

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 20 September 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. R J Davison (Chairman)
Cllr. C Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr. L Abraham, Cllr. Mrs B Ayres, Cllr. L Ball, Cllr. J Edwards-Winser,
Cllr. Mrs A Firth, Cllr. Mrs A George, Cllr. R Hogarth, Cllr. M Horwood,
Cllr. Mrs F Parkin, Cllr. R Piper, Cllr. S Raikes, Cllr. P Towell and
Cllr. R Walshe

Apologies for absence: Cllr M Butler, Cllr. A Pett and Cllr. J Scholey

Cllr. L Ayres, Cllr. Mrs C Clark, Cllr. A Eyre and Cllr. B Ramsey were
also present

11. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 JUNE 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 21 June 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Cllr. Ball apologised for not having given his apologies for absence for the meeting held on 21 June 2011, due to I.T. difficulties on his return from holiday.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr. Mrs. Parkin declared a personal interest in matters relating to housing and benefits as she had relatives in both social housing and on benefits.

13. FORMAL RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET FOLLOWING MATTERS REFERRED BY THE COMMITTEE AND/OR REQUESTS FROM THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE (PLEASE REFER TO THE MINUTES AS INDICATED):

The Committee noted the comments of Cabinet.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Environmental and Operational Services advised that the Swanley clear sack recycling was still being sent to the Ideal Waste Company Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at Swanley. He reported that the North Farm transfer station would be closed for maintenance for a few weeks and therefore Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils would be making more use of the Dunbrik transfer station for a while, so the County Council (KCC) had agreed that Sevenoaks could send more waste to the Swanley MRF during this period. Whilst this was only short term, it was hoped that this would further highlight

the benefits of the arrangement to KCC.

Following advice from the Head of Environmental and Operational Services, Members considered the potential benefits of requesting a visit to the Waste to Energy plant and MRF at Allington, but agreed instead to a further visit to the Swanley MRF.

Action 1: The Head of Environmental and Operational Services to arrange a further visit to the Ideal Waste Company Materials Recovery Facility at Swanley, for those Members who did not previously attend.

14. ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The completed actions were noted.

15. FUTURE BUSINESS, THE WORK PLAN 2011/12 (ATTACHED) AND THE FORWARD PLAN.

The Committee agreed the Work Plan with no amendments.

16. KENT WASTE PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT 2011 AND CONSULTATION ON REFRESHING THE KENT JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Chairman, with the agreement of the Committee, brought consideration of this item forward on the agenda.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services presented the report, explaining that the Kent Waste Partnership (KWP) was comprised of the twelve Kent District Waste Collection Authorities, and Kent County Council (KCC) as Waste Disposal Authority. The existing Kent Waste Strategy was adopted by all Member Authorities of the KWP in 2007 and covered the period 2007 – 2027. The Strategy was now in its fourth year and the KWP felt that a refresh of the Strategy was needed and this had been agreed for Consultation by the Kent Waste Partnership Members Board, represented by the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Member from each Constituent Authority. He brought Members' attention to the aspects influencing the approach to the public consultation as detailed within the report, and requested Members' comments on the twenty-one questions posed within the consultation document.

During consideration of the consultation document a number of queries arose to which the Head of Environmental and Operational Services responded. He advised that food waste was collected on a weekly basis in Kent. Authorities using the fortnightly schemes accepted food waste in both collections. In Sevenoaks it was collected weekly in the black sacks. A further option was to have food waste collected separately each week for composting, which would incur an additional cost for a separate receptacle and separate collection. New Members' attention was drawn to the Household Waste, Recycling and Composting Working Group Report (9 September 2010). Both raw and cooked food waste was acceptable for

collection as an in vessel composting method was used at the site, but only raw vegetable food waste could be used for open air composting such as home composting – which needed to be encouraged. It was felt that leading retailers should be encouraged to contribute in the whole process of reducing all types of packaging. The Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that KWP were currently working with a major retailer in Kent on reducing unnecessary packaging, and if successful this could lead to a national reduction and other retailers following the lead. Talks were also being held with the packaging industry. He explained that some packaging however was necessary to lengthen shelf life and avoid food waste.

A Member was concerned that he had not seen the 'Love Food hate waste' campaign, which surprised the Head of Environmental and Operational Services as it had been a successful campaign. The new Government proposals for packaging only carrying "sell by" or "use before" dates were discussed, and viewed as a good way to deter the public from wasting good food.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services asked Members whether they felt the KWP recycling and composting target rates of 45% for 2015 and 50% for 2020 were realistic. He advised that the dates were set by EU legislation but could be brought down if felt appropriate. Sevenoaks were not the lowest performers, the Kent District average was 39% and Sevenoaks District was about 32% at the moment.

Members asked whether it was possible to mention the Ideal Waste Company Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at Swanley, on the 'Suggested Way Forward' part of the consultation. It was agreed that this could be promoted on the basis of the proximity principle.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services reported that landfill had been a cheap disposal option in the past. There would always be a small need for landfill for inert waste but an increase in the disposal price per tonne, due to the escalating landfill tax levy, was now making it more comparable with sending residual waste to the Allington waste to energy plant. However at the moment KCC were contractually tied to contracts with other landfill sites which had remaining capacity. In response to a question he explained that methane was often collected and used, even if just on the landfill site operation, but it was difficult to capture all of this and a lot still escaped to the atmosphere.

Resolved: That the Chairman and Head of Environmental and Operational Services, collate the comments made and forward an appropriate response on behalf of the Committee to the Kent Waste Partnership in response to the Consultation on refreshing the Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

17. HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

The Head of Housing and Communications gave a verbal update and power-

point presentation on Private Sector Housing, Social Housing, Housing Policy and future initiatives. She advised that there would be future report to Committee concerning the Housing Action plan and the Local Investment partnership. The Partnership was with Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Borough Councils and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA),

In response to Members' questions the Head of Housing and Communications explained that the social housing register was managed by West Kent Housing and that there were usually around 1000 people on the waiting list. This had been radically reduced a few years ago by being honest with applicants about the chances of re-housing and offering alternative solutions such as renting in the private sector housing or shared home ownership schemes. Twenty-one placements in Bed & Breakfast was the result of the recession and placements were for very short periods of time or emergency situations. The waiting list included for example, 'hidden homeless' who lived with their families or with friends, often in cramped conditions, older people looking for supported schemes for when they needed extra support later in life, or transfer cases of existing tenants. Homeless applicants were awarded extra points to reflect their urgent situation, but Kent Homechoice was in place where relevant applicants bid for suitable properties. It was an open register and therefore not all those on the list were from the Sevenoaks district, and local people who lived or worked in the district received local points. A Member suggested that Parish and Town Councils would be more willing to identify green belt areas that could be used for affordable housing, if they were made more aware of the direct housing need. The Head of Housing and Communications explained that all the information was contained in the register which could be obtained from West Kent Housing.

The Head of Housing and Communications advised that they also ran a private landlord accreditation scheme, which had originally run in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The scheme was very successful and Landlords had been trained and awarded small grants to help make the property decent homes standard. In addition, anyone accessing the Private sector lettings scheme (a loan scheme offering rent in advance and deposit bond) could only use accredited properties in the private sector. In response to a question, she advised that she did not believe private landlords would sign up to the schemes if the Council attempted to recoup the money at a later stage. The money for the loans was from a small amount of funding that she had identified, and the scheme would end once this was exhausted unless further funding was found.

The HERO (Housing Energy Retraining Options) Project was a holistic outreach service which provided advice on matters such as housing, energy, retraining and returning to employment options. A Member suggested looking at working with Welfare to Work Contractors. The Head of Housing and Communications advised that there were already good links with Business link but was always looking for new contacts and would look into it once the additional officer was trained.

A report on affordable housing would come to Committee later in the year.

Work was ongoing with registered providers and there were a range of initiatives such as Home Buy with MOAT – shared ownership rent to buy schemes etc., to minimise the lack of affordable housing. The Council was also looking at reducing under-occupation, utilising empty homes and working with other neighbouring boroughs.

18. IN-DEPTH SCRUTINY - UNDER-OCCUPATION OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The Head of Housing and Communications drew Members' attention to a briefing paper which had been electronically circulated to Members prior to the meeting. She advised that for the Working Group meetings she could provide Members with a case study and statistics, and that the Housing Policy Manager could pull together a draft action plan. At a future Committee meeting, Members would be able to decide who they would like to sit on the panel, adopting a similar approach to the 'In Depth Scrutiny of Empty Homes' in September 2008.

Action 2: Working Group to meet with Officers and report on Stage 3 at the November meeting.

19. CHANGE TO 10 YEAR BUDGET AND STAFF TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Committee noted the tabled minute extract from Cabinet which considered the report on 15 September 2011. The Head of Finance and Human Resources introduced the report which set out proposals to achieve the savings included in the 10 Year Budget arising from changes to staff terms and conditions. The proposals had been subject to extensive consultation with staff who had broadly understood the need for savings to be made and were supportive of the proposal as the "least worst option". The report outlined the consultation timetable and briefings which had begun in April 2011 with a view to the changes being introduced in April 2012. The proposed changes came in addition to earlier savings identified which had included the removal of market supplements, no national pay awards from 2010/11 to 2012/12 and the removal of a leased car option. It was noted that in addition to briefings the staff most directly affected by the proposals had received one-to-one meetings.

The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions were outlined in Appendix A to the report and attention was drawn to the comments received from staff in response to the consultation process which ended on 6 September, which were summarised in Appendix B to the report along with the management response to those comments. Comments from this Committee would be fed back to the meeting of Cabinet on 13 October 2011 and then be submitted for consideration at full Council.

Members were impressed with the amount of work carried out, and the result was a credit to all the officers involved in the process. Members were very impressed with the reaction of the Staff and appreciated their input and consideration of this matter, and were particularly impressed with by the petition received in favour of the proposals from staff working at Dunbriok. It

was noted that although there had been a two year freeze on the national pay award, other pay increases such as pay scale increments had still been awarded. The Head of Finance and Human Resources clarified Members queries on the figures set out at Appendix C.

A Member expressed concern at Staff perception of Member Allowance increases in comparison to these proposals. He was advised that the recommendations of increases in Members' Allowances were made by an Independent Remuneration Panel, and that Members had actually accepted a significantly reduced amount than that recommended by the Panel. This had also been frozen for the past year.

Members were concerned as to the possible effect on staff of the removal of the leased car option, especially for those that might not be able to afford the car loan. The Head of Finance and Human Resources advised that as well as the car loan scheme they were speaking to local car leasing companies, and staff were being met on a one to one basis to explore all their options. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources advised that Cabinet had looked at this very carefully and had also been concerned by the effect and possible loss of the 'best performers' due to the proposed changes. In response to a question on recent staff turnover and whether it was noticeably increased since the proposals were put forward, the Head of Finance and Human Resources advised that during the last couple of years turnover had been lower. However, it was noticeable that in the last few months three Service Managers had left and it had been difficult to recruit suitable applicants to the vacant posts. One post was being delivered in an alternative way, one had been filled and efforts to recruit to the third had been ongoing since June. With reference to concern expressed on losing potential pay savings from the removal of the lower banding, she advised that each vacancy would be reassessed as it arose, and that there were still enough options to remain flexible.

Resolved: That the proposed changes to staff terms and conditions to meet the saving included in the 10-year budget be noted and that the Committee feedback its comments to the 13 October 2011 Cabinet meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.45 pm

Chairman