

KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held in the Council Chamber, Browfort, Bath Road, Devizes on Tuesday 29th March 2005 at 2:15pm

PRESENT: Councillor C P G Hoddinott – Chairman

Councillor B G Ashley
Councillor P A Brown
Councillor N D Carter

Councillor W B Cavill
Councillor Mrs P M Winchcombe

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor S J Miles
Councillor J D Pearcy-Caldwell
Councillor Dr J P M Reid

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Mrs M S N Taylor (for Minute number 47)

PART 1

Items considered whilst the meeting was open to the public

36. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Cavill, Mrs Taylor and Mrs Winchcombe declared personal interests in Minute number 47 owing to their roles as Town Councillors in Marlborough and Devizes.

38. STEPHEN GILES, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES TEAM LEADER

Members of the Board expressed their gratitude to Mr Giles for his 33 years loyal service, and expressed their hope that he would enjoy a long and healthy retirement.

39. BENEFITS BEST VALUE REVIEW 2004/2005 INTERIM REPORT

The Financial Services Manager introduced his report and explained to Members that the current Benefit Best Value Review was being conducted in a different format than the previous review, to account for

the challenges of reviewing performance at the same time as meeting the challenges that had been set by CPA Inspection. He explained that the targets of the previous review in 2000 had been met, but that owing to increasingly high standards elsewhere this still left Kennet's performance in the bottom quartile. He further explained how meeting the 641 standards previously set by the Department of Work and Pensions had been a struggle alongside trying to achieve targets from other action plans and e-government strategies.

The Financial Services Manager informed Members that performance improvements had been dramatic during the 2004/2005 municipal year. He informed Members that all backlogs had been cleared and that members of the public could now contact benefits staff during all office hours and not only in the mornings as previously. He expressed his opinion that improved performance, alongside changes to Department of Work and Pensions reporting standards, left the benefits section in a good position to possibly move into the top quartile of performance during the 2005/2006 municipal year.

In response to questions by Members, the Financial Services Manager explained that the closure of the Council's cash office did not affect people's options for payment of Council tax, because it was possible to pay in cash at Post Offices. He also informed Members that the biggest hurdle to timely resolutions of applications was that as many as 80% of application forms were either incorrectly or inadequately completed, and that one of the key improvements that had been introduced by the service had been to take a more proactive approach to obtaining relevant information to allow applications to be completed.

RESOLVED

THAT the Interim Report be noted and that an action plan based on the revised performance standards be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for adoption and that this should be presented no later than the October 2005 meeting.

40. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MONITORING

The Policy Support Manager introduced her report and apologised to Members for bringing the report a cycle late, and explained that this was owing to late receipt of the National Performance Dataset.

The Policy Support Manager drew Members' attention to the services detailed in the report that currently had bottom quartile indicators: benefits; collection of recyclables; and housing completions on brown-field sites.

The meeting was informed that investments had been made in benefits and recycling and improvements were starting to show, but that the

provision of housing on brown-field sites would require a change in planning policy by the Council.

In response to questions by Members, the Policy Support Manager explained the a recent Planning Inspectorate decision to allow housing to be built on a particular brown-field site would not improve the Council's performance rating in the short-term, because performance was based upon housing completions and not permissions.

RESOLVED

THAT the report be noted and that the Policy Support Manager should in future provide reports concentrating on bottom quartile indicators and any indicators where performance was dropping.

41. WORKLOAD FOR MUNICIPAL YEAR 2005/2006

The Policy Support Manager introduced her report to Members and indicated that the report was intended as a stimulus to a debate about workload for the following municipal year.

The Chairman invited Members of the Board to indicate their own preferences for the Board's workload. Members made a number of suggestions, alongside Officer suggestions contained in the report, and the Board debated at length exactly what might be the desired outcomes of the various subjects that were proposed. Members also discussed the need for clear terms of reference to be agreed for any future Working Groups so that their work could be given a clear focus.

RESOLVED

THAT:

1. A Best Value Review of Cultural Provision be established and that a Members sounding-board be appointed.
2. The proposed work programme for Scrutiny Reviews in 2005/2006 should include:
 - a. A review of planning policies in relation to agricultural buildings;
 - b. A review of the strategic provision of public car parks;
 - c. a review of the Council's Consultation Strategy;
 - d. a review to consider the allocation of staffing resources in relation to Council strategies;
 - e. a review of the Council's role on outside bodies and its partnership arrangements;
 - f. a Tourism Task Group.
3. The membership of the above Task Groups should be set at the July meeting of the Board

4. The Policy Support Manager identify Board Members to assist with drafting terms of reference for the Working Groups prior to the July meeting.

42. CONSTITUTION REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

The Board received the Minutes of the Constitution Review Subcommittee held on 22nd March 2005 and noted that it had not made any recommendations for change to the Constitution.

43. PLANNING APPEALS TASK GROUP

The Chairman of the Planning Appeals Task Group informed Members that it would report to the July meeting of the Board.

44. TRAINING FOR MANAGEMENT BOARD MEMBERS

The Chairman informed Members that budgets were available for Overview and Scrutiny Members to receive training in relation to their particular role. He encouraged Members to seek training both individually and as a group.

45. URGENT ACTION BETWEEN MEETINGS

The Chairman informed Members that details of urgent actions agreed since the last meeting were available for inspection.

46. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 SECTION 100(A)(4)

RESOLVED

THAT in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 and 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(a) to the Act.

PART 2

Items considered whilst the meeting was closed to the public

47. TOURISM AND IT TASK GROUP

The Chairman informed Members that this item was being taken out of agenda order to allow for it to be taken in part 2.

The Board received a written report from the Chairman of the Tourism and IT Task Group.

Members held a wide ranging debate about the evidence that had been gathered by the Task Group and various scenarios for future provision of tourism services in Kennet put forward within the report.

**RESOLVED
THAT**

1. the report of the Tourism and IT Task Group be noted;
2. that the Director of Resources be requested to present a detailed Officer report based upon the scenarios in the Task Group report to a future meeting of the Board;
3. that the Director of Resources pay particular heed in his report to the following concerns of Members:
 - a. recommendations should seek to provide a 7 day a week TIC in Marlborough;
 - b. that the priorities for tourism should be decided before setting a budget, rather than visa versa;
 - c. that if considering possible alternative sites for a TIC in Devizes, 7 day opening should be a priority, and that the Corn Exchange should only be considered after proper consultation with the Town Council;
 - d. that the Director of Resources note Members opinions that tourism has wide economic development ramifications and that his report on tourism provision should not be an exercise in budget reduction.

Chairman
10th May 2005