

Kent Supporting Independence Programme

“Increasing Employment & Fulfilment - Reducing Dependency”

May 2002

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Foreword

The Kent Public Service Agreement (PSA) is a partnership between Kent County Council and the Government established in April 2001. It will bring significant benefits to our County – financial reward, freedom from regulation, new opportunities for partnership working and, most importantly, improvements in public services and the quality of life.

Behind this work we hold a wider ambition - *to increase employment and fulfilment and to reduce dependency*. We believe we can help people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves trapped in dependency, and by supporting them we can enable them to lift themselves back into independence, employment and more fulfilling lives, thus allowing them to take responsibility for themselves, their families, and their future.

In order to take this forward we are now launching the Kent Supporting Independence Programme with the full and active support of all our Kent partners in the public sector, in the voluntary, community and private sectors. Together with the Treasury we have commissioned work to analyse the pattern of all welfare expenditure in Kent and our success in reducing it. At the same time we are mapping all our work, and that of our partners and Government agencies, to integrate and gear up core programmes, as well as new initiatives in order to make the greatest possible impact on reducing dependency.

Total public expenditure in Kent is £5.5 billion of which some £2.5 billion is from the Government's social security programmes. Our Kent Supporting Independence Programme seeks to help those who are dependent and so reduce unnecessary expenditure on welfare and benefits – and in commitments already made in the Kent PSA to reinvest part of these savings for Government back into public services and preventative programmes in Kent.

We know that these aims are difficult and ambitious but in Kent we share a determination to succeed. Our work with our Kent partners, in the public, private and voluntary sectors, in joining Government at the local level, is going forward methodically and professionally, with new projects, backed by new resources. We believe that this work will make a real difference to the lives and quality of life of all in Kent.

Sandy Bruce-Lockhart
May 2002

Introduction

The Supporting Independence Programme (SIP) has evolved from the initiative of the Public Service Agreement (PSA). The aim is to re-focus the County Council's work, across all its departments, in order to help people achieve greater independence and lift themselves out of dependency. At the same time, the County Council is working with its key partners in the public sector, other councils, the voluntary and community sectors and the private sector, to assist in achieving the aims of dependency and welfare reduction. The SIP consists of 4 strands of actions:

1. Analysing and monitoring welfare expenditure in Kent (to be carried out by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre of the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Oxford);
2. Assessing all work that contributes towards SIP for the key partners referred to above;
3. Re-focusing the work of these partners in supporting independence;
4. Targeting specific projects in selected high dependency wards – Supporting Independence Projects.

This paper sets out a general overview of the SIP and additional information and more comprehensive working papers are available from the Kent County Council, Joint Policy and Social Independence Unit. Please contact us if we can help you or if you can help us:

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Background

This programme forms a fundamental element of '*The Next Four Years*' – the County Council's medium term policy statement. When taken together, the Kent SIP, Kent PSA and Next Four Years will deliver significant reductions in the levels of dependency in the county. The Benefit tracking (and Social Independence Projects) will provide a meaningful basis for future work across the county and perhaps in other deprived areas of the country. It will focus on the number of claimants and the associated expenditure in relation to those benefits most associated with dependency, specifically: Income Support (excluding payments to pensioners), Job Seeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Incapacity Benefit.

Supporting independence is about reducing dependency but it is about more than purely getting people off welfare benefits and into a job. The over-riding goal is two-fold:

1. To enable those who are reliant on benefit to lift themselves out of dependency and into a sustainable and meaningful existence where they are able to support themselves and their families without the help of the state;
2. To improve life chances for all young people to stop them becoming dependent in the first place.

The key is to develop a cohesive approach, i.e. to bring both of the above goals together - in a way which improves the current situation but not at the expense of improving the longer-term picture - the ultimate goal of our PSA and SIP initiatives. The longer-term objective must ensure that prevention is at the core of everything that we do.

A New Approach to Social Independence?

From the Public Service Agreement to the Supporting Independence Programme

The new approach to preventative work, as outlined in the local regeneration targets within the PSA, is fundamental to moving the SIP forward. The way in which the PSA brings together mainstream services and other initiatives (e.g. Sure Start) at the local level will provide the basis from which the SIP will be taken forward. The SIP will allow this work to be taken to the next stage and will demonstrate the kind of progress that can be made at the local level, when all relevant factors are addressed.

The SIP will require input from both local partners and central government and its agencies. The relaxation of rules and the will to make this happen is required from all involved, and changes will need to be instigated at both the local and national level. This should not be a major issue, as the aims of the SIP are at the heart of our PSA and therefore, a critical factor in its success. As the targets in the PSA are shared targets (for local and central government) all parties have an interest in making this work.

Community Leadership

The Community Leadership role and ‘well-being’ power given to local government via the Local Government Act 2000 provides many of the tools we need to approach the issue of dependency in a new and imaginative way. Use of the ‘well-being’ power is relevant at all levels, especially at the local level. KCC needs to work through local agents to promote the Community Leadership role at the level of the community and do whatever is required to increase social independence and promote community well-being.

The bottom line with any new approach however, is that it will **not** deliver significant instant and measurable benefits, at least at any significant scale. The pay-offs will be realised much later on. That said, there will be short-term measurable advances in terms of reduced welfare benefits spend, but this will be at the mercy of macro-economic trends and a small economic downturn could wipe out all gains over night. However, the longer term benefits although they will not be visible for some time, are likely to be far more resilient to macro-economic forces and, therefore, far more sustainable.

Key Elements

There are three key elements to the SIP, which will build on the foundation of the PSA and place supporting independence at the heart of service-delivery:

Community Capacity Building

- a personal bespoke service helping people and communities to help themselves;
- can be done within existing legislative framework;
- requires full co-operation from all agencies (local and national).

‘Whole Education’

- developing the remit of the local school where children do not receive social and moral guidance from family and/or community, and providing a focus for community development.

‘Welfare Reform’

- pushing for national reform of the benefit system;
- being pragmatic and developing ways to promote change, whilst moving in the right direction, at the local level, in the meantime;
- using local resources to support individuals in becoming independent by easing the transition from unemployment to work;
- taking a local approach to the Jobcentre Plus initiative.

Re-focusing the Work of Mainstream Services

Different approaches will be set in place; from collation and distillation of information/activity data from a wide variety of sources, to support for direct intervention on local community projects, such as those initiatives already set in place through the PSA work. It is necessary to be both practical and theoretical and will require a 'macro' view, for example; at a county level, whilst at the same time requiring a quite focused 'micro' view, aimed at supporting individual community initiatives (and indeed individual people). The Kent Social Independence 'Team' will generally work through colleagues already actively involved in community development and mainstream services and primarily, will act as a catalyst to pull together the 'macro' view and to promote developments at a 'micro' level.

Supporting Independence Projects

In furtherance of the SIP we intend to launch a series of *Supporting Independence Projects*, which will trial new approaches to tackling dependency and again will follow closely the approach and success of the PSA initiatives. These projects will bring together the work on dependency and the concept of 'mini-PSAs' and will take on the form of specific targeted interventions in key areas, demonstrating what we are seeking to achieve across the county over the longer term. It is proposed that the first phase will concentrate on projects in about 25 locations (wards) where there is a high level of dependence and/or the presence of multi-agency partnerships, which will provide opportunity for a county-wide spread.

Twenty two of the twenty four wards selected rank within the top seventy Kent wards in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The IMD index represents six different aspects of deprivation (Income, Employment, Health & Disability, Education, Housing, Access to Services). However, to ensure that we achieved a county-wide spread we did not restrict the selection to the IMD but drew on local knowledge in respect of existing community initiatives. (See List of Wards attached as Appendix 1.)

The services required by a community need to be defined by that community itself rather than dictated by a number of disconnected organisations, each with their own local priorities. It is the community that needs to be at the heart of decisions on service delivery, rather than professional norms or organisational objectives and projects will be designed to respond to specific local needs. The implications of this go further than the standard use of consultation, towards an approach where prioritisation of local services is led from within communities - true community leadership - and may require a cultural shift by some professionals to ensure that appropriate services which promote independence are actually delivered. Where communities are unable or unwilling to articulate their needs, extra resources will need to be focused to rebuild this capacity in a sustainable manner.

Nine Archetypes of Dependency'

Nine Archetypes of dependency have been identified and the work of the SIP will concentrate on initiatives which help to promote independence for these groups, building on work already underway:

Young People

- 1) School Leavers with Low Educational Attainment
- 2) Youths with repeat youth offending records
- 3) In Care / Care Leavers

Dependent Adults

- 4) Lone Parents
- 5) People lacking basis skills including life skills, social skills and those lacking low level literacy or numeracy
- 6) People with alcohol or substance addictions
- 7) People with health problems, learning or physical disabilities on or applying for low-level long-term incapacity benefit

- 8) Transient or seasonal populations (including Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Homeless)
- 9) Long-term unemployed aged 50+

(NB. It is not intended that these groups are mutually exclusive, rather it is intended that they cover all relevant groups, to include as many dependent individuals as possible.)

Building on Local Services!

Social Care

By re-evaluating services in relation to the long-term social outcomes they are intended to deliver, rather than focusing on ensuring the rule-driven processes run smoothly, services can be refocused to ensure that they are mainly a means to an end rather than an end in themselves.

The refocusing of the long-term objective of children's services, for example, towards the ultimate goal of not taking children into care, has ensured a far more preventative approach and outlook to the delivery of services. Our investment in new Family Centres in deprived areas and enhanced support for the 16-Plus service is already resulting in fewer children being taken into care and improved social outcomes for those children, their families and the wider community.

Another example is the implementation of KCC's 'Active Care' policy which seeks to support people in independent living. Rather than delivering purely reactive services, we are working to prevent people needing the services in the first place.

The Best Start in Life

The quality of education plays a key role in determining levels of dependency and subsequent demand on services. A well-educated population is generally thought to be a less deprived and less dependent population. More importantly a higher general standard of education in traditionally deprived areas can help to make a real difference in terms of reversing the cycle of deprivation.

Education however, is not purely about children being taught a curriculum at school, but instead should be taken in its widest possible sense referring to a learning community. Schools are the natural centre of many communities and lend themselves to much wider uses. Our ideal is of a 'School that never sleeps' where a community can come together for self-improvement, to build an identity and to improve levels of skills, knowledge and to develop new ideas.

The proposed changes to Primary education, as outlined in the 'Big Idea', would help to make a real difference. For example, extending the school day in deprived areas would make it easier for schools to help children develop the values and skills which they are not getting from family and community, values and skills which they will take home to their families and communities.

There is little doubt that the key to effective preventative services is ensuring that our formative years give us the tools and strength of character to make the most of opportunities in later life. The provision of services for the very young and their families cuts across many of the organisational barriers at the local level. For example, Health Services, Social Services and Education all have a major part to play in this area.

Real Communities with Shared Values

Crime and community safety are becoming increasingly high profile and of concern to the general public. Regardless of what is happening with actual levels of crime, there is little doubt that the fear of crime is increasing, especially in deprived neighbourhoods. A loss of community 'spirit'/identity and high levels of transience within communities have led to a breakdown in the social ties which

have traditionally bound members of a community together, alienating them from the services that are there to help them (Police, Fire, etc).

It is possible to reverse these adverse trends and revitalise communities and help promote shared values and social cohesion. However it is the case that this is both resource intensive and cannot be prescribed. Each community is different and requires a bespoke approach to capacity building. We are already making a difference in the deprived areas of Kent through joint working with the Police through initiatives such as the 'Handy Van' Scheme and our Neighbourhood Wardens Project. These new projects add to existing approaches to improved community safety, such as Neighbourhood Watch and other self-administered community-based schemes.

Young people are often associated with anti-social behaviour and in some areas they account for more than their share of criminal activity. We are working through our Youth Service and Young Offenders Teams and with our partners to develop constructive activities for young people to keep them out of trouble and bring them back into the heart of our communities.

Health inequalities are a major issue in deprived neighbourhoods with the incidence of many diseases and illnesses being higher. Investment in longer-term aims and objectives is key. Improving general levels of health, reducing teenage pregnancy and providing additional community-based preventative health services will help to reduce deprivation and improve quality of life and general well being. Through working with partner agencies in the promotion of healthy living for all ages, promoting sport and improving nutrition, our longer-term action will ultimately lead to a decrease in pressure on acute services.

Regeneration and the Economy

Whilst there is no argument that the role of economic development in attracting inward investment and working at the strategic level is of prime importance to the health of the local economy, equally there is a role for economic development at the local community level. In fact the most successful regeneration projects are those which have focused on both elements simultaneously. Combating dependency is key to the economic health of any area and it is key to provide people with both the skills and aspirations they need to do the jobs which can be delivered through large-scale infrastructure regeneration.

All mainstream services have a significant role to play in this area, as it is in the interests of all stakeholders that the general levels of economic, environmental and social well-being improve. Through acknowledging the fact that these elements are fundamentally inter-linked, an important step forward is taken. There is little point in providing new jobs for people in deprived areas if the unemployed do not have the aspirations that drive them to gain the skills to obtain the jobs.

Benefits Agency /Employment Service – Jobcentre Plus

Government is proposing to roll out the new Jobcentre Plus initiative across the country over the next two years. Jobcentre Plus will change the way support is provided to people of working age who are claiming benefits, moving to a welfare system that provides active support to help people become more independent. This new service will bring together the Employment Service, who run Jobcentres, and those parts of the Benefits Agency providing services to people of working age and offer the following services:

- practical job finding assistance through a personal adviser service,
- ensuring those people unable to work receive the correct benefits on time
- helping employers to fill their vacancies.

The Adult Careers Guidance Service in Kent and other local organisations (voluntary, public and private sector) also deliver specific services aimed at getting people back into work. Jobcentre Plus will provide a single point of contact for all working age people to access a wide variety of benefits. It seems logical therefore to take this a step further and bring all of the relevant agencies and services

together under one ‘roof’, and combine resources to offer a single service to people in the area. This would deliver a variety of benefits:

- single point of contact for all employment / benefit services in an area;
- a removal of bureaucratic boundaries relating to who is able to help which sections of the population;
- single fund of money to meet the joint aims of all agencies / bodies concerned.

Such an approach is a good example of the ‘blurred boundaries’ approach that underpins the SIP.

Easing the transition from benefit dependency into work

Discussion with the Benefit Agency and Employment Service has identified a key disincentive for those who might move from benefit into work, relating to financial demands. Whilst on benefit some of the more dependent people may borrow from the Social Fund in order to buy certain essentials (such as refrigerator) and are also afforded some degree of protection from financial responsibilities such as utilities bills. However, when these people move from benefit into paid employment they are expected to increase the level of repayment of the aforementioned loans and are liable for the payment of utilities bills, etc. This often creates a difficult situation for the individual in question, who has to cope with the pressure of a significant lifestyle change (into paid employment) and simultaneously deal with multiple demands for payment of various outstanding debts. This has a number of effects:

- lead to a situation where taking paid employment at the minimum wage can lead to no change or even a drop in overall net income;
- provide a disincentive to seeking work, as it is safer and less bother to remain on benefit where everything is done for the individual;
- delays in pay can lead to an overall increase in indebtedness with returning to dependency on benefit being the only option.

Various mechanisms are already in place in an attempt to deal with these issues, however they are not successful in all cases as is often the way with rules-driven systems. Therefore in order for the SIP to be a success the freedom to provide ‘gap’ funding where necessary, in order to ensure that there are tangible financial benefits from moving into paid employment, is crucial and would provide a real incentive for people to seek employment. This additional support would have to be time-limited, but would allow some breathing space and would help to ease the transition from benefit to work combined with one-on-one support.

It is likely that the well-being power will let us do these things anyway, but we need to do this **with** government rather than in isolation. There are bound to be some difficulties as we are essentially asking for devolution of certain powers and roles from the national to the local level.

Next Steps

Across the county a great deal of work is already underway which supports the ambitions and targets of the SIP, particularly through the provision of mainstream services. One of our initial tasks will be to identify key people involved (such as local ‘community champions’) and to determine what lessons/successful initiatives can be transferred elsewhere in the county, particularly where this can be achieved through refocusing or bolstering services. The emphasis is on action and on learning from good practice already in place, followed by delivery of intervention models which result in change, at individual and community levels.

In Conclusion

It is important to recognise that this is the beginning of a process, of a new way of delivering services and support. Key to success will be the requirement for an openness which will allow opportunity to respond to bespoke problems in a bespoke manner – to learn and act from our findings - the essence of action learning. The emphasis must be on prevention and there is an acknowledgement that whilst the aims are ambitious the commitment to succeed is well grounded.