

**By:** Alex King, Cabinet Member for Localism and Partnerships  
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**To:** Corporate Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee 8th April 2010

**Subject:** Shared Services work in Kent

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## **1. Summary**

Since the Kent Commitment was signed between Kent County Council and the District and Borough Councils in Kent in January 2007, formal and informal partnership and joint working structures have continued to develop to create shared services and more effective collaboration.

At the January meeting of this Committee you received a detailed report on the payroll and HR aspects of shared services.

This report covers the ongoing work of the East Kent Joint Arrangement Committee (involving the Districts of Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet, plus KCC); the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (involving the districts of Ashford, Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells, plus KCC); the shared services activities between the remaining districts and the work of Kent Commercial Services in support of shared services and shared procurement in Kent.

## **2. East Kent**

Over the last three years the East Kent authorities have been working together to establish a strategic vision for the area. The work started with the establishment of an East Kent Local Strategic Partnership in 2007.

At the same time, the East Kent authorities started to collaborate to develop shared service projects. A pilot was arranged to establish the East Kent Audit Partnership and the project has moved on to include a wide range of services including Waste Management, Housing, HR/Payroll and others. The collaborative working is underpinned by a decision making framework which involves an East Kent (Joint Arrangements) committee (EKJAC) and parallel scrutiny arrangement. Both were established in 2008 following a collaborative project between the Legal representatives of the five constituent authorities of Canterbury, Dover, Shepway, Thanet and Kent CC. Other authorities can co-opt for particular projects, as happened when Ashford elected to participate in the Joint Housing project. Regular informal meetings of the East Kent Chief Executives and Leaders support the work of the committee.

The East Kent districts have also developed a decision making framework for discussion and agreement of joint service arrangements between the East Kent authorities. There was lengthy debate about the need for a formal committee, given that it makes recommendations, which are then referred back to each Council to formally resolve through Executive or Council depending on the nature of the function. The

alternative model involved each authority separately considering and resolving reports without there being a formal collective forum at which the proposals were endorsed.

In the end, all parties accepted the benefits of having all authorities sign up to a single set of recommendations for each report, where all parties have the opportunity to debate the issues together in open forum and make a formally-minuted joint recommendation to the participating authorities. In June 2008, the inaugural meeting of EKJAC took place at which the Procedure rules, administrative processes and proposals for the future development of the East Kent arrangements were all jointly agreed.

The committee is held to account by an East Kent (Joint Scrutiny) committee, which includes three members from each constituent authority, nominated according to the political balance of each. Chairmanship for both committees rotates on an annual basis.

The work of committees is supported by informal (in that they are private) meetings of the East Kent Chief Executives Forum on a fortnightly basis and the East Kent Leaders and Chief Executives on a monthly basis. They receive regular progress reports and offer strategic and political direction to the process. Secretariat support is provided by Canterbury.

The process is hierarchical and can be seen as a pyramid, leading to a recommendation by the joint committee which is referred to teach council for resolution (diagram included at the end).

A summary of the progress on joint projects is attached as Appendix 1

### **3. Mid Kent**

Activities to date and the summary of progress are contained in the annual report of the partnership dated December 2009 – see Appendix 2

Since that date, the Audit Partnership is now in place and further positive progress has been made towards the joint Legal Service Revenues and Benefits service across 3 of the 4 districts.

### **4. West Kent**

West Kent Collaborative Working Group comprises Dartford Borough Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The four Councils accept that shared working is beneficial and have been inputting to the initiatives being progressed under the Kent Commitment, but now acknowledge that there is the need to progress further collaborative working.

Arrangements in place (as at the end of 2009):

#### **Between Dartford and Sevenoaks**

- Internal Audit – Joint management but work taking place to bring the two teams into one.

- **Environmental Health – a joint management arrangement with** consideration being given to progressing to arrangements extended to cover three or all four of the Councils.

#### **Between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Malling**

- Legal Services – a joint management for an initial period but Councils now looking to extend arrangement.

#### **Between Gravesham and Tonbridge and Malling**

- Fraud – joint management arrangement
- Council Tax – joint management arrangement

#### Other Services being explored

#### **Procurement**

- Procurement representatives from the West Kent LA's to meet with the West Kent Steering Group to agree actions to move the procurement agenda forward.
- Joint working being developed whilst seeking to ensure that representatives on the current clusters of the Kent Buying Consortium match the Kent LA's clusters.
- Joint Spend Analysis initiative being undertaken with Spikes Cavell.

#### **I.T.**

- Information shared on type of software systems each Council have and where these are due to be replaced. The aim is to try and progressively achieve common systems.
- Service managers meeting to identify and progress opportunities for joint working.

**Land Charges** – an arrangement across the four Councils is being explored.

**Planning** – discussions ongoing on possible areas for joint working.

### **5. Kent Commercial Services (KCS)**

This is the largest public sector procurement in the UK outside central Government, with a turnover of £650m. KCS has also been appointed as Centre of Excellence for Procurement by Improvement and Efficiency, South East, who are promoting 10 of our arrangements as 'Best Deals'.

LASER is setting the national standard for energy procurement and management - reducing consumption in addition to best buying – not only within Kent but across the UK.

The goods and services provided by KCS to Districts is worth in excess of £14m ranging from energy supplies (via the LASER consortium) worth over half that total – saving an estimated 23% over other means of supply.

This is summarised in the table attached as Appendix 3

## **6. Kent Public Service Network (KPSN)**

KPSN (Kent Public Service Network) will deliver high quality network services to Kent's communities, local authorities and public service providers as they meet the challenges facing government, education and health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This wide area network will be connecting over 1,100 sites, including Local Authority officers, schools and libraries. All, apart from 40 minor sites, were 'live' by March 2009. There were further savings on 'Government Connects' connections (mandatory for all LAs) worth c£500k in connection/rental costs.

Gartner has reviewed Kent Public Service Network as part of the Government Connect Secure eXtranet Evaluation and Positioning Study. They concluded:

*"Kent County Council's WAN is provided at a cost level 29% below the peer average."*

and

*"Kent's adoption of MPLS, delivered through a strong relationship with a technical partner vendor, at a cost efficient level is exemplary"*

Kent Public Service Network was a finalist in the LGC Awards 2009 (rewarding excellence in public sector IT) in the shared services category.

Lee Grafton, Head of Commercial and Communications at Government Connect, praised the progress made by Kent and Medway noting that it is the first aggregate community to connect all their sites. *"The success of KPSN in achieving this significant milestone conclusively demonstrates the ability of local and central government to work in partnership and to deliver real benefits to ordinary people"*.

The 14 local authorities in Kent have implemented a common network which links over 1200 public sector sites, Police and Fire services as well as sharing resources with the Higher and Further Education Joint Academic Network (Janet) and providing a secure shared channel to central government and local NHS trusts. The 3 years of partnership development, planning, procurement and physical implementation of this network was completed in March 2009. In April 2009 Kent became one of only 4 aggregated networks in the UK delivering connection to the Government Secure Network. It remains the only aggregator with 100% membership and compliance of all local authorities in the region.

## **7. Recommendation**

Members are asked to note the contents of this report

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