get it up and running first and then to look for the independent solution.
- Mrs Dean also raised the issue of ensuring that Kent Health Watch was a representative voice and that the complaints which were not in our gift were being solved. It would also be necessary to demonstrate whether Kent Health was effective. The Leader confirmed that Kent Health Watch was not just a means of sign posting but was also a feedback mechanism.
- In response to a question on whether LINKs could deal with complaints, Ms Blanche stated LINKs was not a system for individual complaints, but it was a way to get wider public involvement in services.
- Mr Lemon stated that one of the values of Kent Health Watch would be to help people who would not normally complain, or who may be put off by the complexity of the process and encourage them to get involved in the process in order to give NHS colleagues feedback on services.
- In relation to a question on the £300,000 in the budget for Kent Health Watch, Mr Lemon stated that the Daft Marketing Strategy had come up with options and pricing and that £100,000 allocated in this year's budget had not been spent. It was anticipated by the Steering Group that media and PR strategy budget would be more in the region of £50,000 -£60,000.
- Also mentioned was the importance of the confidentiality of the information given at the Call Centre and the need to effectively evaluate the data. It was questioned whether the Call Centre was the right vehicle to handle such confidential complaints. Mr Gibbens stated that Call Centre staff would be specifically trained to work on Kent Health Watch and would be aware of the sensitive and confidential matters that they would be dealing with.

(2) Mr Gibbens gave an undertaking that he would regularly come back to this Policy Overview Committee, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Scrutiny Committee to report on how Kent Health Watch was developing and changing. Mr Gibbens concluded by saying that Kent Health Watch would change and evolve and he was confident it would provide useful information in the short term as well as the long term.

(2) RESOLVED that the recommendation approved by Cabinet on 17 March 2008 and the comments made by Members be noted

85. Local Involvement Networks – an update

(Item B6 – Mrs M Blanche, Senior Policy Manager, Central Policy Unit, was present for this item)

(1) Mr Gibbens and Mrs Blanche presented a report to update Members on the progress made in establishing a Local Involvement Network (LINKs) for Kent. Mrs Blanche explained the LINKs would not be established by 1 April due to the timescale needed for the EU procurement process. It was hoped that by 8 April the tenders would be in, and then there would then be an evaluation and selection process with a report to Cabinet on 16 June with the aim of appointing the host organisation by the end of June.

(2) Questions from Members were answered which included the following:-

- Mrs Blanche in response to a question from Mr Muckle on potential duplication with Kent Health Watch she stated that the monitoring of complaints was only a small part of the remit of LINKs. Also the LINKs would be independent and it would be up to the LINKs to decide how it how it wanted to carry out its role. She stated that LINKs would probably look at complaints at a strategic level.
- In response to questions from Members, Mrs Blanche explained that the contract for LINKs had been written in such a way as to encourage the host organisation to use any mechanisms available to help the LINKs to gather information about the local health service.
- In relation to the role of the Kent Observatory, Mr Gibbens explained that the Observatory dealt with data at a sub ward level and was not involved with the complaints process.
- In response to a question from Mr Smyth on if the LINKs legislation precluded LINKs from receiving and pass on complaints. Mrs Blanche stated that although this was not positively excluded from their remit, it might not be something that fitted in with its duties in relation to the strategic overview of health. LINKs would have a limited budget and it would for them to decide and shape how they operated in Kent.
- Mr Gibbens undertook to give briefings cross party to Members if required on both LINKs and Kent Health Watch.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members of the Committee progress made be noted.

86. Select Committees - Update
(Item C1)

(1) The Committee received a report which updated them on the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse, the Select Committee Topic Review programme following the meeting of the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee on 14 February and outlined the progress of the Select Committee on Accessing Democracy.

(2) In relation to the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse, Mrs Dean commended to future Select Committees the way that the Committee had engaged with Young People at the Marlowe Academy and also the round the table discussion of the recommendations with partners prior to them being agreed by the Select Committee.

(3) The Chairman reported that there would be an additional Research Officer recruited to Overview and Scrutiny and at the request of the Leader, there was a proposed review on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

(3) RESOLVED that the update be noted.