

REPORTS OF SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

a) Environment Select Committee – 6 September 2011

Carol Valentine, Kent Highways Service Highway Manager for West Kent, gave a presentation on the Winter Service policy. This covered the salting of roads, snow clearance, and salt bins. Questions from Members addressed liaison with district and parish councils, schools, bus routes, and neighbouring county authorities.

The Committee received a report on business support within the Sevenoaks District. The District Council works in partnership with several other organisations to support local businesses. One current focus of attention was improving broadband services in parts of the District. Although the staff resources available within SDC for business support were very limited, a team reorganisation was helping the Council devote additional officer hours to the service.

The Committee received an update briefing from the Planning Services Manager on the Local Development Framework. This covered where the Council currently was in the process, and what would happen in the future. Issues arising from the current consultation on Development Plan Documents were highlighted. The impact of the government's Localism Bill was examined. Gypsy and traveller site policy was discussed. Proposals for the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans were explained.

Updated Conservation Area Appraisals for Chipstead Village and Brittain's Farm were reviewed and the Committee recommended to Cabinet that they be adopted as informal planning guidance.

John Grint, Vice Chairman
6 October 2011

b) Social Affairs Select Committee – 8 September 2011

Community Safety, Helping Communities to feel Safe and be Safe, was the first of the Council's key criteria to be examined by Social Affairs using its new format. Prior to the meeting various Members had made visits to the Police Command Centre at Maidstone, had sat in on one of the daily Community Safety Unit Tasking meetings and had accompanied PCSOs on their rounds. The reports were both interesting and informative and are attached to the minutes of the meeting.

1. There were detailed presentations from the new District Chief Inspector, Peter Steenhuis, Amanda Bell, the Service Manager from West Kent Mediation, and from the Community Safety Co-ordinator reporting on PACTs. The Chief Inspector informed Members of the changes which would result from the New Policing Model when it comes into effect on the 16th of November.

Under these proposals there would no longer be separate divisions; instead the most appropriate, available response unit would deal with an incident, regardless of artificial geographical boundaries. The initial officer would then see the case through to its conclusion.

Between 7am and 1am, 7 days a week, there would be 5 teams deployed in neighbourhood policing, a slight increase on the current position and in future all response officers would come out from the Tonbridge Police Station. However as this district had the lowest crime figures in the County for burglary and vehicle theft the overall cover was likely to be reduced.

2. The West Kent Mediation service covered a wide area including the districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells and offered a range of interventions from mediation in neighbour disputes to anger management and from restorative justice to peer mediation. Demand for its services had never been higher but, as with many charities, funding was a major issue making long term planning difficult. The main funders in addition to the three district councils were Kent Probation, some town/parish councils and the various housing associations plus several grant giving bodies.

There have been close links with the Charity since its inception and, courtesy of the District Council, its office is based in Swanley. There were 3 full time and 2 part time staff who, together with 35 volunteers, (who all undergo regular, rigorous training) make up the team.

Earlier this year WKM gained PQASSO accreditation without any amendments or recommendations, the only mediation service to have gained this to date.

3. Kelly Webb, the Community Safety Co-ordinator informed Members about the work of PACTs, how and why they are set up, their priorities, membership and actions. Currently there are 9 in operation with another 4 having completed their remit. It is important that when a PACT has completed its objective it is disbanded, although it can always be reconstituted if necessary.

Where young people are concerned it is especially important that they get involved in the process and take ownership of the resolution. Typical issues have included speeding, litter, anti-social behaviour and cold-calling.

There was some debate about attendance at these meetings especially in Swanley and it was suggested that both the times of the meetings and the venues might need to be revisited. It was pointed out that the Partnership held community days in the 3 towns giving the public the opportunity to speak to any of the partners directly.

Alison Cook.
Chairman, Social Affairs Select Committee.

c) Services Select Committee – 20 September 2011

The committee held a meeting on 20th September at which the Kent Waste Partnership Annual Report was discussed together with the consultation on the proposed refreshing of the Kent Joint Management Strategy. The committee made a number of general points on the two documents and it was agreed the Chairman and the Head of Environmental and Operational Services should collate the responses and reply to the questions set out in the refresh document. The committee received a presentation from the Head of Housing and Communications on a number of housing issues.

The in-depth scrutiny sub-committee would be progressing the issue of under occupation of social housing and would report to the next committee meeting. The committee considered the report on the 10 year budget and staff terms and conditions. Members were impressed with the amount of work carried out and how positive the result was in view of the current circumstances. The comments will be fed back to the Cabinet for their meeting on 13th October.

R.J.Davison
Chairman, Services Select Committee

Council- 18 October 2011