

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Regeneration Policy Overview Committee held on Friday, 4 April 2008 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mr R A Pascoe (Chairman), Mr R Truelove (Vice Chairman), Mr M J Angell, Mr T J Birkett, Miss S J Carey, Mr D S Daley, Mr M J Harrison, Mr C Hibberd, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr R F Manning, Mr R A Marsh, Mr J I Muckle, (substitute for Mr A R Poole), Mr R J E Parker and Mr M V Snelling.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director Environment & Regeneration, accompanied by Mr N Caddick, Resources Manager, Mr B Gould, Strategic Finance Advisor, Mr R Hallett, Directorate Finance Manager and Mrs C A Singh, Democratic Services Officer (Overview and Scrutiny).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

65. Portfolio Holders' Attendance and Meetings

(1) Members of the Committee voiced their frustrations at the absence of the Portfolio Holders at this meeting as the Leader of the County Council had issued a directive in a report submitted to this Committee on 27 September 2007 that "Cabinet Members are committed to attending meetings of the Policy Overview Committees and being held to account for the decisions and actions we are taking and for the balance of responding to Members questions being made by ourselves and not by the Managing Director or the staff all Portfolio Holders attend all POC meetings". The Members added that the dates for the POC meetings had been set a year in advance and as they were not present they were not available to answer questions from the Committee.

(2) The Chairman agreed to write to the Leader of the County Council with a copy to the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee expressing the complaint on behalf of the Committee.

66. Minutes – 31 January 2008 *(Item A3)*

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2008 are correctly recorded subject to Minute 58(12) 2008 – the word "principal" be deleted and replaced with the word "principle" and Minute 61(3)(c) 2008 the words "off riders" be replaced with the words "off roaders" and that they be signed by the Chairman.

67. Matters Arising

(1) Members of the Committee referred to Minute 57(6)(a) 2008 that the portfolio holder, Mr Ferrin was attending a meeting with Essex County Council on the day of the Committee's meeting when the Policy Overview Committee had not received a reply for a request for information relating to the performance indicators that the Alliance Board received.

(2) The Chairman agreed to speak to Mr Ferrin regarding the Committee's dissatisfaction.

(3) Mr Wilkinson advised the Committee that the Minutes and a report to the Alliance would be made available and he would give an update during the next item on the agenda.

(4) RESOLVED that the concerns of the Committee be relayed to the Portfolio Holders.

68. Portfolio Holder's and Managing Director's Update

(Item B2 – report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration)

(1) Mr Wilkinson advised that Mr Gough and Mr Ferrin both sent their apologies for not being able to attend the meeting today. Mr Gough was taking part in meetings in China on KCC business and Mr Ferrin was meeting with Essex County Council and he would be reporting back on their behalf.

Portfolio for Regeneration and Supporting Independence London Array

(2) Mr Wilkinson advised that this was a very complex matter and the County Council was still in talks with the Thanet District Council. There had been a meeting of interested parties in January 2008. If the project goes forward the prospects were felt to be very encouraging for the East Kent area becoming a 'hub' for engineering activities related to the windfarm proposals..

Ashford Future – Special Performance Vehicles (SPV)

(3) Mr Wilkinson advised that the setting up of the SPV's had been agreed in principle and the County Council was now on board. Ashford Future Board would set out the direction for the delivery of the SPV.

Manston

(4) Mr Wilkinson advised that this was a joint venture project which was out for consultation this week to seek to develop the airport using the opportunities that already existed. Roger Gough was attending meetings in China for this purpose.

Turner Contemporary

(5) The Committee was advised that the Rendezvous Car park site would be regenerated as part of the work being planned and undertaken by the Consultants

Glebesons. They will be looking at the many projects for the site and ensure that they compliment one another.

Post Offices

(6) The Committee was advised that the Post Office held a community summit for Kent on 6 March 2008 at Oakwood House, Maidstone and that an extension of the “No Use Empty” project was being piloted.

(7) The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:-

- A request was made for an update on Dover Pride on its challenges for the future and the number of people employed by the company was requested for the next meeting of the POCC
- Details of the outcome of the Post Office meeting was requested, it was suggested that the County Council should lead on this issue and the suggestion of the Library buses being used to provide Post Office services. Mr Wilkinson agreed to bring back a summary of the outcomes of the Post Office meeting to the next POC. He advised that the County Council was attempting to influence Government on the Post Office closures and agreed to report back on the current lobbying to stop any further potential closures. It was suggested that using the words “support” gave a false premise. Mr Long as Lead Member advised that at the summit a number of people representing people affected by the Post Office closures were in attendance. The County Council had concluded that it would not be able to stop all 58 closures planned in the current round but that the work done would prove valuable in lobbying against any future review of the network. Mr Wilkinson advised that Essex County Council was contributing £4m to Post Offices to stop them closing. Mr Long felt that in his opinion Kent could be criticised if it used tax payers’ money in this way.
- A Member of the Committee advised that the criteria set down by the Government on Post Office Closures was very strict that unless you can get through the criteria, the only option is to provide subsidy.
- A Member of the Committee disagreed with the comments that taxpayers would not be happy to use money to pay for the post offices. If the Post Office was a community hub and socially desirable, there should be no objection, but there was a challenge. It was suggested that the County Council could run post offices where there was a need. The County Council could ask the Government to make them a charity and reduce their tax.
- Mr Long, Lead Member agreed that the Post Office as a publicly owned company owned by the Government. It was pointed out that the Post Office appeared to be protecting Crown Post Offices and the costs associated with the closure of the franchised offices was considerably lower. Mr Long advised that he was not saying public subsidy was ruled out completely, but at present the business model for post offices was

completely floored. The “retail arm and the post office arm had no leg to stand on”.

- It was suggested that the County Council could look at other ways of working with the post offices. It was suggested that the Libraries, area offices and other buildings could be used.
- There was concern that Glebe Hill and Whistable Harbour were not mentioned in the update and a request was made for a report regarding pylons and the potential for £4m to Thanet Link to Dover Town.
- Regarding the London Array proposals it was stated that Port facilities in Ramsgate and Margate are both subject to high tide variations. Ramsgate would be locked and Margate had a pier that for six to eight hours had no water. There needed to be water to have shipping. It was suggested that Dover was the only port which was 20 miles away by road, it was felt that the practicalities would cost £m to make Margate a port. Mr Wilkinson advised that the London Array and Siemens were looking to see what was available in the ports. In response to a question regarding Lowestoft and Dunkirk, Mr Wilkinson felt they did not offer what Margate did with a longer regeneration potential.
- A request was made for the identification of the officer responsible for Manston Airport as there were concerns about the increase of lorries parking in the area.
- A Member of the Committee had concerns about feeling cajoled into regeneration schemes in areas such as Ashford that did not offer practicality. It needed to be borne in mind that the community would inherit maintenance problems for the future with ideas of one off specialist items, which would be difficult and costly to replace like for like in the future.

Portfolio for Environment, Highways and Waste

Lower Thames Crossing

(8) Kent and Essex County Councils have stated their joint intent to conduct a feasibility study into constructing a Lower Thames Crossing providing urgent transport relief for the South East, this will include the Terms of Reference and specification. Mr Ferrin, Mr P Carter, Leader of the County Council and Lord Hanningfield and the Leader of Essex County Council were looking at sites for the crossing.

- In response to a question, Mr Wilkinson advised that this study would include issues on rail, a bridge and a barrier.

Project Pothole

(9) The Committee were advised that due to the recent bad weather, the Kent Highways Services were blitzing the problems of potholes in the Kent roads. This challenge was being met by 24 crews tackling the potholes during April 2008. 1,800 potholes had already received attention. An action plan would be drawn up for 2009.

Operation Stack

(10) Mr Wilkinson advised that there were ongoing discussions with the Highways Agency, Kent Police, Fire and Ashford Borough Council and neighbouring District Councils looking at sites, cost and details for a truck stop with overnight stay facilities. The meetings had been positive.

Allington Incinerator

(11) The Waste Recycling Group was developing an integrated waste management facility at Allington Quarry and this would be fully operational for the beginning of the next financial year. Mr Wilkinson confirmed that the right amount of waste was being transferred at present.

Operation Stack

- There was concern from a Member regarding the number of negative meetings she had attended regarding Operation Stack as no-one had taken the time to speak with local people regarding the plans and ideas about the proposed site for the lorry park. Mr Wilkinson advised that the possible solutions were being discussed with relevant agencies in terms of the cost and maintenance and the practicalities of a site only when these issues were resolved would the local communities be engaged. The Member responded saying that this information could be shared with the local communities so they were aware.
- It was suggested by a Member that when Operation Stack was working, some ferries were not working. Ferries were capable of taking approximately 450 trucks. If ferries were not operating was there a reason why the lorries could not sit on the ferries? Was this a health and safety issue or was there another reason? Mr Wilkinson said he would seek a response.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the Members questions and responses be noted and any necessary action be taken; and

(b) the oral report be received.

70. Financial Monitoring Update 2007/08

(Item B2 – Report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration. Mr B Gould was present for this item)

(1) Mr Gould answered questions from Members on the Financial Monitoring reports 2007/08 which included the following issues:-

- In response to a question regarding the completion of Ashford Ring Road and the £1.9m shortfall in funding, Mr Gould advised that a bid for funding support had been made but to date there had been no reply. Mr Gould agreed to pursue the matter.
- In response to concerns over the financing of salting Kent roads, Mr Gould advised that there was an emergency reserve held by the Corporate Centre which was available to meet the costs of emergency works caused by major floods, hurricanes and earthquakes.
- Members raised concerns that there were no County Councillors involved with Ashford Future, Mr Manning, Lead Member agreed to keep Members informed.
- In response to a question regarding a separate collection for plastic, Mr Wilkinson advised that this was being kept under review until the market place indicated it was the right time to resume collection.
- Referring to page 10 of the report, £240k for street lighting, maintenance programme and inventory completion, Mr Gould agreed to forward a copy of the programme.

(2) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Members of the Committee extended their best wishes to Mr B Gould for a long and happy retirement; and
- (b) the Members comments and the report be noted.

71. KCC Regeneration Strategy

(Item B3 – Report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration)

(1) Mr Wilkinson advised that the design of the strategy was to identify education, social services, art, culture, environment and transport as a means to tackle deprivation at its route causes. He advised that an assessment had been carried out across all directorates to look where there were gaps and provide solutions. Work had also been carried out with the District Leaders, CEO's and Directors of Regeneration to provide an opportunity to work with District partners on key issues and explore opportunities of better working practices. He advised that the Cabinet would receive a report on 12 May 2008.

(2) The Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions

- There was frustration from Members of the Committee that County Councillors had not been asked to attend any of the meetings and had not been aware that the Local Strategic Partnership had met.
- It was suggested that Education should have been invited to attend the meeting, it was felt essential that education should be involved especially

after speaking with Mr P Wookey, Locate in Kent in getting people to locate in East Kent. Mr Long advised that he had noted the suggestions.

(3) RESOLVED that the Members comments and the report be noted.

72. Environment and Regeneration Review

(Item B4 – Report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration)

(1) The Committee received a report on the ongoing organisational review of the environment and regeneration directorate on its structure and capacity within the organisation as regards its fitness to deliver the new KCC Regeneration Strategy.

(2) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:-

- The Members suggested that there was a need to add the adoption of new estates in the Strategy, as it was felt they were not receiving the necessary services.
- A request was made for the identity of those responsible for roads that had not been adopted and whether KCC could assist in identifying who was responsible to the public.
- In response to a question as to why community development was included in the strategy when there was already a community strategy, Mr Wilkinson advised that this would play a key part in KCC having a stronger role in regional liaisons. It was also suggested that environment and regeneration work closer with other directorates regarding local regeneration needs so there is cohesion across the whole of the County Council.
- In response to a question regarding the source of “Re-defining Influence, responsibility, power” within the report, Mr Wilkinson advised that this strategy had been to the Cabinet but since his appointment seven months ago, he had received many demands for studies from various sources and when asking questions on these demands there were gaps. He advised that a new Regeneration Board had been set up which included five Cabinet Members plus officers who would oversee the work of this strategy. There was an acceptance on the shortage of skills and work would be carried out to identify what needed strengthening. A detailed structure would be compiled which would overarch proposals within the strategy.
- In response to the frustrations from Members of the Committee regarding the POC Members having no input, Mr Long, Lead Member advised that this was a report in progress and the policy would be put to the Cabinet in May 2008.
- Members of the Committee requested a timetable be drawn up to show where Members would have an input.

(3) RESOLVED that the progress made and the continued support be given to the proposed re-organisation of the Environment and Regeneration Directorate, in order to facilitate the implementation of the KCC Regeneration Strategy within the timetable agreed at Cabinet be noted.

73. 2008/09 Risk Register

(Item B5 – Report by Report by Mr A Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration)

(1) Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:

- Referring to Risk No ERM1 regarding the CTRL claim (CPO Notice dispute) Members were advised that the County Council had employed legal counsel and tribunal was in its preliminary stage before the President of the Lands Tribunal. This was a complicated issue regarding land. A Member of the Committee asked for North Kent to be considered in the CTRL proposals.

(2) RESOLVED that the Members comments and the report be noted.

74. Select Committee

(Item C1 – Report by Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) The Committee considered a report on the Select Committee for Flood Risk and the Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme.

(2) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the draft Minutes of the reconvened meeting of the Select Committee for Climate Change be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee be agreed; and
- (b) the update of the Select Committee Topic Review and the Building Capacity for Policy Overview Committee's be noted.

75. Monitoring of Select Committee Recommendations

(1) RESOLVED that :-

- (a) the request by the POCC to review Select Committee recommendations prior to 2006 be noted; and
- (b) the re-establishment of a Select Committee to revisit the recommendations and refresh them on the Future Rail Passenger Services for Kent be agreed.