

# Partnership

# Working -

# snapshot survey

Kent County Council

Audit 2008/09

April 2010



---

# Contents

<b>Summary report</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Detailed report</b>	<b>6</b>

---

## **Status of our reports**

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/ members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
  - any third party.
-

# Summary report

---

## Introduction

- 1 This report explains the results of analysing some voluntary and independent organisations' perceptions of Kent County Council (KCC) as a partner, highlighting areas of strength as well as of development. It does this by drawing conclusions from three pieces of work. These were: an electronic survey of partners' opinions; involvement in the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) inspection of KCC's adult social care services; and examining the findings of the Comprehensive Area Assessment's (CAA) work on dealing with the needs of Kent's older people.

---

## Background

- 2 Partnership issues were identified for further investigation in KCC following the Corporate Assessment (CA) report in June 2008. In an otherwise excellent assessment, the Audit Commission reflected on the need for the Council to consider its impact on voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). The report concluded in this regard that KCC's capacity to deliver its ambitions would be stronger if it adopted a more inclusive, listening approach, particularly with local partners.
- 3 The need to engage with partners to deliver area-wide outcomes is particularly important with VCOs. Volunteering is likely to be an increasing form of service delivery, and as the number of older people available to volunteer increases, KCC needs to be seen as a facilitator of services as well as a deliverer of them. So a view of the Council as a highly supportive and enabling partner will be essential to make the most productive use of resources not directly employed by KCC, available to the area.
- 4 As a result of this background, the Audit Commission has included as part of its annual audit plan for the current year, a snapshot analysis of partnership working involving the KCC and some of its VCO partners. Although the nature of the survey means that it is not possible to draw conclusions about all partnership working involving KCC, the analysis will help the Council in its own wider review of partnership working which has now commenced.

---

## Audit approach

- 5 It was agreed with KCC that partnership issues should be explored through three approaches.
- 6 Firstly, a SNAP survey (an online questionnaire) was sent to a range of partners identified by KCC as key organisations in delivering services through financial contracts or advisory services and relationships.

- 7 Secondly, Audit Commission staff also took part with the CQC in their inspection of KCC adult social services in March 2009 where a range of VCOs were asked about partner working with the Council. This included a range of interviews with KCC councillors and staff.
- 8 Thirdly, older people's issues were an area for investigation to contribute to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) of Kent given the impacts of these larger numbers on the service demands on providers. This involved statutory as well as voluntary groups working with the increasing numbers of older people in Kent. This report takes into account those conclusions from that work that relate to partnership issues.

---

### Main conclusions

- 9 Drawing together evidence from the three approaches to analyse VCO partners' views on KCC's ability to foster strong partnerships, the overall conclusion is that the Council is well regarded as a partner.
- 10 KCC strengths include giving strong and inspirational leadership to partners and valuing their differing objectives and approaches. This also relates to seeking to build partner leadership. Moreover, the Council supports these groups on difficult decisions on patient care and boosts their capacity through training.
- 11 Areas for consideration include the need to review the implications of the level of resources given to partners and to seek to ensure that partnerships achieve their goals. Also, KCC's work to build links with the older people's forums is at an early stage and needs further work to be fully effective.
- 12 The SNAP survey produced mixed results. Partners judged that KCC values the different contributions of partners and makes the most of them. They also state that the Council respects partners' own values, goals and restrictions. On the other hand, some partners believe that the Council could be more open to criticism in order to improve its approach to the VCOs.
- 13 Representatives from voluntary and independent organisations when interviewed as part of the CQC inspection concluded that KCC inspires, motivates and provides leadership. They also said that the Council makes it clear that voluntary and independent organisations need themselves to be inspirational, thereby enabling strong voluntary organisations. They also judged that the Council has good systems for monitoring and is working successfully on needs such as housing for vulnerable people. Moreover, the Council supports these groups on making difficult decisions on patient care and boosts their capacity through training. On the other hand, there were concerns over domiciliary contracts whereby voluntary and independent organisations perceived that they are now expected to absorb higher costs in these difficult times. In this case, there would be a risk of deteriorating quality or capacity to deliver the contract.

## Summary report

- 14 The CAA work on older people's needs in Kent concluded that there is more to be done to make sure public services work together in the best way to make a real difference to older people's lives. There are large numbers of older people's groups in Kent and older people's forums work well in East Kent and Dartford. But these groups have not influenced public policy on services for all older people in all of Kent. As a result older people in Kent are likely to receive a different response from public services depending on where they live, and which service they are using. It is also more difficult for those who prefer not to attend public meetings, or who are too frail to do so, to influence what happens in their communities. This also makes it more difficult for public services in Kent to make sure they are delivering what older people want. KCC's work to build links with the older people's forums is at an early stage.
- 15 The recommendation following from this work, is as follows.
- That the Council considers how to respond to partners' perceptions that:
    - the Council could be more open to criticism in order to improve its approach with the VCOs;
    - the Council does not make changes to its procedures with partner goals in mind and does not react quickly enough to arrangements that do not work; and
    - the Council's work to build links with the older people's forums is at an early stage and older people's groups have not influenced public policy on services for all older people in all of Kent.

---

# Detailed report

---

## Partnership working

- 16 Partnership working was identified for further investigation in KCC following the Corporate Assessment (CA) in June 2008. The report noted that well-established partnership work is bringing real improvements to quality of life for local people, with ground-breaking care projects embracing new technology and the Council aiming to personalise services. It also stated that while KCC seeks excellence and its organisation is high quality, responsive and gives good value for money, this has required a drive and firmness of direction that has been seen by some as over-dominant. KCC recognises that it has reached a stage of maturity where further gains will depend on a more inclusive approach, internally and externally.
- 17 The CA report also noted that KCC's capacity to deliver its ambitions would be stronger if it adopted a more inclusive, listening approach - particularly with local partners. This is needed for the full development of localism and of inclusive decision-making that reflects fully the needs of all communities.
- 18 Integral to success in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is the need to engage with all partners to deliver area-wide outcomes. This is particularly important with the voluntary and community organisations (VCO). Volunteering is likely to be an increasing form of service delivery, and as the number of older people available to volunteer increases, KCC needs to be seen as a facilitator of services as well as a deliverer of them. It should also be noted that the Kent's LAA from 2008 includes NI 6 - Participation in regular volunteering. Also, KCC has identified its need to ensure there is good governance in its partnerships which is set out in its good governance guide.
- 19 In order therefore to help KCC to understand and strengthen partnership working, it was agreed to set up a project to analyse opinions of the VCOs in a number of settings. The project has been in three phases.
  - Phase 1 – was to conduct a SNAP survey with a wide range of VCOs in February/March 2009.
  - Phase 2, was to join CQC on their inspection of adult social services (onsite March 2009) and interview VCOs on partnership relationships with KCC.
  - Phase 3 is to have regard to the work of the CAA in Kent on the Council and partner approaches to the ageing population in Kent.
- 20 Following analysis of the three phases of work, this report highlights the findings of the work to help KCC to consider them in its wider review of partnership working, which has now commenced.

### Phase 1 - SNAP survey

- 21** A SNAP survey was sent to a range of partners identified by the Council as key organisations in delivering a range of services through financial contracts or advisory services and relationships. 22 responses were received from 75 groups contacted, giving a response rate of 29 per cent.
- 22** There were four main criteria assessed.
- How good the Council is as a partner.
  - KCC leadership and change.
  - Working together.
  - Delivery.
- 23** On the first criterion, there were positive scores between 59.1 to 72.7 per cent. Partners gave the highest score to the criterion that the Council works to ensure the diverse needs of all people, including disadvantaged people, are addressed. Partners also stated that the Council pays attention to measuring and monitoring the right things on partnership matters; and that the Council is ambitious about what can be achieved.
- 24** On the second criterion, there were positive scores between 40.9 per cent and 72.7 per cent. The high score was that the Council is honest about difficulties, indicating an open approach to dealing with difficult issues. On the other hand, two of the lowest scores in the survey were found in this section. They were – ‘Takes a long as well as a short term view, including on funding’; and ‘Is willing to be challenged by others’. The latter finding is similar to the judgement in the corporate assessment in 2008. This indicates that there is a continuing view that the Council could be more open to criticism in order to improve its approach with the VCOs.
- 25** On the third criterion, there was a wide range of responses from 36.3 per cent to 90.9 per cent. The highest score in the survey was that the Council ‘Respects that partners have their own values, goals and restrictions’. This indicates that the Council is aware of what drives and guides other organisations. On the other hand, one of the lowest scores in the survey was ‘Contributes money or staff to the partnership where needed’. The issue of money is a constant factor for the VCOs who are more dependent on grant funding than statutory organisations. This issue was also mentioned in the separate focus groups run by CQC. Examples mentioned by these organisations included driving down the value of domiciliary contracts whereby voluntary and independent organisations are now expected to absorb higher costs even though they are not in a position to do so. It has to be recognised that such organisations whose existence depends on funding from bodies like the Council are likely to want to maximise funding. So a view that Council funding is not enough is understandable. But the example of transferring financial risk to VCOs and cutting the income for some projects is a general concern expressed by Council partners, on which the Council will no doubt wish to reflect.

- 26 On the fourth criterion, there were positive scores between 31.8 per cent and 63.3 per cent. The highest score was against the criterion that the Council ‘Sends the right people to the partnership so that decisions and action follows’. On the other hand, three of the five criteria in this section were amongst the lowest scores in the survey. These were: ‘Tests solutions by working with those who will be affected by them’; ‘Makes the changes it needs to make within the council to ensure the partnership achieves its goals’; and ‘Stops doing things that do not lead to successful outcomes’. Taken together these three low scores indicate that partners believe that the Council does not make changes to its procedures with partner goals in mind and does not react quickly enough to issues that do not work.
- 27 In summary, the SNAP survey gives a range of matters for the Council to be satisfied with but there are other issues needing further reflection.

---

## Phase 2 - Care Quality Commission inspection of adult social care

- 28 The CQC inspection covered a wide range of issues in relation to adult social care. From their findings, some of the issues that relate to partner working are stated below.
- 29 Strengths from the inspection included:
- the Council and partners promote healthier and safer lifestyles. The Brighter Futures Group<sup>1</sup> is a good example of this;
  - the Council had actively invested in the independent and voluntary sectors to provide a wide range of preventative services;
  - the Council was working to strengthen its capacity to support the health and wellbeing of family carers; and
  - strong links with the voluntary sector.
- 30 Areas for improvement included:
- the Council should act upon the feedback made by carers in the Carers Satisfaction Survey;
  - the Council and its partners should develop a communications and engagement strategy that ensures people who use services, carers and members of the public know how to report abuse and know how to keep themselves safe; and
  - the Council should review both the need for and the capacity of advocacy organisations to support and empower people through safeguarding processes, especially during the investigative process or where support needs are long term.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Brighter Futures Group (BFG) is a partnership between Adult Social Services, Primary Care Trusts and the voluntary sector and is funded with £1.39m from the treasury

## Detailed report

- 31** From the focus groups with VCOs that took part in the CQC inspection, partnership strengths mentioned by them included:
- close work by Kent Adult Social Services (KASS) and housing partners has resulted in sound policies in place on partner working and awareness. KCC has a good to focus on safeguarding and offer more support when needed;
  - the Housing 21 Public Finance Initiative scheme on extra care housing engaged partners on its design. Good work with partners is improving housing for vulnerable people;
  - KCC listens and supports proactively. An example is hospital discharges where some hospitals want to discharge a patient to a home without assessment. There are cases where the care homes will raise the issue with KCC who has agreed that the home was correct not to accede to pressure. This gives confidence to partners that KCC will support them in difficulties; and
  - KCC supports partners' capacity. Training is offered by KCC at South Kent College on a wide range of training including for lifting and handling, first aid and care. These are excellent courses.
- 32** From the focus groups with VCOs that took part in the CQC inspection, partnership areas of development mentioned by them included:
- On Self Directed Support (SDS), partners are concerned that funding to VCOs might be cut. Also, while people receiving direct payments is very positive to give more choice, if there are not care managers regulating the service to ensure appropriate decisions are made, it could make older people vulnerable;
  - KCC does not stop doing some things that do not lead to successful outcomes. Examples include with the Kent Card where some clients are spending money outside the agreement. Also, invoicing on domiciliary care where providers have to invoice electronically, is leading to a saving for KCC but a cost for provider. Of the extra cost of 2 per cent, KCC is giving financial help towards the costs of 0.8 per cent but those organisations were left to find the other 1.2 per cent of cost. This hampers the capacity of voluntary organisations; and
  - KCC is not supporting advocacy providers sufficiently, who say that they do not have the capacity to meet demand. Some advocacy services are experiencing an increasing call for these services and there is now a waiting list; some advocacy services had Comic Relief funding which is finishing. Sustainability has not been assured.
- 33** In summary, VCOs in the focus groups judged that the Council has good systems for monitoring and is working successfully on needs such as housing for vulnerable people. Moreover, the Council supports VCOs in difficult decisions on patient care and boosts their capacity through training. On the other hand, VCOs are concerned about the ability of clients to handle complex decisions on care through Council initiatives and think that their long-term viability is being harmed through lack of funds from the Council.

---

### Phase 3 - Ageing well in Kent

- 34 KCC is mentioned several times in the CAA work on the needs of older people, called 'Ageing well in Kent'. The Council has produced 'Living Life to the Full', the framework for bringing together the work being done by various partners.
- 35 Demographic trends in Kent show increasing numbers of older people. As a result, there was a focus in this year's CAA on how the Council was working with non-statutory groups to improve services to older people. Findings included:
- public services in Kent are coming together to help older people lead active and fulfilling lives. There are some successes. But there is more to do to make sure they are working together in the best way to make a real difference to older people's lives. This is important because the number of older people in Kent is rising fast;
  - partners in Kent are working to improve older people's lives. The KCC-run library service offers a good range of activities, such as advice on healthy living, and sessions where older people are able to share their memories to keep their minds sharp. Work is also going on to increase the number of jobs for older workers and, in schools, to improve understanding between older and young people. For older people who need care and support, there are good services. Examples include giving older people more control over the services they want. Good partnership work is dealing with older people's needs in their homes rather than have to admit them to hospital;
  - most areas are taking account of older people's housing needs. As a result, new housing has been built, where frail older people can receive extra care and support if they need it to live as independently as possible; and
  - there is more to be done to make sure public services work together in the best way to make a real difference to older people's lives. There are large numbers of older people's groups in Kent and older people's forums work well in East Kent and Dartford. But these groups have not influenced public policy on services for all older people in all of Kent. As a result older people in Kent are likely to receive a different response from public services depending on where they live, and which service they are using. It is also more difficult for those who prefer not to attend public meetings, or who are too frail to do so, to influence what happens in their communities. This also makes it more difficult for public services in Kent to make sure they are delivering what older people want. KCC's work to build links with the older people's forums is at an early stage.
- 36 In conclusion, the Council is in a position to play a pivotal role, not just to deliver improved services directly, but also to encourage partners to work better together to deliver that aim. At this stage, it was too early for this to be making a difference to older people in Kent. Services for older people in Kent will continue to be a focus for further investigation as CAA develops.

---

# The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

---

## Copies of this report

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, audio, or in a language other than English, please call 0844 798 7070.

© Audit Commission 2010

For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 0844 798 1212 Fax: 0844 798 2945 Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

---