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Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Tuesday, 2 August 2016 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor K Mills

Councillors: M R Eddy (as substitute for Councillor M I Cosin)
B J Glayzer
P J Hawkins (as substitute for Councillor D A Sargent)
M J Holloway
T P Johnstone (as substitute for Councillor J M Heron)
S C Manion

Officers: Chief Executive
Director of Governance
Team Leader – Democratic Support

35 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T A Bond, M I Cosin, R J Frost, J M Heron, M Rose and D A Sargent.

36 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillors M R Eddy, P J Hawkins and T P Johnstone had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors M I Cosin, D A Sargent and J M Heron respectively.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

38 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Team Leader – Democratic Support advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

39 EXPLORING THE MERGER OF THE FIVE EAST KENT DISTRICT COUNCILS

The Chief Executive introduced the report on Exploring the Merger of the Five East Kent District Councils.

The Committee was advised that no decision had yet been made in respect of the merger of the five East Kent District Councils (Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet) and the report was only about exploring options. Each authority was contributing £20,000 to support the preparation of the business case by the end of the year.

If the business case was agreed for a new East Kent 'Super District' there would be the potential for bidding for additional powers and the devolution of some existing powers to town and parish council level.

The Chairman, Councillor K Mills, stated that the Committee needed to understand the process for any potential merger, what new powers (if any) were on offer, what public consultation and engagement would be undertaken to support any decision and what the criteria for a successful merger were. It was agreed that the matter would be included on the work programme for regular updates.

The willingness of Kent County Council to devolve powers and the accompanying funding to a new 'Super District' was questioned and the importance of engagement in turn with Town and Parish Council's over what powers would be devolved to them and where the funding to enable them to deliver these devolved powers would come from was emphasised.

The proposed level of Council Tax for a new East Kent authority was raised given the current variation in Council Tax levels across the five authorities. Members were advised that while it would be a matter for the Elected Members of any new East Kent authority to determine its Council Tax level, there was an intention from the Leaders of the existing five authorities to set the level of Council Tax for the new authority at the level of the lowest of the authorities (Ashford Borough Council). This would result in a £5 million reduction in the existing combined revenues of the five authorities.

The median level of Council Tax for East Kent was close to the level currently charged by Canterbury City, which was higher than the Council Tax in Ashford and Dover but lower than that of Shepway and Thanet.

The exploration of other combined working options such as a unitary authority, a super district based on 3 or 4 East Kent councils or expanding the existing three authority shared services vehicle to cover other services and/or authorities was discussed.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to the Cabinet:

- (a) That the Business Case would be enhanced if it could be shown that Town and Parish Councils had been consulted about the possible devolution of powers to their level and were in support. As such, Scrutiny recommends that building the business case includes engagement with Towns and Parishes so that we can demonstrate to the Secretary of State a partnership approach at an early stage.
- (b) That the business case be the subject of pre-decision scrutiny prior to it going to Cabinet and Council in January 2017.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm.