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To: County Council – 1 April 2010

Subject: Comprehensive Area Assessment

1. Summary

1.1 In 2009 the Audit Commission launched the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process as the successor to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The CAA provided a judgement by the commission of the performance of individual organisations through an Organisational Assessment report and a judgement of the effectiveness of partnership working in and Area Assessment report.

1.2 Although KCC has expressed significant reservations about the CAA process (as recently as in the report to Cabinet in October 2009), it remains the national system for England until at least the end of 2010 and so the judgements published about Kent and KCC play a significant part in how the area and the authority are viewed.

1.3 Claire Bryce-Smith is the Audit Commission CAA lead for Kent & Medway and is presenting a summary of the CAA picture in Kent to members today. This report highlights the key findings published in December 2009, relating to activities and outcomes in 2008/9.

1.4 Kent excels in both reports. Kent County Council is joint top among all county councils in England – it is one of only three county councils that are “performing excellently”. So, for the eighth year running, Kent County Council has scored the highest possible overall rating. The county is also singled out for exceptional achievement. In the partnership assessment, Kent gets two exceptional accreditations for improving young peoples’ education and skills, for providing job opportunities to match Kent’s growing economy and for the Gateways, which bring a wide range of public, community and voluntary services under one roof.

2. Extracts from the Audit Commission reports

2.1 Kent – the county

The Area Assessment paid tribute to how Kent partners were working together to improve life in Kent.

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“Kent’s public services deserve recognition for two exceptional and innovative areas of work. One is “the wide range of training and learning opportunities and support available for young people, adults and families to improve their skills.”

The second is “the pioneering chain of Gateway one-stop shops across the county. These bring a wide range of public, community and voluntary services under one roof, making it easier and more convenient for local people to use them.”

Direct quote from the Audit Commission on the Green Flag on improving skills

“Kent Partners show a strong commitment to improving local peoples’ skills to meet Kent’s economic needs so everyone benefits. Even in the current recession, Kent’s economy is growing and the future levels of growth planned for the county are ambitious. A range of partners from the business community, the public sector, education providers and community groups are working together, investing in facilities, courses and apprenticeships and helping people into better jobs. A wide range of opportunities for the development of the skills of young people and adults are available.”

Direct quote from the Audit Commission on the Green Flag for Gateways

“A pioneering chain of one-stop high street shops across Kent is improving the way people can get local services. The county and district councils have worked to bring local services together under one roof, from benefits through to housing advice and adult social care. This makes it more convenient for people to find out what they want to know about services in one visit. Before the one stop shops, people often had to contact individual organisations or departments spread across a number of locations. The bright and welcoming Gateway shops are fully accessible to disabled people, such as wheelchair users. They provide free internet access and contain self-help kiosks for paying bills. Many people say they like using the Gateways and numbers accessing services have risen rapidly.”

Further comments from the Audit Commission on Kent as a county:

“Kent is one of the largest counties in England with a population of over 1.4 million. People in Kent feel safer than most other places. Crime rates are low and are falling lower still with good partnership working.”

“Many more people in Kent are healthier and living longer, but there are still big variations between and within areas. The quality of health services are improving, but not fast enough.”

2.2 Kent County Council – the organisation

The Audit Commission said:

“Kent County Council clearly understands what matters to Kent residents” and “targets these with great effect”. The council has demonstrated “clear innovation and significant outcomes in a number of its key priority areas, exceeding challenging targets in many cases”. Important services such as adult social care, safeguarding children and education are good. “Leadership is farsighted and strong” and “the council has an excellent track record in delivery, providing confidence for further improvements”.

Kent County Council has nine priorities that it seeks to deliver for the people of Kent, as follows:-

Economic success – opportunities for all

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“The council has continued to be proactive in boosting jobs, supporting businesses during the recession with much success. The council makes good use of its considerable purchasing power to support small local businesses.”

Learning for everyone

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“Secondary schools perform well overall and more sixth forms are good or better than seen in similar areas or the country overall. More special schools are good or better than is the case nationally or in similar areas and the local authority fostering and adoption agencies, and private fostering arrangements, are all good. A large programme is underway to rebuild schools to a high standard across the county and this is the largest scheme in the country.”

Preparing for employment

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“The council’s approach to improving skills and helping younger people into work is extensive. There is a wide range of vocational programmes and apprenticeship schemes. These, importantly, work closely with employers and training providers to make sure skills training fits with the needs of local employers.”

“Numbers of apprenticeships employed directly by councils in Kent is increasing. As a result, the county council and partners are on track to achieve 750 apprenticeships in the public and private sector by 2010....This is impressive. Nearly all those who complete their apprenticeships get employment.”

Enjoying life

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“The council has received national recognition for its work in promoting and boosting participation in sport in the build up to the 2012 Olympic Games. The highly successful Kent School Games won the council beacon status for 2009. This award recognises innovative practice. Promoting Kent as a centre for the arts continues, and the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate is on track to open next year. Accessing a whole range of public services and advice and support from voluntary and community organisations is being made easier and more convenient through the bright and welcoming, pioneering network of Gateway shops, found in seven town centres across Kent.”

Keeping Kent moving

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“A comprehensive package of measures to keep Kent moving and reduce congestion is delivering success. This includes, the large scale roll out of the Kent Freedom Pass for use by 11 to 16-year-olds on buses, which is helping to reduce the school run, ‘town centre’ congestion, as well as promoting independence.” Other “actions include using better technology to improve traffic flows through to promoting and providing more choice in how people can travel. Better ways of keeping traffic moving are helping to reduce congestion in the busy centre of Maidstone. This is reducing journey times and is helping to improve local air quality.”

Environmental excellence and high quality homes

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“Overall streets and public places in Kent are clean and well-kept. Households in Kent produce more waste than average but levels are falling fast. A number of campaigns and initiatives are helping to reduce the amount of waste being put into bins. This is good for the environment because less waste needs to go to the incinerator and landfill.”

“The council is successfully reducing the impact of its own services on the environment by promoting a range of actions. Recycling at County Hall is high and business miles have been cut. Many more empty homes have been brought back into use as a result of successful partnership working with the district councils.”

Improved health, care and wellbeing (staying healthy)

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“The council is doing well to improve people’s health. The Kent Healthy Schools Programme ... is on target to reach 100 per cent of all Kent schools by December 2009. Council activities are improving the sexual health of young people. More than 8,000 young people have access to advice on sexual health.”

Improved health, care and wellbeing (independent living)

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“Among a range of findings was excellent work done by the council in delivering preventative services. Fewer people in Kent need care or treatment in hospitals or care homes. People who have long-term needs and their carers are supported to live as independently as they choose, and have well-timed, well co-ordinated treatment and support.”

Stronger and Safer Communities

Direct quote from the Audit Commission:

“Crime levels in Kent have fallen and remain low. Reducing crime is an important priority for the police, all councils, health services and other partners working together across Kent. Progress is good and improvements are likely to continue. More people say they feel safe, and in higher numbers, than elsewhere in the country. Work with Kent Police, and Kent Fire and Rescue, on joint initiatives has led

to innovative ways of engaging with those ... most likely to be killed or seriously injured.”

Finally, under ‘Prospects for Improvement, this is what the Audit Commission said about our use of resources:

“The council has an excellent track record of delivery, and continues to beat tough targets to make efficiency savings to reinvest in services to residents. The council has balanced and achieved its budget for 10 years while exceeding its savings plans and delivering services the public wants. The council has a strong control over costs maintaining council tax at relatively low levels.”

3. Recommendation

This report is for information only, but following the presentation from Claire Bryce-Smith, there will be an opportunity for Member questions.

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