

By: Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

To: EH&W Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14th September 2010

Subject: Bold Steps for Kent – Update

Summary: Provides Members of EH&W POSC with an update on the timetable and development of the new medium term plan, *Bold Steps for Kent*, and seeks the Committee's input on the key issues over the next four years that it believes the plan might address ahead of the launch of a draft version for public and partner consultation.

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 *Bold Steps for the Kent* will be the medium term plan for KCC succeeding *Towards 2010*, which is due to expire at the end of September 2010. As the title suggests, *Bold Steps for Kent* will draw heavily on *Bold Steps for Radical Reform*, the discussion paper published by the County Council in January 2010. This set out how through radical thinking about public service delivery at the national and local level, it would be possible to deliver approximately £15-21 billion savings to HM Treasury.
- 1.2 From the recommendations set out in *Bold Steps for Radical Reform*, it is worth nothing that many have been swiftly acted on by the new Government:
 - *Bold Steps* called for abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime and a reduction in the audit and inspection purposes. The Government has announced the end of the CAA regime and the abolition of the Audit Commission.
 - *Bold Steps* called for the removal of the regional governance framework, since when the Government has axed Regional Development Agencies and is expected to announce through the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) the abolition of Government Offices for the Regions.
 - *Bold Steps* called for a roll back in the quango state and the Government has abolished or announced the abolition of, to date, 81 quangos.
 - *Bold Steps* called for a return of spatial planning powers to democratic local government, since when the Government has abolished regional housing targets, regional spatial strategies (i.e. the South East Plan) and the Infrastructure Planning Commission.
- 1.3 *Bold Steps for Radical Reform* also called for new forms of localism with more local decision making and more joined up and integrated delivery of public services to reduce costs and better meet public expectations within a smaller funding envelope for local government. *Bold Steps for Kent* will therefore be a very different document to *Towards 2010*. It aims to be a more strategic document. Whilst it will still set out the Administration's priorities for the next four years (and by definition not every service will be a priority), it will also set

out how the Administration increasingly wants these services to be delivered, moving towards a new model for local public service delivery in Kent.

2. The wider policy landscape

2.1 It is important to note that the wider policy landscape remains unclear on a number of key issues facing local government. These include:

- The fundamental financial challenge facing local government and the wider public sector. Reductions in government funding are expected to be at least 25% across the public sector as a result of the CSR, but as local government oversees one of the largest non-ring fenced areas of public expenditure, it is possible that councils' savings requirements may be far higher than this figure.
- The role of local authorities in education in light of the academies and free schools' agendas remains unclear. The Secretary of State has promised that local authorities will continue to have a strong and influential role in education, but the nature of that role, and the possible financial impact on upper tier councils of education reforms already announced, remains unclear.
- The role of local authorities in the health economy, as set out in the recent White Paper, in relation to GP commissioning and public health, and how that might tie into current service provision, particularly in regard to Adult Social Services, is still emerging.
- The development of Local Enterprise Partnerships as a mechanism for driving forward economic development and regeneration following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies remains a significant opportunity for local authorities, but one that will develop throughout the autumn as proposals are submitted by local authorities and considered by the Secretary of State.

2.2 As a result of these uncertainties the development of *Bold Steps for Kent* is taking place in a fast moving policy environment that requires the County Council to respond quickly to emerging developments. It is anticipated that many issues will become clearer following the announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) due on 20 October. However, some of the initial thinking laid out in this report may have to change both ahead of the release of a consultation draft, and before approval of *Bold Steps for Kent* by full Council.

3. Structure and Emerging Priorities:

3.1 Current thinking is that the document should be structured around the key themes of:

- Helping the economy to grow
- Supporting the Big Society
- Tackling disadvantage
- Building a new relationship with partners
- Ensuring the organisation is fit for purpose

- 3.2 Taking each of these key themes in turn, the emerging priorities (and it should be stressed that these are emerging priorities which require further consideration and refinement) are set out below:

Helping the Economy to Grow:

- Delivering of *21st Century Kent* and *Unlocking Kent's Potential* (regeneration framework)
- Delivering a big bold and ambitious Local Enterprise Partnership
- Getting the Thames Gateway moving to deliver new growth
- Continued investment in capital infrastructure (a third lower Thames Crossing/Manston Airport)
- Identifying new funding mechanisms for capital infrastructure (e.g. TIFF, Britdisc)
- Significant expansion of apprenticeship provision
- Delivering a high quality highways network
- Linking adult skills provision to the needs of the local economy
- Developing young people's career management skills

Supporting the Big Society:

- Establish a 'Big Society' Fund for Kent to provide start up monies for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs
- Reform our procurement framework to open it up more widely to the voluntary and community sector
- Introduce a 'Right to Bid' process for KCC services if local groups think they can run them better through mutuals /co-operatives (including KCC staff)
- A single strategic approach to community asset transfer
- Continue to support and use the Sustainable Communities Act
- Maintain the Member Highways Fund and Member Community Grant until at least the next county elections
- Support Kent parents who wish to establish free schools and continue to support and fund the Kent School Games

Tackling Disadvantage:

- Link the Supporting Independence Programme into the new Single Work Programme being developed by DWP
- Develop a pan-Kent multi agency approach family intervention
- Tackle the issue of looked after children being placed in East Kent by non-Kent local authorities
- Improving outcomes for young people in care and better transitions for those leaving care
- Focus on preventative early intervention strategies and enablement services in social care
- Continue to drive forward personalisation

Building a new relationship with partners

- Move to shared front line services with partners and greater focus on specific locality problems e.g. Margate Task Force
- Develop a model of local place based commissioning to ensure real subsidiarity is delivered in Kent – bringing on board partners to the potential of joint commissioning of local services

- Ensure a relationship with all schools – whether maintained or non-maintained
- Re-shape our support offer to schools and GPs so that it is competitive and attractive in the emerging market for support services

Ensuring the organisation is fit for purpose by:

- Ensuring KCC is a more transparent and open organisation that welcomes challenge
- Expanding the Gateway programme to deliver seamless access to public services across the county
- Increasing the amount of online service transactions
- Greater focus on commissioning rather than providing services
- Absolute emphasis on value for money and de-commissioning services where necessary
- Better and more targeted engagement with residents (and where possible in conjunction with partners)
- Ensuring staff have the right skills mix to deliver in the new landscape for local government

4. Key Questions:

- 4.1 Ahead of the development and publication of the consultation draft of *Bold Steps for Kent*, and given the issues, themes and emerging priorities outlined in this report, it would be particularly useful for Members of EH&W POSC to consider the following questions:
- Are the themes around which *Bold Steps for Kent* will be structured broadly right?
 - Are the emerging priorities set out under each of the key themes broadly right?
 - Are there any priorities not outlined in this report that Members feel should be considered for inclusion in *Bold Steps for Kent*?

5. Timetable & Next Steps:

- 5.1 Public and partner consultation on Bold Steps for Kent will begin on 11 October 2010 and will last for four weeks. This will allow full consideration of any decisions or issues emanating from the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2010 - due to be reported on 20 October 2010 - to be factored into the document if required, before approval by Full Council. Appendix 3 of the KCC Constitution (as amended 22 July 2010) states that the 'Strategic Statement' (i.e. Towards 2010 or its successor document) requires debate and approval by Council. It is intended for this to occur at the December County Council meeting.

6. Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.
- Provide comment and feedback on the themes and emerging priorities for Bold Steps for Kent.
- Identify any priorities not currently set out that should be considered for inclusion in Bold Steps for Kent.

Background Documents

- Bold Steps for Radical Reform, Kent County Council, January 2010

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