

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 14 January 2010.

PRESENT: Mr E E C Hotson (Chairman), Mrs T Dean (Vice-Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr J R Bullock, MBE, Mr R B Burgess, Mrs J Law, Mr R J Parry, Mr J E Scholes, Mr M V Snelling and Mrs P A V Stockell (Substitute for Mr R Frayne)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P B Carter, Mr R W Gough, Mr A J King, MBE, Mr R A Marsh and Mr J D Simmonds

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Director of Personnel & Development), Mr N Fairburn (Workforce Development Manager), Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Service Manager (Policy Overview)), Mrs S Garton (Head of County Performance and Evaluation Manager), Mr P Gilroy (Chief Executive), Mr R Hardy (Director of Improvement and Engagement), Ms J Hill (Performance Manager), Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mrs T Oliver (Director of Strategic Development and Public Access) and Mr D Shipton (Finance Strategy Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

36. Minutes - 13 November 2009

(Item A3)

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

37. Financial Monitoring Report : Corporate Services 2009/10

(Item B1)

(1) Mr Shipton introduced the second quarter's budget monitoring report for 2009/10 to Cabinet on 30th November 2009 and the latest exception report on 11th January 2010 for the Chief Executives Department.

(2) In response to a question from Mrs Dean, officers undertook to send Members information on the Property Enterprise Fund (PEF).

(3) RESOLVED that the projected outturn for the Chief Executive's Department and Financing Items for 2009/10 based on the second quarter's monitoring report to Cabinet be noted.

38. Budget 2010/11 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/13

(Item B2)

(1) The Committee considered the Chief Executives Departments (CED) Draft Budget proposals set out in the Draft Budget 2010-11 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTP) 2010-2013 and also the report which was circulated specifically relating to the key areas of these documents for this Department. The report also included the issues raised by the Informal Member Group in November 2009, along with the resulting responses and the comments made by Members.

(2) Mrs McMullan and Mr Shipton introduced the draft MTP and the Revenue Budget and Capital Budget for the Chief Executives Department then answered questions from Members about the following issues:-

ISG base budget

(3) In response to a question from Mr Parry on the ISG base budget increase of £600,000 (page 29 of the report), Mr Shipton explained that the previous year's budget had included a reduction in ISG support services commensurate with an anticipated reduction in the number of KCC officers requiring email accounts and support. However, this reduction did not materialise and therefore it was not possible to make the savings identified without there being an impact on Directorate service levels. Service Directorates were not prepared to agree to such a reduction and thus the base budget provision has had to be restored.

Cost of living increase

(4) In response to a question from Mrs Dean, Mr Shipton stated that for 2011/12 and 2012/13 no specific provision for the cost of living increase had been made at this stage as the authority had not made any proposals and we were awaiting full details of the 1% pay cap announced in the Pre Budget report on 9th December 2010. Once proposals were made the cost would have to be met from the provision made for emerging pressures in the draft MTP.

Reduction in staffing numbers

(5) Mrs Dean referred to paragraph 3.5 (page 29) of the report, regarding savings involving further reviews of staffing and whether the publicly quoted figure of a reduction of 700 posts was fixed. Mrs Dean also referred to the proportionally high reduction in posts in Legal and Democratic services (page 71 of the MTP) and asked whether any redundancies had been decided yet. Mr Shipton explained that the staffing reduction numbers in the MTP were based on the average salary cost to determine the estimated number of posts required to achieve the savings quoted in the MTP. However, it was hoped that savings would be made by not filling vacancies. Mr Shipton also explained that savings figures had been calculated according to individual service's ability to make savings according to their relative spending on strategic and support activities in order to preserve front line services.

(6) Officers undertook to supply information, at the lowest level possible, on redundant posts for this Directorate to Members of the Committee.

Kent TV

(7) Mrs Dean referred to the delay in awarding the contract for Kent TV, Mr Gough explained that interviews with tenderers had been postponed due to adverse weather and would be held shortly. Mrs Oliver confirmed that KCC was still within the legal framework for awarding the contract.

(8) RESOLVED that the revenue and capital budget proposals, the issues raised by the Informal Member Group, along with the resulting responses and the comments made by Members be noted.

39. Half-year monitoring 2009/10

(Item B3)

(1) Mrs Hill introduced a report which summarised the corporate element of the 2009/10 half-year monitoring results for the Annual Business Unit Operating Plans and included a statement by the Chief Executive of progress to date.

(2) In response to a question from Mrs Dean, Mr Gilroy confirmed that the review of Prisons covered the issue of support for prisoners on discharge.

(3) Mrs Dean commended the successful HOUSE project.

(4) It was confirmed that there was a focus group of Members involved in the development of the Members Portal.

(4) In relation to a question from Mr Parry regarding the location of the East Kent Data Centre, Mr Bole explained that although there had been some delays caused by the need to evaluate potential sites, the scheme was still due to be achieved within the original timescale.

(5) Mr Hardy explained that “pick and mix” was a pilot project funded by central government and was a new way for the public to access publicly held data, which combined maps, spreadsheets and other data sources to allow the public to put together their own sets of information. It was due to go live in March 2011. It was agreed that all Members of the Council would be supplied with information on this project.

(7) In response to a question on the Interreg IVa coastal deprivation project, officers undertook to supply further information to Members of this Committee.

(8) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

40. Gateway Update

(Item B4)

(1) Mr Gough and Mrs Oliver presented a report which updated Members on the Gateway programme in Kent across face to face, telephone and online access. This report also included an update on the Interreg IVa project, the links with Total Place and Better Work Places and the recently launched Welfare Pathway with the Ministry

of Defence. Mr Gough acknowledged the success of the Gateways in gaining a green flag in the recent CAA review.

(2) A Member referred to the need to have equal District and County Council branding at Maidstone Gateway or to ensure that it was undertaken in a way similar to Tunbridge Wells, which Mrs Oliver acknowledged was necessary.

(3) Mr Burgess referred to the positive effect that sharing the Gateway facility has had for Thanet library which has seen an increase in use.

(4) In relation to the franchising of Gateways, Mrs Oliver explained that aim was for this to be cost neutral initially, with the first authority expressing an interest being Buckinghamshire, but it was hoped that there would be some income generation from this in the future.

(5) Mrs Dean requested the footfall figures for Gateways and comparative figures for services before they were included with the Gateway. Mrs Oliver undertook to provide the figures that were available but explained that some partner organisations and some parts of KCC did not keep these figures prior to using the Gateway.

(6) The importance of KCC services making full use of Gateways was emphasised by Members.

(7) In relation to questions on the voluntary sector presence in the Gateway's it was suggested that funding from KCC should be conditional upon voluntary sector partners making effective use of Gateway facilities.

(8) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

41. Reception Closure Programme

(Item B5)

(1) The Committee were given the opportunity to read the following papers which were circulated at the meeting, the report to the Chief Officers Group on 2 December 2009, numbers of visitors to SHQ receptions and the recommendations from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 9 December 2009.

(2) The Chairman explained that this item had been referred to this Committee from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 9 December 2010 via the Scrutiny Board spokesmen.

(3) Mr Gough introduced a report which set out the rationale behind the programme for closing receptions in KCC office buildings beginning with headquarters (excluding Sessions House), which had been agreed by the Chief Officer Group. This issue came within officer delegated responsibilities. He stated that this matter needed to be taken in context and was about doing things in a different way to meet the financial pressures on the authority.

(4) Mrs Dean, as Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, explained that Cabinet Scrutiny Committee had considered this matter at the request of the staff involved. As a delegated officer decision it would not have gone to Members but in

consultation with the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chairmen, it was unanimously decided that the Committee would consider this matter. She emphasised that Cabinet Scrutiny had only considered Strategic headquarters and had not considered any of the other buildings that were referred to in the report to this Committee. She accepted that the situation in other buildings may be totally different to that at headquarters. Mrs Dean referred to the number of visitors to headquarters and questioned whether Sessions House reception staff would be able to deal with this increase along with their other tasks. She stated that she had requested an analysis of why people visited the receptions at headquarters and had not received this. She made it clear that no one was suggesting that the public should not be directed to the Gateway and acknowledged that the majority of the public that visited Sessions House were going to the Crown Restaurant. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee wanted to be assured that there had been sufficient information available to inform this decision, which was why the Committee had asked to see the relevant documents. Without having this information available Cabinet Scrutiny Committee did not know whether the savings outlined would be offset by the additional cost to directorates in staff time for collecting visitors etc. She mentioned that UNISON had received a letter on 8 December 2009 stating that this proposal would go ahead. At Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Members had emphasised the importance of people visiting headquarters being welcomed in an appropriate manner.

(5) Mr Gough expressed surprised at what appeared to be a staff issue being considered at Cabinet Scrutiny Committee as there were specific procedures to be used for these matters. He explained that at the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee it was not possible to answer all Members questions as key officers were not available. He confirmed that when the matter had been considered at Cabinet Scrutiny Committee the process had been stopped to enable the matter to be discussed by this Committee.

(6) Mrs Oliver assured the Committee that a lot of detailed discussions had taken place with facilities and directorates. The Chief Officers Group had been supportive of the proposal. The paper circulated to this Committee gave details of how this would work, it would be a customer friendly service and she suggested that all reception staff should receive the same training as Gateway staff.

(7) The Leader clarified that the comments that he had made at the Cabinet meeting related to the importance of the recommendations from Cabinet Scrutiny Committee receiving a full response from the Cabinet Members.

(8) Mr Bullock shared the experience of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council who, as part of their transformation agenda, had closed their four reception areas and referred visitors to the Gateway. However, it was still possible for the public to meet with officers. The saving identified by the closure of reception areas at headquarters of £60k savings were important.

(9) Mr Brazier raised concerns about potential security issues arising from the changes. Mrs Oliver explained that if a pass was issued under the new system it could be time limited, and restricted to initial entry to a building and not all areas, she believed that this would not lessen the existing security arrangements currently in place, although acknowledged that no system could be completely secure

(10) The importance of insuring that Members were provided with papers, on request, that informed decisions was emphasised.

(11) Mr Scholes, as a Member of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee clarified that, he was not against the strategic aim to save £60,000 but as the key officer was not able to attend the meeting for this item the detailed questions that Members had were not answered and this had been his concern. This meeting and the information provided had rectified that situation.

(12) It was suggested that that the changes should be reviewed after a reasonable period.

(13) Mr King reminded Members, in light of the financial situation facing local government, of the importance of challenging perceptions and looking at different ways to provide services.

(14) RESOLVED that the report, the programme phasing and the comments made by Members be noted.

42. Equalities Update

(Item B7)

(1) Mr Hardy introduced a report on equalities which provided an update on work completed and underway in relation to those key areas for action.

(2) The Chairman asked that the more detailed report that Mr Hardy would be submitting to the next meeting of the Committee include examples of best practise.

(3) Mrs Beer informed the Committee that in the recent Stonewall Equality Index survey KCC had been placed 101. This was an improvement of 14 places on the previous year index and was a good outcome for KCC.

(4) RESOLVED that the content of this report be noted and a report on the draft revised Equality Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.

43. Workforce Strategy Update

(Item B6)

(1) Ms Beer and Mr Fairburn introduced a paper which provided an update on KCC's strategy to influence employment demographics and recommended that this Committee monitored progress towards meeting the targets and objectives on a regular basis. Questions and comments from Members were invited.

(2) In response to a question on whether factors such as changing financial circumstances and increased longevity leading people to retire later were being taken into account in the strategy, Mr Fairburn confirmed that the importance of managing and retaining talent at different age levels was acknowledged. The need to retain existing talent but also to attract new staff was part of the overall strategy.

(3) Mrs Beer explained that the aim of the strategy was to have a workforce that reflected the population of Kent and provided opportunities for young people.

(3) In response to questions about the apprenticeship scheme Mr Fairburn explained that the majority of funding for this scheme was targeted at the 16 -18 age range which made widening the scheme to include those up to the age of 25 a challenge.

(4) Mr Fairburn gave details of the targeted recruitment of young people, which included visits to schools and recruitment fairs. He also explained that for entry level posts experience was not required and the only qualifications sought were those specifically required for the post, this helped to encourage young people to apply for KCC posts.

(5) RESOLVED that:-

a) the achievements to date and future developments on the Workforce Strategy be noted;

b) that the comments made by Members on further areas that they would like to see developed be noted;

c) this Committee will regularly monitor progress against the targets set.