

ACCESSING DEMOCRACY

YOU CAN DO IT. REAL POLITICS FOR REAL PEOPLE

Final REPORT
August 2008



FOREWORD TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON ACCESSING DEMOCRACY

People are accused of becoming bored and disenchanted with politics. When there is an issue which affects people, or their neighbourhood they will make their views and opinions felt, the so called 'single issue' debate. We need to build on that keen interest in community.

This Select Committee will not solve the issues of accessing democracy at a stroke. What it does is act as a pointer to enabling elected members to become involved in a variety of ways in their community. We already have many councillors who engage and work very hard for their constituents, however, with the increasing pressures on people's time, combined with the growth of technology people are keen to have a choice how to engage.

If people take time to engage they need to be listened to and their comments made, when asked, need to be seen to be acknowledged and be seen to make a difference. If not we end up with even more cynical members of the public, believing consultation to be merely a 'tick-box' exercise.

Decisions and choices which affect people need to be explained clearly and communicated in a way that engages all. Sometimes difficult decisions need to be made, and the choices need to be explained clearly to those affected. People are not foolish and we, as a Select Committee heard that when difficult decisions and choices need to be made, the people made their choice in a rational and appropriate way in order to benefit the most number of people in the community. We need conversations and dialogue rather than choices alone!

Decisions are often complex, there will always be conflicting objectives, conflicting stakeholders views, and with properly planned participation there will always be more than one thing that will be achieved. However, engaging and accessing Citizen Kent in those decisions which affect the community need to use many methods and approaches as 'one size does not fit all'. The public after all are not a homogenous group communities are actually made up of different people.

We, as a county council, have ever growing numbers of partners 'delivering' services to the community. As elected members we are ideally placed as representatives of our community. In our day to day activities we seek out to reach as many members of our community as possible. By engaging people at the point of delivery, we can enable citizens to shape their community and in turn community cohesion will build and grow making Kent an even better place to live, work and play.

Christine Angell
Chair, Accessing Democracy Select Committee

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

1. In January 2008 an eight Member Select Committee was established to carry out a review on Accessing Democracy with the following terms of reference:

- To understand why many people do not participate in and influence decision making in Kent
- To discover what would/could encourage more people to participate in and influence decision making in Kent
- To discover what Kent County Council can do to increase participation

1.1 The Members of the Accessing Democracy Select Committee were:



Mrs Christine Angell
(Chair)
Labour



Mrs Ann Allen
Conservative



Mr David Brazier
Conservative



Mr Bill Hayton
Conservative



Mr George
Koowaree
Liberal Democrat



Mrs Eileen
Rowbotham
Labour



Mr Mike Snelling
Conservative



Mr Roland Tolputt
Conservative

1.2 This report considers the steps needed to revive involvement in local decision making. It looks at the use of new technology and participation methods to facilitate two way communications with the public on local service policies and priorities, the localism agenda and structures and the role of elected members within a mix of representative and participative democracy. The review focuses on the themes of how to get people interested, how to encourage people to participate and improving knowledge and understanding of the opportunities to participate. The Select Committee used a number of evidence sources to inform the investigation, including hearings, discussion groups, insight gathering with local residents, written evidence, key documents and national

research. This is written in the context of Kent County Council (KCC) and KCC elected members, with recognition that as a two- tier authority in Kent there is similar debate with District partners.

1.3 Our report contains a number of recommendations, which if agreed by Cabinet and the County Council will hopefully reinvigorate local democracy in Kent and result in people becoming more involved and influencing decision making, in both the short and longer term.

1.4 Key points are

- Empowering elected members to be as accessible and responsive as possible is key and needs the imaginative use of both traditional methods and new technology.
- Two-way communication is a key component if we are to successfully engage with local people in local democracy.
- Elected member roles are fundamental to the development of effective local involvement.
- There needs to be greater opportunity for the further development of the role of frontline elected members, empowering them to make locally evidenced based decisions.
- There needs to be an enabling of Local Forums to become increasingly targeted on local priorities and outcomes, through dialogue, action planning, joint commitment and the ability to respond.
- Need to use new technology and opportunities presented by e-democracy to broaden input into local decision making processes, making it easier for some and develop dialogue with local people, and support the development of a range of tools. These won't necessarily engage uninterested people and an outreach approach may still be needed – a combination of tools is essential.
- Need positive, adaptable and flexible approach.
- Whilst there are diverging views amongst members, it is clear that one key factor is that however challenging, representative and participative processes are both key components of a healthy local democracy.
- Also need to consider how local people would like to take this agenda forward - One size does not fit all – within the framework Kent County Council and elected members should use innovation and flexibility to achieve best outcomes.

Recommendations

R1: Raise profile of elected members and use other strategies to change public perception.

R2: A 'menu of options' of how local people can get involved in local democracy in Kent should be promoted.

- a) All proposals taken through County Council or Overview and Scrutiny should be required to state the degree of public involvement to date. This would improve accountability and demonstrate how information from consultations is used (especially the effect on decision making).
- b) Existing good practice should be advertised and promoted, identifying future priority issues for local action/campaign with elected members and/or highlight possible areas for review.

R3: The Member Charter, and programme of member development to help ensure Kent has high calibre effective community leaders, should incorporate media training and public speaking skills.

R4: As part of the Communications Strategy KCC should actively promote the role of elected members as community leaders and advocates within their community using a range of communication tools.

R5: Embrace democracy in secondary schools and school councils should be encouraged to operate through age range - advocate school councils in primary school.

- a) All elected members should be involved in schools democracy week.
- b) Ensure all teaching staff are firmly encouraged to undertake Continuous Professional Development on democracy.
- c) Linkage between School Councils, Kent County Council and District, Town and Parish Councils should be promoted.

R6: Citizenship pack should include information on how to register to vote, the role of local elected members and how to contact local member at District, County and National level.

R7: Need to ensure that induction and information pack for new staff includes information on how to have your say and get involved in local decision making and how public involvement has made a difference.

R8: KCC should provide subtitles and British Sign Language option on all DVDs produced.

R9: Elected members should have a hard copy summary of all the planned KCC consultations.

- a) Information regarding consultations and the need to inform and involve elected members needs to be highlighted and included within future plans to develop a discreet section of information for members on the web and clear commitments reflected within the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
- b) Information on consultations should include note on method of engagement to be used.

R10: Facilities for video conferencing should be utilized, maximizing opportunities in Kent with KCC and partners.

- a) Elected members should be supported in using this service through current resources, training and support mechanisms.

R11: Need effective promotion of E-consultation and decision making to raise profile and encourage local people to have their say and voices heard.

- a) All engagement activities and weblinks should be brought under easily recognisable umbrella and portal e.g. 'Ask Kent', to ensure two way interactive communication.
- b) Facilities for blogs, emails, online surgeries, plus training and support should be available for elected members.

R12: In promoting the role of elected members and interaction with communities KCC should embrace e-democracy/ technological solutions to make elected members activities more visible and to open up dialogue and debate, for example e-petition, e-campaigns generated by Local Boards and local people, and e-debate.

R13: Raising interest in both the opportunity and how to become an elected member needs to be clear and transparent. Agree more diversity in elected members is seen to be beneficial but is complex and worthy of separate study.

R14: 'Top tips' and contact details on making contact with seldom heard/ perceived hard to reach communities should be included in all new ward packs.

R15:

- a) The introduction of role descriptions for all elected members needs to be supported.
- b) The IDEA Councillors guide should be actively promoted and need to ensure all elected members have a copy.
- c) Training for elected members in ways of local government and ongoing training to help elected members carry out their role effectively should be actively supported.

R16: To effectively strengthen local structures for community engagement and encourage involvement in local decision making need

- a) Localism to be more outcome focussed.
- b) mechanism for prompt feedback to the public on specific issues.
- c) to explore further with District, Town and Parish Councils and other local partners what they believe would improve community engagement.
- d) to devolve power and resources to support local priorities and action, from discretionary funds being delegated to local forums for decision making.
- e) Chief Officers and Cabinet should identify which services can be delegated to local level and be influenced by members in their representative capacity based on views of community priorities and preferences.

R17: The opportunity for participatory budgeting from devolved discretionary funds should be provided within the next budget year, with delivery mechanism to be determined, and a sum of underpinning monies to enable local people to determine how the resource should be spent.

Introduction and Methodology

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 In January 2008 an eight Member Select Committee was established to carry out a review on Accessing Democracy with the following terms of reference.

- To understand why many people do not participate in and influence decision making in Kent
- To discover what would/could encourage more people to participate in and influence decision making in Kent
- To discover what Kent County Council can do to increase participation

2.2 The Members of the Accessing Democracy Select Committee were:

Mrs Christine Angell (Chair)
Mr Mike Snelling
Mr David Brazier
Mrs Ann Allen

Mrs Eileen Rowbotham
Mr Roland Tolputt
Mr George Koowaree
Mr Bill Hayton

2.3 The Select Committee set out to investigate what Kent County Council could do to encourage its residents to be more involved in local democracy. This report considers the use of new technology and participation methods to facilitate two way communications with the public on local service policies and priorities, the localism agenda and structures and the role of elected members within a mix of representative and participative democracy. It considers the role of Kent County Council in encouraging local people to be active and what steps need to be taken to revive involvement in local civic and democratic roles.

2.4 It is an opportune time to look at this with increasing focus on community engagement nationally, localism agenda, and falling election turnout figures nationally. Interest in politics, particularly local politics is often reported as being lower than in previous decades. Nationally and internationally there is concern about the nature and health of democracy. It is widely acknowledged that a strong democracy relies on participation in public decision making. Democracy affects everyone everyday – whether we realise it or not, through services, local policy and decisions being made.

2.5 The reasons why many people do not participate in local politics or vote in local elections are widely acknowledged. These predominantly include lack of time, lack of interest and knowledge, personal circumstances, views on national issues and lack of awareness about opportunities to participate and influence or make decisions¹. Not all of these issues can be resolved or influenced by Kent County Council. This review therefore focuses on the themes of how to get people interested, how to encourage people to participate and improving knowledge and understanding of the opportunities to participate. Our report contains a number of recommendations, which if agreed by Cabinet and the County Council will hopefully reinvigorate local democracy in Kent and

¹ New Localism – Citizen engagement, neighbourhoods and Public Services: Evidence from Local; Government ODPM

result in local people becoming more involved and influencing decision making, in both the short and longer term.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Select Committee used a number of evidence sources to inform their investigation, and heard evidence from a number of witnesses/key stakeholders, residents and in particular seldom heard groups. These included the following:

- a) Insight Gathering with residents/members of the public and members of staff
- b) Discussion groups with residents and perceived hard to reach groups, including young people, young offenders, young carers and deaf people.
- c) Meetings/hearings with key stakeholders/witnesses including John Thomson, Deputy Leader of Wiltshire County Council; Richard Wilson, Director of Involve. A complete list of the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee is shown in Appendix 1. The Select Committee took evidence during April - June 2008.
- d) the results of a questionnaire to elected members of Kent County Council, asking how they currently engaged with their communities and opportunities for the future
- e) Turn out figures for Local elections
- f) Written evidence from Directorate representatives on consultations
- g) Desk Research informed by key background documents and national research evidence including²:
 - *Department for Communities and Local Government White Paper and Statutory Guidance – Strong and prosperous Communities*
 - *Department for Communities and Local Government White paper – ‘Communities in control: real people, real power. July 2008*
 - *Representing the future- the report of the Councillors Commission Dec 2007*
 - *Making Local democracy work. Frontline Councillor 2017: empowering a new generation. (Local Government Information Unit)*
 - *Information from the Power Inquiry – An independent Inquiry into Britains Democracy*
 - *Beyond the Ballot. 57 Democratic innovations from around the World. Power May 2005.*
 - *Participation Nation – reconnecting Citizens to the public realm. Involve 2007*
 - *People and participation. How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making. (Involve 2005)*
 - *Power to the People: Time for a revolution in local decision-making? Participation Inquiry: strengthening the role of local councillors (Commission for rural communities Jan 2008)*

² for more information please see the Bibliography at the end of this report

- h) Public Office Event – 27th and 28th Feb – to engage directly with the experiences and insights of citizens, working alongside peers, service designers and provocateurs to find new and collaborative ways of delivering public services driven by the needs of the end-users.

Note: During this review it was not possible to cover all of the issues or some of them in as much detail as each other, such as the role of Youth and Community in empowering young people. The report however highlights that there is much positive activity and also opportunities for Kent County Council to improve access to democracy locally.

Section 1: The Public – Citizens and Communities

4. ACCESS TO LOCAL DEMOCRACY – WHY ENGAGE AND INVOLVE?

4.1 What is the National Policy perspective?

In 2008 there is an increasing focus on finding ways to reconnect with the electorate and involving people in the way they are governed and encouraging them to be more active through democracy. For example:

4.1.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill - includes a '**duty to involve**' and seeks to give a stronger voice to citizens and communities, ultimately through participation contributing to the strengthening of democracy.

4.2 What is meant by involve?

The Duty to involveⁱ seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say, and embed a culture of engagement and empowerment as the norm across the authority's functions, and is essentially a shift towards a focus on **people** and **places**.ⁱⁱ

4.2.1 'Involvement' or participation is clearly defined in existing legislation and the Local Government White Paper³, and can contribute to the creation of more active citizens, help manage complex problems in public service design and delivery, and help build new relationships and shifts of power and resources for 21st century governance.⁴ There are cultural and personal barriers to participation. The "Stronger and Prosperous Communities White Paper" aims to create a system where people are empowered and that people should be consulted, involved and encouraged to voice their opinions to shape services and influence decisions.

4.2.2 There are many different approaches to participation^{5, 6}, through different devolution strategiesⁱⁱⁱ, each mixing citizen engagement, devolved governance and responsive management in different ways, and many different participation methods/tools, such as focus groups, citizen juries, public meetings.

4.2.3 It is not just the taking part that is important i.e. participation for participation sake, but the level of opportunity to influence and/or make decisions to solve some of the issues local communities face. The ladder of participation⁷ (inform, consult, involve,

³ for more information see Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities – statutory guidance HM Govt July 2008, and Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government white paper 26 Oct 2006

⁴ For further information see People and participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision making, Involve (2005) and IDEA's Connecting with Communities.

⁵ Why Involve and what are the outcomes? The duty to Involve for best Value authorities – Vicki Savage June 2007 Young foundation, briefing commissioned by Communities and Local Government Department.

⁶ For further information see How local government devolves and why. Part two: developing local strategies, Young Foundation (2006), as referred to by Savage 2007

⁷ The guide to effective participation, David Wilcox (1994)

devolve) provides clarity on why authorities are involving citizens and the increasing levels of public impact along each stage of the ladder. See Appendix Two for further information.

4.2.4 The new Local Government White Paper, '**Communities in control: real people, real power**'^{8, iv}, is a package of reforms to put more power over local decisions in the hands of local people/communities. It is about democracy, and how democratic practices and ideals can be applied to our complex, modern society'. Under the proposals Kent County Council would have a duty to promote democracy, encourage a greater take up in voting and make elected members more visible in the community. It also provides new powers for people to use petitions to demand action and for Kent County Council to respond and debate key topics with the public.

4.2.5 The agenda of empowerment through devolution and participation means Kent County Council needs to provide opportunities for people in Kent to have their say and get involved in activities over and above being informed and consulted. It relates to the most interactive forms of engagement, giving residents greater influence over decisions or delivery. Involvement will mean developing new and innovative ways of devolving power and influencing decision-making, such as participatory budgeting, citizen juries and assessing services through for example citizens acting as mystery shoppers.

4.2.6 The importance for residents in Kent is the chance to have voice heard, and greater opportunities to influence, shape and design local services and decisions, and opportunities to question why decisions have been made. Elected members have a key role to play in this⁵. Kent County Council and elected members are key to promoting local democratic engagement and promoting a sense of efficacy - the belief that an individual is able to influence the democratic process and the course of events.

4.3 Why is community engagement growing in importance nationally and in Kent?

4.3.1 Community Engagement enables local people to have greater control over the decision-making processes.

"Community engagement and two-way communication are increasingly recognised as important for the future of local government. Community engagement has been identified as a significant factor in building local trust in a council. It includes improving resident satisfaction and providing councils with a greater understanding of the needs and views of local communities.

The Government agenda of greater localism, choice and community empowerment means that councils need to consult and engage with local groups in better and different ways. "⁹

4.4 Perception: What does the Council do?

4.4.1 Members of the Select Committee began their investigation by gathering insights from local residents and discussion groups. The key themes highlighted were

⁸ Local Government White Paper, 'Communities in control: real people, real power', HM Govt July 2008

⁹ Statement from Improvement and Development Agency on Community Engagement. www.idea.gov.uk

an apparent lack of interest and understanding of local government, Parish, District and County and what elected members do, and a lack of awareness of how to be involved and of key methods Kent County Council uses to engage the public e.g. Local Boards. The public perception and reputation of local government are significant. Research¹⁰ by Ipsos MORI found that people often distrust local government, and for many members of the public, local government – and their own council – remains a rather remote, low profile, bureaucratic and inefficient beast.

“Most commonly one’s local council is seen as slow moving (a sloth, donkey, elephant or dinosaur) or ignorant (ostrich with head in the sand) or even self-interested – the cat that sits on your lap when it wants feeding.”

Source: MORI

4.4.2 There is also a drop in the percentage of people who think they can influence local decisions¹¹, and a lack of awareness and understanding of how the Council works, what services are provided and by whom, for most people

“local authority service provision” means, above all, refuse collection and recycling, followed by leisure, sporting and recreational facilities, parks and keeping the streets clean. ... there is confusion and misunderstanding about the demarcation of local authority responsibility.

The research explored whether respondents had previously attempted to tackle local issues in their area by taking some action. In most cases, respondents found that their action had not translated into any real change, and they had been left disillusioned and more negative about the council in general.

Source: DCLG¹²

4.5 What do elected members do?

4.5.1 The perceptions of elected members by the public is key as elected members are the frontline to residents and communities within Kent, engaging with them, representing them and understanding their views, issues and priorities, and have a vital role as local leaders.

4.5.2 National research¹² shows perceptions have been fairly negative with councillors described as “inaccessible and haughty”, driven by their ego and desire for local recognition rather than a will to serve the people in their local area. The research found a lack of trust stemming from a deep seated mistrust of politics and politicians, and that

¹⁰ Research by Ipsos MORI for LGA’s Reputation Project: The business case for the reputation project. January 2006. <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/assets/localgovernment/the-business-case-for-the-reputation-project.pdf>

¹¹ Citizenship Survey: April – September 2007. 38% of citizens in England agreed that they could influence decisions in their local area, a fall from 44% in 2001. Communities and Local Government.

¹² Perceptions of Local Government in England: Key findings from qualitative research. Sally Taylor and Bridget Williams. BMG Research Ltd October 2006 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG): London

Few respondents had more than a rough idea about what a councillor does... in particular younger respondents, have no real understanding at all. Many do not know the identity of their local councillor. Most take very little interest in local politics and are highly cynical about what would motivate a person to stand for election to the council. Belief that once residents become councillors they lose their affinity with the people they are supposed to represent. Widely held view that councillors only come and seek out residents' views at election time (if at all).

But ... Where respondents have asked for a councillor's help or been present at a lobby-style meeting, many were highly impressed with the professionalism and commitment of the individual councillors.

Source: DCLG

4.5.3 Some of the insights from local people in Kent –

“councils are too bureaucratic and out of touch. Have never heard of Local Boards and enraged by MPs expenditure, councillors' free dinners, they are all on a gravy train – but was worried about economic immigration and always voted.” Adult library user

“thought County Councillor was my Member of Parliament.” – young person

“would not go to a meeting unless there was an issue that affects where I live“

“negative opinion - council does nothing. Want higher profile in the community – but don't know how”. After talking with Member said he was interested in being a councillor.

“no idea of who councillor is , never heard of Local Boards”

No conception of democracy or how to access councillors – young offender

“interested in voting if it made a difference to my area”

“I have heard of councillors but don't know what they do”

no understanding of difference between Town council, District Council and KCC

“councillors read lots of papers”, it's a paid job

“felt mainly older people who would be more inclined to attend Local Boards”

4.5.4 The Select Committee considered that the public could not be encouraged to become involved in local democracy, or convinced of the benefits if they did not understand what each council does, what decisions are made and by whom, how this relates to them or understand the role of elected members. The public perception of local government and elected members and apparent misunderstanding and confusion around provision must in turn impact on the public's willingness to engage and belief that they can influence decisions. If you don't understand what is provided, by whom or how

it works and perceptions are of mistrust how can you influence it and believe in the opportunities available to change things locally?

4.5.6 To effectively fulfill their role as Local Leaders, elected members in Kent need to be in a position to provide real leadership to their communities, to engage with the community and listen to local people's views and ideas – able to weigh up evidence, make decisions, and to get things done. The research stated that to do this councillors need to be more visible, proactive and accessible, and to have the power to effect change/ or their views acted on by those with the real power to effect change.

“actions speak louder than words”.

4.5.7 Perception, understanding and awareness are key issues to be addressed both locally and nationally. Changing culture is a function of education, information and communication.

<p>R1: Raise profile of elected members and use other strategies to change public perception.</p>
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5. How are KCC engaging with their communities?

5.1 Effective engagement of citizens and communities requires a clear understanding of how “bottom-up” engagement can influence strategic policy, political decision-making and service planning¹³. There is a renewed focus on putting people first, empowering communities and on more strategic and innovative forms of community engagement. Central to this is local democracy and how power is put back to the electorate and that people have the opportunities to engage in and influence local decisions.

5.2 How is Kent County Council embedding Community engagement in Kent? Is community engagement one of the council's priorities?

5.2.1 Kent County Council is developing a council-wide culture of community involvement by -

- appointing a Director for Improvement and Engagement to lead on community involvement across directorates, supported by the Social Innovation Lab for Kent (SILK). The main focus is broadening methods to engage communities and individuals, developing new ways of connecting strategic policy to realities of everyday life. SILK are developing a toolkit and training to support the work and the embedding and sharing of good practice.
- updating and developing a new Consultation and Engagement Strategy for Kent County Council, and ensuring this is translated into practice.
- recognising that ‘one size does not fit all’ and ensuring there are a range of options for public access to/involvement in decision making and engaging communities. There are a wide range of opportunities for community engagement for example through

¹³ How local government devolves and why - Part 2: developing local strategies - Paul Hilder (November 2006) The Young Foundation.

- 12 Local Boards^v and Neighbourhood Forums Active in the community;
- taking part in workshops and community conferences
- taking part in user groups/ focus groups, Citizens panels
- public participation in overview and scrutiny
- innovative approaches to youth engagement including the Youth County Council and Cabinet liaison
- 'Have your say' section on website and Kent TV
- Kent Residents panel /Kent and Medway Residents Panel
- taking part in surveys of public opinion, consultations, citizens juries
- joint development of strategies and commissioning of services
- arrangements for public speaking at meetings, raising items for agendas (see constitution)

5.2.3 Some of the successes to illustrate this:

Action by communities

- Dover Neighbourhood Forums - enabling more involvement from residents and service providers working closer together – empowering individuals and communities – engaging with all three tiers of Local Government – for instance
 - Ban the bag campaign
 - Input of NHS monies into area to tackle issues around obesity

- £840, 000 grants accessed by communities for local projects through KCC elected members

From principle to practice

- Clear adoption of participation principals transferred to practice. For example The Kent Participation Framework¹⁴ 'Participate by Right!', setting out key principles and standards for participation and Kent Ladder of participation, and joint development of the Young Carers Strategy – 'Invisible people' with young carers and joint commissioning of children and young people's projects and services.
- Millmead Children's Centre Community Action Group – the community discuss the progress and talk about the future, their opinions. Listening to local people on service priorities – with everyone having a voice – empowering people and devolving power allowing KCC to deliver the services the community wants.
- Coldharbour Library Service User Group – working as a critical friend, influencing what happens. Finding solutions with the community to local issues - Young people not using the library, graffiti, congregating outside and being a nuisance and how to get them interested in reading and what the library had to offer. Led to a group of teenagers evaluating views and ideas, selecting furniture, stock and the 'Coldharbour Teen room' – now instead of passing by teenagers come in and use the library, with a host of regulars.

¹⁴ The Kent Participation Framework – Participate by Right!. Kent Children's Fund Network

- Developing public involvement in Kent Adult Social Services to ensure people have more choice in how needs are met, a louder voice, shape service developments and are critical to service monitoring, and have a real influence in the process. Drivers include “Active Lives”, “Our health, our care, our say”, “Stronger and prosperous Communities”. Variety of ways this is being achieved including: Kent Purchase Cards (in effect devolved budgets), Occupational Therapy user groups, Senior Citizens Forums, Learning Disability Partnership Groups, meetings with service users, carers and the public. DIG (directorate involvement group) – to ensure highest possible standards of public involvement.

Continued Development of opportunities for engaging with local people

- *The Kent and Medway Citizens Panel* – enables local people to have their say on the future of Kent. The information helps to ensure Kent County Council understands what local residents think about the county in which they live and the services KCC provides. The new panel is managed and recruited by Ipsos Mori, on behalf of Kent County Council and the KM Group. Participants are contacted by Ipsos MORI by email, phone or post to seek feedback and opinions on new and interesting ideas, services and products. The expectation is that there will be quarterly surveys of the whole Panel, but also Kent County Council are hoping to create sub-Panels by age and other characteristics in order to be able to carry out short surveys really quickly on particular topics and quick polls. For example residents within a given radius of a location.

Another feature of the Panel is its website and Members will be able to check out what surveys are planned and results from surveys already completed. The website address is www.kmcp.co.uk.

5.2.4 Elected members can help identify the issues and priorities in local areas working with local people and ensure communities have a voice and are empowered to find solutions and influence services. Insights suggest that awareness of Local Boards is low and that these need to have greater ability to respond. These are discussed in more detail in sections 2 and 3, reflecting on how they could be more effective.

5.2.5 Some key questions are:

So what can KCC do to improve this? How can we do things better or differently?

But how do we publicise the opportunities and actively encourage people to take part?

How many people in Kent feel that they can have a say?. The aim is to give more people a voice and belief that they can influence decisions.

5.3 How are some Councils achieving results? What are the opportunities?

5.3.1 Councils use many different methods to involve citizens to capture views or opinions about specific issues or as part of an on-going dialogue between the council and local people about local issues, to find solutions, influence decisions and shape local services. One size does not fit all, but experiences can both encourage and inspire us to try something a bit different. There is a need to accept that much of the innovative

practice in engaging local residents recognises the need to engage people in ways that will fit with their lives rather than in formal governance arrangements. For example -

Involving the community in improving their local area with elected members

the '100 days' campaign: an initiative involving local people to encourage healthy living, improve their local environment and tackle specific issues and foster a belief that they can make a difference - a multi-agency approach – a mixture of public, private and voluntary sector – with the public deciding the focus and taking direct action together.

- '100 days to a clean city'- involved 'community clean-ups' with local participation on an unprecedented scale.
- Local people decided to focus on young people as 'the future of Manchester' – including '100 days to 100 per cent Attendance' as absence from school was a major issue (resulting in more than 4,000 extra days' attendance than during the same period the previous year.)

The campaign underlined the importance of ongoing community involvement - initial 'quick wins', supported by regularly revised action plans that reflect and respond to feedback and priorities from local councillors and residents.

Source: Case study on Manchester City Council, www.idea.gov.uk.

Involving residents/ encouraging public participation in localism, overview and scrutiny

Health scrutiny – involves residents: an initiative to involve the community in health scrutiny, recruited and invited a 'hub' of local residents to take charge of the process and decide how to consult people and what to ask, involving different agencies from across the borough. 'Alcohol harm reduction' was selected as a pilot topic. The residents produced a DVD, based on the findings of their research into how to engage the community. Councillors considered the evidence and put forward a number of recommendations. This process benefited the council by giving it greater understanding of the pressing issues for local people and increased trust in the council.

Case study: South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
www.idea.gov.uk.

Participatory appraisal, such as that used in South Tyneside to discover views of a cross section of the community to identify local issues and solutions and '**Learning Links**' peer research to engage local people, can help accessing communities that traditionally have escaped formal consultation such as refugees or young people. Learning Links in Portsmouth, trained over 800 local people as community researchers to carry out research and consultation on the issues that matter most to them – providing valuable information and encouraging many researchers to become 'change-makers' in their local community.

5.3.2 Communication is key to raising the profile of opportunities of how the public can get involved and make a difference, and also key to explore new opportunities to

increase involvement of residents to identify and tackle local issues with elected members.

5.3.3 A '100 days challenge' could help to engage people and communities in Kent about their local issues and priorities, empowering them to decide the focus for action with elected Members, Local Boards and Neighbourhood Forums as a catalyst and key driver. It may help to deepen the understanding of views of local communities, build trust and dialogue, working together to make change happen, contribute to the raising of profile of elected members, local boards and encourage more active citizens.

'Blitz it and do your bit – make change happen together' bring policy to life

5.3.4 The importance of community engagement should be reflected within KCC committees. Different methods to engage with all sectors of the community should be considered and put into practice where appropriate for example through Select Committees or Policy Overview Committees looking at specific topics of interest, to increase involvement, and change perceptions. The training and toolkit being developed by SILK and access to knowledge on different approaches could result in strengthening the process further. E-democracy initiatives are discussed in more detail later in the report.

5.3.5 There is a need to raise awareness of how the public can participate and effect change. 'Local residents try their hand at scrutiny in Kent' could be something for the future. Feedback on what has been achieved is important to raise the profile and belief that people can make a difference and that KCC is listening and acting, acknowledging the input from both professionals and residents/communities/service users.

5.3.6 There is an opportunity for Local Boards to actively seek input from communities on priority issues for review, encouraging and promoting the opportunity to suggest topics and encourage debate. An initiative could encourage the public to have their say and influence the decision on planning of topic reviews and campaign for action.

5.3.7 This is an evolving process, but opportunities need to be available to try new initiatives to engage the public - a focus on continued development and seeking new and better ways to engage.

5.3.8 Can KCC bring democracy alive? There are innovative ideas and good practice examples that may help, including using big screens to highlight issues in fun and engaging manner, or at cinemas for example, working with Kent TV, a comic strip in the paper to highlight issue and how to have your say or Street theatre.

R2:

- a) A 'menu of options' of how local people can get involved in local democracy in Kent should be promoted.
- b) All proposals taken through County Council or Overview and Scrutiny should be required to state the degree of public involvement to date. This would improve accountability and demonstrate how information from consultations is used (especially the effect on decision making).

c) Existing good practice should be advertised and promoted, identifying future priority issues for local action/campaign with elected members and/or highlight possible areas for review.

6. Two-Way Communication – Reaching out to residents

6.1 Two-way communications are increasingly important for KCC to change perceptions, increase understanding of local issues and the challenges Kent faces and to increase involvement of local people in local decision making.

6.2 Perceptions and the role of the Media and media strategy

6.2.1 Research has shown that the Media undoubtedly has an effect on public perception of both Councils and elected members, and points to the power of the media in spreading negative perceptions. Test Research, a subsidiary of MORI's that specialises in media analysis, looked at what the press writes about local government on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA). It shows that most of what people will read about local government is negative. Overall, some 39% of what the public is exposed to is negative, compared to only 10% that is positive^{15,16}, and that when only 5% of people in Britain feel they know a great deal about their council, what the papers say will have a huge impact.

6.2.2 In reality elected members do not follow the stereotype, but take on the role with a belief that they can make things better for the communities they serve¹⁷. In promoting Local democracy Kent County Council needs to continue to actively manage the relationship with the press, as a means to encourage more active citizens, encourage constructive debate, highlight/signpost ways to be involved and challenge media perceptions.

6.2.3 It was commented that some elected members see the press/media as 'the enemy' and the public see it as one of its best tools to effect change. There needs to be a build up of confidence in accessing the press by elected members as a means to effect positive change with their local Communities. The Committee agreed that in relation to the public's perception of elected members it was important to work on the image given by the press. Also it was important for elected members to have basic media training.

R3: The Member Charter, and programme of member development to help ensure Kent has high calibre effective community leaders, should incorporate media training and public speaking skills.

6.3 Reputation, Promotion and feedback

¹⁵ for further information see Ipsos Mori. The business case for the reputation project January 2006.

¹⁶ for more information see MORI/LGA, 2005: "Understanding the Reputation of Local Government - Key Drivers and the Potential National versus Local Perception Gap"; and LGA report on Test Research's analysis at media coverage and implications for councils - "How is Local Government reported in the press?" LGA January 2006.

¹⁷ Representing the Future – The Report of the Councillors Commission Dec 2007

6.3.1 Awareness and understanding of what councils do and how they work is key if Kent County Council is to encourage greater involvement by the public. People are often very positive about the services they receive but negative about the organisation that provides these services.¹⁸ Research revealed that

- Just 1% of people would talk highly of their council unprompted
- Only 5% know a great deal about what the council does

6.3.2 Reputation is an important issue. It has a major impact in many ways including trust in the Council and elected members and its ability to act as a community leader. The new local performance frameworks will increasingly be informed by public satisfaction – making residents’ perceptions of councils increasingly important, even more so with the agenda for more localised services and stronger community engagement. Communications is key to changing perception, improving the reputation of the County Council and reinvigorating local democracy.

LGA Reputation Campaign – identified 12 core actions^{vi} to enhance the perception of Local Councils. Branding, media relations and direct communications with residents form the core element. Kent County Council has signed up to this, appointed a Head of Communications to take the lead and developed a ‘*Communication Strategy 2008-2010*’ to set principles and bring coherence to communications across the organisation, and will have a set of action plans to support this.

Posters promote councils – SILK have produced ‘montages’ to spread the word and highlight examples of how the public has been involved in Kent and how the public have made a difference - embedding and encouraging community engagement.

LGA ‘*My Council*’ Campaign launched July 2008 - to boost the reputation of local councils, encourages local authorities to spread the word about the vast range of services they provide, through a series of attention grabbing posters, customised by councils. They feature a range of services, from swimming pools to allotments, libraries and food safety - designed to increase understanding and awareness of what the council does.

6.3.4 The perception of the County Council and indeed of elected members is important, as discussed earlier in this report and is key to strengthening relationships and involving local communities. Feedback on how local representatives and local people have influenced decisions may help to encourage greater involvement and more active citizens – by raising the profile, increasing the belief that local people/communities can make a difference and help build trust. It is essential that KCC and elected members listen to views of residents/ communities but also are seen to act on the views.

¹⁸ LGA-commissioned research for the campaign shows many people remain largely unaware of the range of services provided by councils and a majority thought councils were responsible for the police service and hospitals. LGA Reputation campaign. July 2006

'We asked... you said... we did' campaign based on effective two way communication - raising awareness of the council, highlighting local priority issues and how residents input has led to action, with a page on the council's website dedicated to the campaign –

"we love listening to you...shaping services and the future of the borough is a two way process".) Source: case study South Tyneside Council www.idea.gov.uk

Lewisham Listens page in residents magazine, features forthcoming consultations and reports back on the outcomes of consultations.

Source: case study on Lewisham Council www.idea.gov.uk

6.3.4 KCC should sign up to the LGA 'My councils' campaign and implement other targeted initiatives to tackle issues of perception, awareness and understanding of what Kent County Council does and how the public can influence /make change happen. Ideas for expanding this could involve Kent TV, 'Kent listens' on radio, interactive have your say feature extended to include feedback from the council, open up key debates to the public.

6.4 Innovation the way forward - Making use of new technologies

6.4.1 KCC's new Communication Strategy aims to support KCC in achieving effective two way communication, giving residents the choice of how to communicate with KCC, positive perceptions and an enhanced reputation. It embraces both modern (webcasting, Blogs) and more traditional routes (such as roadshows, Around Kent publication) to communicate and engage directly with the public. It highlights the importance of developing new ways of reaching local people (particularly those who are seldom heard) and the possibility of using new methods and media technologies. This is key to strengthening local democracy and encouraging greater involvement; supported by feedback - listening backed up by action.

6.4.2 It is anticipated that the strategy will be supported by further strategies and action plans for instance on promotions and new media and web. It was noted that elected members (and the public) are identified as an 'audience' within the strategy. This gives first impressions of a more passive role. The perception and awareness of local members is important as community leaders and advocates. The new strategies should ensure that opportunities to raise awareness of elected members and empower residents to be heard / involved in local decision making are embraced, and that promoting local democracy is one of the priorities. As illustrated in the strategy, numerous methods and campaigns have been designed to communicate and engage with local residents. There is an opportunity now through new interactive technologies and the anticipated supporting strategies/ action plans to both broaden and emphasise how the public can raise and influence decisions on issues they are concerned about and local priorities with KCC and elected members.

6.4.3 The future picture is one of multi media – a combination of tools modern and traditional to reach and understand the issues and views of local people. The Committee hopes that the use of new media will engage a wider range of residents and enable the public to communicate its priorities and concerns to KCC and partners in a modern and fast-paced way.

R4: As part of the Communications Strategy KCC should actively promote the role of elected members as community leaders and advocates within their community using a range of communication tools.

7. Engaging seldom heard / perceived hard to reach people

7.1 Reaching people from all communities in Kent including those who are 'seldom heard' is highlighted as a priority. Kent County Council has begun to take steps to improve engagement in democracy, for example through webcasting of all its Committee meetings. Kent County Council now has the opportunity to put in place more targeted initiatives to strengthen this and find new and effective ways of involving and communicating with all its residents, embracing innovation.

The 'futures group' - a multi-media competition for secondary schools inviting young people to think about their local area, how the future would directly affect them; to get involved with their local communities; and to promote their understanding of local government and its services. During the finale, representatives from six schools were invited to meet county councillors and discuss how to make their visions of the future a reality.

'Future group Take 2' - invited secondary school children to develop a video about their views on the council's new corporate priority: 'safer and more secure for all.'

Encouraging young people to think about their role in local decision-making, raising awareness of what the council does, what services it delivers and the potential role they can play in the community.

Case study: Hampshire County Council www.idea.gov.uk

7.2 In developing a system of two-way communications targeted initiatives in Kent could encourage debate on some of Kent County Council's key documents, engage and encourage specific groups to think about their local area, give groups a voice and encourage open dialogue with seldom heard groups and elected members. Views could for example inform POC debate, policy development, and local priorities for action.

7.3 Young People

7.3.1 Increasing interest in local democracy and encouraging more active citizens is a cultural change and a long term goal. During the insight gathering phase of the review the importance of the citizenship agenda within schools to help change culture and encourage more active citizens was highlighted. It was therefore decided to look at this in more detail. It was noted that although Schools have a key role to play through the Citizenship Agenda, the curriculum is one aspect of the learning around citizenship and democracy and a child's learning is from both in and out of school, formal and informal.

7.3.2 *Citizenship education - why is it important?*

Citizenship encourages young people to take an interest in topical and controversial issues and to engage in discussion and debate, learning to take part in decision-making

and different forms of action. It helps young people to develop their critical skills, consider a wide range of political, social, ethical and moral problems, and explore opinions and ideas other than their own, learning to argue a case on behalf of others as well as themselves and speak out on issues of concern. Citizenship equips pupils with the knowledge and skills needed for effective and democratic participation, helping them to become informed, critical, active citizens who have the confidence and conviction to work collaboratively, take action and try to make a difference in their communities and the wider world.¹⁹

7.3.3 *Outline of Citizenship Education for Key Stages 2-4 (Sept 2008).*

In KS2 Citizenship is part of the Non-Statutory programme of study for PSHE, but there is a section on "Preparing to play an active role as citizen", and within this section 7 states that children should be taught what Democracy is. In KS3 and 4 Citizenship is a statutory part of the curriculum, and has been a National Curriculum subject since 2002. Democracy features well in these Programmes of study: as a key concept that underpins much of the curriculum, and also as a defined aspect of the range and content of the programme.

7.3.4 *Support to teachers*

Insights relating to the Citizenship in Schools

*"Had citizenship lesson, but didn't hear about voting"
"teacher had to look it up as she didn't understand"*

Following these insights Members of the Committee were interested to know how teachers are supported to deliver this aspect of the curriculum. A number of continuous professional development (training events) are provided annually for teachers to look at approaches and opportunities to develop Citizenship within the curriculum with Democracy as part of this. Also many web sites and other resource materials have been shared with schools to highlight resources etc and opportunities to actively engage young people in the democratic process.

7.3.5 *Support from Elected Members*

It was commented that one of the more successful activities has been during 'Local democracy week' providing direct involvement of local councillors and County Members in events such as "Meet your County Councillor", or "Invite your Councillor to school for the day". These provided opportunities for groups of students to meet and question members about their role, key issues and local concerns that young people are concerned about. Some of these events have been arranged as Cluster activities in central venues with representatives from a number of schools in attendance.

7.3.6 *Kent Youth County Council*

There are a variety of ways in which children and young people can become involved and give their views, examples include Kent Youth County Council, School Councils and Student Voice. Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) is a non-party political organisation, focusing on the issues of young people. It provides a key opportunity for democratic representation and involvement in local democracy and real decision making activities, and helps to build a bridge between local students, officers and

¹⁹ Citizenship – Programme of Study for Key Stage 3 and attainment target www.qca.org.uk/curriculum. (extract from The National Curriculum 20070 Crown copyright 2007. Qualifications and curriculum Authority 2007)

elected members of KCC informing them of young people's issues and concerns. It encourages feedback on council services and provides a channel for young people in Kent to be heard and to influence decisions and priorities. Any young person aged 11-18 years inclusive, living within KCC boundaries, may vote or stand for election.^{vii} Kent members of the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) are elected from the KYCC by the members to take Kent issues to the national sitting. Some of the campaigns and projects currently undertaken by KYCC are:

- **Votes @16:** to give young people the basic right of any citizen - the right to vote. Young carers who met with the Committee said it was important to vote and if they could vote at 16 they would.
- **National Children's Rights Day:** A national holiday to help children understand their rights.
- **The Peer Leader System:** Survey and discussion to address the issues of the peer leader system.
- **National Roma Day:** Propose 8th April as a national holiday. To give same prominence to Gypsies that such events as Black History Month give to other ethnic minorities, to increase recognition of Gypsy and traveller culture, give time to travel and tackle the problems of bullying and racial discrimination that many Gypsies and travellers face.
- **Transport:** Improving the safety for young people to travel on public transport and to make it free to travel and the point of purchase.

7.3.7 Insights from members of KYCC

Limited understanding of structure of local government or how to contact councillor

All joined KYCC to 'have their say' – other pupils not really interested, but might if issue such as vertical tutoring

Schools can regard KYCC as potentially seditious

Aware of Kent TV – but thought uninteresting

Felt consulted for box ticking purposes and surprised that views were valued

Keen on youth issues when felt involved

It was striking that although young people were involved in KYCC none of those interviewed understood how KYCC formed a brick in the wall of democracy, and did not understand democracy in a global sense in the wider world.

7.3.8 Survey of children and young people in Kent

Consulting with children is a key aspect of developing citizenship and builds on the work of school councils, providing a real opportunity to influence policy and be involved in local democracy. Many consultations are undertaken with students through the vast array of KCC activities during the year to inform and influence decisions and policy and service development. For example almost one fifth of the county's school children (more than 42,500 children) responded to an independent survey by the National Federation of Education Research (NFER) highlighting what life is like for young people in Kent. The findings were reported to Cabinet, inform policy decision on 2010 targets, and reflect KCC's commitment to listen to the views and opinions of young people.

7.3.9 Cluster councils

There are many examples of 'pupil voice' and democracy in all of the Clusters in Kent. Some Clusters have Cluster Councils where individual or pairs of reps from each school

council come together to discuss local matters of significance and also to talk about their own school experiences and to share information on how children have played a part in reviewing and planning for school improvement. One Cluster does for example have a Consortia Council who have visited the Houses of Parliament and have received a visit from the MP Gwyn Prosser who they quizzed about many topics. This particular group of students also took some part in the proposals and subsequent development of a new public play area.

7.3.10 A consortium Council would be a locality group smaller than a Cluster and therefore easier to manage the logistics of bringing groups of students together on a regular basis. In Maidstone there are many examples of pupil participation and involvement – event where all primary and secondary schools from both Maidstone Clusters were able to send elected representatives to take part. The students met at County Hall and in the morning heard speakers, in the afternoon they were able to express their views on what they felt were priorities for the new Local Children’s Service Partnerships (LCSP). Pupils involved in this event were in school years 5 - 12 inclusive. All schools in both Maidstone Clusters have their own school councils and are working towards two Cluster Councils, however, this is quite difficult logistically.

7.3.11 In addition in Maidstone, Kent County Council have established an International Student Network Group for all secondary aged students who have English as an additional language. This enables students to make contact with other youngsters with similar life experiences, to articulate some of the challenges they faced when starting school locally and to provide guidance and advice as to how KCC might better support new arrivals - who may be dealing with many more things than simply not speaking the language.

7.3.12 KCC Children, Families and Education Directorate has also commissioned “Participate by Right” to carry out consultation exercises with 'hard to reach' youngsters. Successes would include a strong voice of young people being evident in the Local Children and Young People's Plans, pupils learning about participation, rights and responsibilities and developing a sense of democracy. Challenges are largely around practical issues of bringing youngsters from different schools together at a time / in a way that meets the needs of all schools - smaller groups such as consortium councils are a way around this.

7.3.13 Members of the Committee considered the linkage between Schools, County Council and district and promoting cluster or consortia councils important. In talking with young people (including carers and young offenders) it was clear that they needed to be engaged in a different way – finding out what matters to them.

R5:

- a) Embrace democracy in secondary schools and school councils should be encouraged to operate through age range - advocate school councils in primary school.
- b) All elected members should be involved in schools democracy week
- c) Ensure all teaching staff are firmly encouraged to undertake Continuous Professional Development on democracy.
- d) Linkage between School Councils, Kent County Council and District, Town and Parish Councils should be promoted.

7.4 People who are seldom heard or perceived as hard to reach

7.4.1 Kent County Council is carrying out Equality Impact Assessments across all services in order to identify specific objectives and targets across services, in order to tackle barriers to access and address need.

'The communication needs of all disabled people must be taken into account for all areas of life. In particular, the needs of people with sensory impairments should be pro-actively considered in particular the needs of people with sensory impairments appear to be the 'forgotten people' when it comes to appropriate communication support. '

(Equality Strategy 2007 – 2010 KCC page 36)

7.4.2 The Select Committee heard evidence from representatives from a group of Deaf/deaf people, Kent Deaf Youth Gang and Medway and West Kent Deaf Youth Forum whose main language is British Sign Language (BSL). It was evident that the comments made in the Equality strategy document were born out by the responses made – through translators – to the Select Committee. The general consensus was that the group did not feel engaged with their local areas and some of the responses were:

'Feeling isolated'

'Frustrated when people don't understand' through the interpreter the witness explained that power was the sign, she felt more comfortable signing than lip reading.

'If you rang reception there was the 'what do I do' fear'

7.4.3 Key points raised during discussion;

- There is Government recognition that BSL is the third language (2003)
- In America there were many hearing people who sign
- Not enough signing on TV and only 75% of programmes subtitled
- In modernising Democratic Services, web casting and developing links with Kent TV it was considered important that signing and sub titles were available
- Voice recognition software can result in 'gobbledegook', time delay and poor quality
- Issues of accessible materials – many Deaf people do not use written English
- Positive support for the use of technology. E.g. an i-player with signed option and optional sub titles
- Short Message System (SMS) had recently been developed to enable Deaf/deaf people to make contact with the Police and Fire Authority in an emergency. Members were concerned that they were not able to represent everyone and SMS should be looked at for elected members. Most elected members used fax facilities, mobile phones and email.
- There is a need to clarify the differing needs of hearing impaired people and Deaf – BSL users, and deaf people

- There is a need to ensure democracy hubs/gateways are accessible to Deaf/deaf people and an awareness of BSL. The need for interpreters is not always understood.
- There are only 32 fully qualified BSL interpreters in Kent.
- If there were interpreters and speech to text reporters advertised local Deaf/deaf people would be more inclined to attend meetings

7.4.4 Elected members would benefit from ensuring they have knowledge of how to access the translation service to enable Deaf/deaf people to have open access to surgeries and utilise technology in order to contact their elected member easily, as any other citizen.

7.4.5 Within the framework of Kent County Councils Equality Strategy the option to have documents produced in alternative formats – Braille, audio tape or Easy Read is clearly stated. This is not so for all communication with members of the public. The general principle that all documents can be communicated by an individuals chosen method of communication needs to be emphasised across the organisation. This will ensure a more robust and diverse group when consultations are undertaken, and elected members would benefit by having a more representative view of the varied issues, direct from their constituents.

7.4.6 Each of Kent County Council's publications, and the web pages on which they can be found give details of how to request information in alternative formats or languages. This includes formats such as audiotape or CD, in Braille and large print, and as computer files in accessible electronic formats. Information can also be made available in easy-to-read formats for people with learning difficulties or poor literacy skills. The Council has a Standard on Interpreting and Translation (which also applies to British Sign Language and other alternate formats), which in essence means that a person's language will not be a barrier to receiving a service. The Council also has a Service Level Agreement with Top Temps Interpreting to ensure that appropriate linguistic support is provided where necessary.

7.4.7 This same service would assist elected members ensuring their communication with people within their area reach some of those people who are currently perceived as 'hard to reach'

7.5 New Citizens

7.5.1 What is British citizenship? British citizenship is one of the six different forms of British nationality^{viii}. Of these, only British citizens have an automatic right to live and work in the United Kingdom and to apply for a British passport. The costs of applying depend on the type of application being made, but for a single application for naturalisation as a British Citizen it costs £655.

7.5.2 Applicants for British Citizenship are required to show evidence of understanding and **knowledge of life in the UK** and have to undertake a multiple choice test (at a test centre) as part of the application process. To support those applying for British Citizenship there is a book called 'Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship' published by the Stationary Office, available from bookshops and 33 copies are stocked within Kent Libraries.

7.5.3 Kent County Council also offers a Nationality Checking Service to support those applying for British Citizenship within Kent. Staff check application forms are completed correctly; all the necessary supporting documents have been provided; and that the correct fee for processing the application is included. There is an additional cost for this.

7.5.4 On successful application all adults wishing to become British citizens in the United Kingdom are required to attend a citizenship ceremony. In Kent these are conducted on behalf of the Border and Immigration Authority by registrars. The ceremonies celebrate a significant event (becoming a British citizen) and welcome participants into the local community. At the ceremony each new British Citizen is given a British Citizenship pack.^{ix}

7.5.5 Although useful it was felt that this could incorporate more information to strengthen democracy and encourage new citizens to take an active role or at least know how and where they can have their say/be heard, nationally and locally.

R6: Citizenship pack should include information on how to register to vote, the role of local elected members and how to contact local member at District, County and National level.

7.5.6 *Languages*

Other questions that emerged were - How do elected members form links with individual people whose first language is not English? How do we raise awareness? Can elected members obtain translation services for surgeries or for ward walks? How are elected members equipped to deal with enquiries from constituents who do not speak English? This is an area that the Committee were unable to consider as part of the review but feel it is important with a diverse community and increasing numbers of immigrants and new citizens.

7.5.7 *Language and Communication guides*

Any guidance/documents/ communication with the public needs to be produced in clear unambiguous language – readable by members, officers and public alike by supporting the plain English campaign, 100 banned word of LGA, and specific guidance from other hard to reach groups.

7.6 **Staff**

7.6.1 The County Council's staff are often local residents and have a part to play in defining and promoting democracy and correcting wrong perceptions with friends, families and others they meet in the performance of their duties. The Council's greatest assets, they can also champion the democracy that lies behind the Council's principles and policies. New staff receive training in the business of the Council, including governance, structure and "how KCC works", but there is as yet no information on how the public can engage with local government and the decision making process that can be passed on to others outside the council. Such further training should be provided to new staff in an accessible form as soon as possible, so that they can represent democracy and show others how to get involved.

R7: Need to ensure that induction and information pack for new staff includes information on how to have your say and get involved in local decision making and how public involvement has made a difference.

R8: KCC should provide subtitles and British Sign Language option on all DVDs produced.

8. Voting and elections

8.1 Since 1997 the Government have embarked upon a major programme of constitutional change: devolving power from Westminster. The constitutional arrangements underpin how the nation functions, the nature of the relationship between government and citizen, rights and responsibilities and together determine the health of our democracy. A recent report 'Review of voting systems: the experience of new voting systems in the United Kingdom since 1997' summarises the experiences of the new voting systems, advantages and disadvantages and gives a broad overview. There is ongoing debate about the voting systems in the UK and whether these should change or not, proportional or first past the post, and as such the committee have not looked at this.

8.2 The recent empowerment white paper incorporates a duty to promote democracy and new powers to encourage voting. KCC will have a responsibility to encourage peoples understanding of the political processes and encourage local people to register as voters and take part in elections. The percentage of those voting in the general and local elections in 2005 was slightly higher than in 2001, at 64.5% turn out of the electorate. Dartford and Thanet had the lower turnouts with 61.6% and 58.9% respectively. Often many initiatives are used to encourage seldom heard groups such as young people e.g. 'Local democracy campaign'. These initiatives could be broadened and encompass local people as a whole. Initiatives such as Wiltshire's 'db8' free issue magazine for young people could offer a positive way of engaging with local people, highlighting issues and encouraging them to be more democratically active.

8.3 Some insights from local people in Kent

"will vote if someone has done something good for our area"

"I don't know how to vote"

8.4 Many residents do not know whom their elected member is or why they should vote for someone, again linking to profile of elected members hoping to return and new members standing. The new duty could give KCC an opportunity to support elected members in a non political way to raise awareness, provide access to information and encourage voting and interest in elections locally – can we learn from KYCC?

To become a member of KYCC, a young person must:

- Write a brief statement saying why people should vote for them, and list three issues that they would like to campaign for.
- Attend a filming session to record their statement (this can be a silhouette or shadow if preferred).

- There is an option for contact numbers for the candidates to be passed to the KCC press office. The number will not be published, but the KCC Press Officer may pass it to local media representatives so that they can arrange interviews with the candidates.
 - Voters can choose their preferred candidate from the DVD and posters displayed at the polling stations. ... and
- Also details of how to stand for election are made available and promoted

8.5 e- Democracy could enhance representation of citizens. It can also support ballot box success – with blogs and websites enabling a 24/7 presence and potential as essential campaign tool to promote what members do, offering better interaction.

8.6 What percentage election turnout should be our realistic target? Can we improve turnout for the elections in 2009? New technologies such as interactive Blogs and Kent TV have a potential role to play in this and increasing visibility and awareness are key.

The Dartford Partnership Group is a group of adult service users with learning disabilities, which discusses many issues relating to how someone with learning disabilities can access services. During discussions it became apparent that the group had never been informed about their rights to vote or have any part in the democratic system. The Dartford Partnership Group ran an Election Training Day in preparation for its elections. At the election day workshop elections were held for the partnership group and candidates had to say why someone should vote for them and used photos and ballot papers which were easy to understand. Dartford Borough Council printed the papers and lent a ballot box. Service users are now aware that they have a right to vote and are looking forward to the next elections and voting for the First time in their lives.

9. Consultations

9.1 Engaging with communities through consultation

9.1.1 The White Paper 'Strong and prosperous communities' sees community consultation as key to enabling residents to have more control and say over their services. The 'duty to involve' requires KCC to offer local people ⁱⁱ appropriate opportunities to have their say about decisions and services that affect them through consultation. Examples of consultation include: formal (including mandatory) consultations, satisfaction surveys, as well as direct dialogue with people, for example through citizens' juries.

9.1.2 The perception (and sometimes the experience) of 'phoney' consultation is a significant cause of distrust²⁰ - a process to give information rather than to actively engage residents. In Kent-

- the consultation strategy sets clear definition of consultation as

²⁰ Communities and Local Government report 'Perceptions of local government in England' DCLG 2006

- *'KCC giving the people of Kent the information and opportunity to consider and give its views on issues so that those views can be taken into account before decisions affecting policies or services are taken'*.
- And outlines approaches for information giving, information gathering to inform decision making process, consultation to generate clearer understanding of peoples concerns and opinions and dialogue to build shared understanding.
- key message is the opportunity to influence decisions and shape services, otherwise consultation is a 'tick box' exercise.
- there are consultation leads for each directorate to
 - help ensure that consultation is approached in the right way, that they are genuine opportunities
 - that consultation is effectively co-ordinated and ensure awareness of separate Corporate Research programme, reduce consultation fatigue
 - to increase awareness of consultations across departments and agencies
 - ensure planned consultations go through an approval process
 - report findings to Directorate Management Teams and evidence its use in planning and decision making

9.1.3 Insights were gathered from Members investigations regarding consultations by KCC directorates from key staff/consultation leads. The responses are summarised below.

9.1.4 Elected members asked ...You said...

About successes -

- Comment cards at all service points: "you choose" cards, customers can select books to add to stocks; "I wish" cards for staff suggestions
- Children and Young People Survey 2007. Over 40,000 young people took part producing a wealth of information that has helped inform planning locally and countywide. (NFER)
- Home Care Survey by Kent Adult Social Services (KASS)– results are used in the contracting process, for monitoring and to share with providers. Therefore able to work in partnership with providers to ensure standards are met and improved.

About the challenges -

- of non service users and trying to get message across
- of ensuring participation obtains views of children who might be seldom heard or more vulnerable children who may not be as accessible as other groups of children or young people
- lack of awareness of issues that are being consulted upon affect them or may in the future
- trying to ensure full representation for whole of Kent population
- getting a representative and statistically significant sample.
- not everyone understands they receive a service from Kent Adult Social Services where agencies deliver the service on our behalf.

- it is always important for a lot of pre-consultation work to take place. Planning is the key aspect. If this and the consultation design (methods and analysis) are not given enough time we can waste people's time.

About opportunities to influence services and decisions, examples included -

- Prison Library and Prison stock survey – assessed satisfaction levels, listened and then matched service more closely to customer requirements
- consultation with parents to produce parent support strategy. Parents Consortium in West Kent where parents are involved in design and provision of service
- Active Lives and current strategy for Older People have involved people in various ways: workshops, surveys, user group presentations to shape policy. The final documents have (will have) an editorial Board consisting of service users/carers and the public.
- user involvement in recruitment policy developed with direct input from service users, carers and staff.
- recent user experience surveys have involved service users in the design, in focus groups - to understand the important questions for them, in testing the resulting questions (both understanding of words and of question). Questions asked are a reflection of the focus groups and the steering board who have service users on the committee and chaired by a service user. (e.g. carers survey, community equipment) KASS

About methods used to reach/engage with local people/service users -

- importance of diversity - Methods chosen are selected dependent on what we are trying to find out and most suitable for purpose and may vary as differing needs of people. Diversity of methods means hopefully there is an appropriate method for local people as they are so diverse and have different needs and preferences.
- scale can vary from large scale surveys to smaller more interactive groups.
- includes written, electronic and phone calls – comment cards, surveys, website feedback, feedback from complaints, user groups, workshops, questionnaires, interviews
- most useful for Kent Adult Social Services (KASS) is direct contact where people can have a real say during the process – e.g. editorial boards.
- surveys are cheaper than focus groups and do tend to get a good response rate if targeted. Focus groups are very useful but need skilled moderator. Interviews can easily introduce bias to the results.

About what could be done better -

- always aiming to reach more people,
- ensure consult more diverse range of children and young people including groups that are seldom heard e.g. disabled children, young carers,
- longer time spent on planning consultation, design of questions (often leading and double questions). Within KASS all research which involves consultation should be approved by the Kent Research Approval Group under the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care which lays down standards for all work
- ensure time to plan and research area before consulting
- website helpful for people searching for information on consultations but not necessarily bring to people's attention

About how KCC can improve participation in consultations -

- try and raise awareness of service to non-users and join up consultations where possible
- giving more publicity to how things have changed as a result of the feedback received – so people can see the impact they are having by being involved in decision making and service feedback.

About how we let residents/service users know about consultations -

- posters, radio kent, press releases
- many are through contact with particular users of services,
- via voluntary/ partner agencies – Surestart, Connexions
- direct invitation (often user survey is targeted and has special sampling framework so people are chosen using the Department of Health sampling framework), public involvement website, newsletter, mailshots, promoting at user events, public involvement database

About how elected members are informed and how they could be involved -

- members normally informed if formal consultation – e.g. if school closures or changes to services
- lead members invited/advised of relevant events as appropriate – or through inclusion in Business plans
- user survey applies only to a selected sample and because of data protection unable to share the names and addresses of those taking part. However all planned consultations are listed in the Business Plan
- Yes - members comments in press releases to raise profile
- Yes - could raise awareness throughout their local community/in whole community
- elected members should be able to encourage citizen engagement irrespective of the participants views

9.2 What is happening in Kent?

9.2.1 DCLG research highlighted that councils should be making more of an effort to communicate more effectively, openly and honestly with residents, to establish greater trust between residents and the council, and that it needs to be two way. In particular one example of the type of information that would be welcomed included information on upcoming plans for consultation.

In Kent details of all planned consultations are submitted as part of Directorate Business plans and are also published on <http://www.kent.gov.uk/consultations>, linked via 'have your say': <http://www.kent.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/democracy-and-elections/have-your-say/>. Consultations can be searched by Ward/geographical area and by area of interest.

9.2.2 As part of the investigations the Select Committee received a comprehensive hard copy summary of all of the planned 2008-2009 consultations, from information in the business plans. The members of the Committee found this information extremely useful and although this information exists and is accessible through the consultation pages and Business Plans members of the Select Committee were unaware/suprised of its existence. Elected members would find hard copies useful.

9.2.3 It was commented that elected members are often unaware of consultations/reviews affecting their areas. The current consultation strategy says 'elected members have a central role as representatives of their community ... and when considering any policy must take steps to inform those affected so that their views can be taken into account before final proposals are considered.' It was commented that there is a clear distinction between actively informing and having information available. Currently there is an Informal Member Group (IMG) looking at information needs of elected members and this is one area that needs to be flagged and included within future plans to develop a discreet section of information for members on the web. Signposting is key.

9.2.4 It was also commented that it would also be useful for information on consultations to include brief note on method of engagement to be used within perhaps Consultation type.

9.3 Consultation and engagement Strategy and toolkit

9.3.1 Successful implementation should increase the people of Kent's confidence that their views will make a difference and improve perception of councils willingness to take local residents views into consideration when decision making.

9.3.2 Kent County Council is broadening the current consultation strategy. The new Consultation and Engagement Strategy will aim to ensure KCC engages with a diverse range of people within the community and to ensure that people who are seldom heard have opportunities to engage and are not excluded, and that appropriate mechanisms are in place. It will take account of Corporate Assessment Report and the recent Empowerment White paper, and principles to incorporate issues raised within the duty to involve.

9.3.4 SILK are developing an engagement toolkit, to assist officers and elected members carrying out engagement activity and help ensure KCC involves a diverse range of people in the community and that KCC/elected members have conversations with local people including those who are seldom heard.

9.3.5 The importance of elected Members within the process should be highlighted, with clear guidance on the role of members, notification or mechanism for members to register interest in specific reviews so that they can be actively involved as leaders in their community.

R9:

- a) Elected members should have a hard copy summary of all the planned KCC consultations.
- b) Information regarding consultations and the need to inform and involve elected members needs to be highlighted and included within future plans to develop a discreet section of information for members on the web and clear commitments reflected within the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
- c) Information on consultations should include note on method of engagement to be used.

10. Tools for engagement – the future?

10.1 The Rural Commission in 2006 highlighted the importance of agreeing different appropriate ways of engagement. Through using new technology KCC can find innovative ways of consulting and engaging with local people and reinvigorate the democratic process. E-democracy is about making democracy easier and more convenient and about engaging with citizens and raising levels of engagement. E-democracy could help increase representations from all sections of the community, including those groups who have traditionally been seen as seldom heard/hard to reach as well as those who have difficulty engaging because they are time poor. Although some people prefer on the whole to speak to people in person it is often not feasible... this provides an alternative.

10.2 Embracing Technology - E democracy

10.2.1 The 2006 Connecting with Communities review (IDEA) shows that most effective way of engaging /opening up dialogue with local people is to acknowledge a 'one size does not fit all approach. The Select Committee concur with this view and that in considering e-democracy it is also about quality and not quantity. As different people like to communicate in different ways it is important for Kent County Council to keep a mix of traditional (direct contact face to face, by phone) and innovative methods (web, text messaging, blogs, podcasts), some directly targeted to reach a specific group of people.

10.2.2 A major issue to be addressed in promoting local democracy and raising visibility of elected members is perception. Technological solutions offer an opportunity for innovation and good two-way communication and getting residents more interested in the council, and widening the field of participation and debate.

Bristol City Council: have an e- democracy programme aimed at increasing representation from all sections of the community to:

- devolve more power and responsibility for identifying issues and solutions to local citizens and communities;
- show that the council is listening to and representing people effectively
- encourage more deliberative discussion, where people learn to listen and tolerate one another;
- more effectively reach the least engaged citizens and communities

Local initiatives include - '*Ask Bristol*' - online citizens panel to widen citizens' access and promote a more informed debate about local issues, running alongside more traditional 'offline' consultation activities, '*e-petitioner*' and '*Campaign Creator*', and '*Viewfinder*', a tool for video discussions with Ministry of Justice funding, incorporated into the Ask Bristol website.

Redbridge-i uses a host of features used by leading online companies like Amazon, eBay and MySpace to provide interactive communications to increase the dialogue with the community. The site allows the public to talk directly to the Council and so gives residents a voice. This has had the effect of changing the balance of power between residents and the Council.

10.2.3 Key to the success of developing an e-democracy programme or initiative is a clear vision driven by a wider philosophy about changing the relationship between citizens and local councils. The incorporation of user generated content could give residents a direct say, improve communications and KCC information about the needs/views of communities in Kent.

10.3 E-panel

10.3.1 These are in effect an online citizen's /residents Panel e.g. www.askbristol.com, and use tools such as discussion forums, surveys, deliberative polls and live chats. They provide an interactive way of consulting a wide range of people with an interest in the local area or specific topics of interest. It can give the opportunity for residents/service users to discuss issues with experts and with each other before giving their final views in polls and surveys.

10.3.2 The Bristol City Council site takes an informal and flexible approach, as participants are encouraged to start their own topics within discussions and come up with ideas for future consultations. It enables askbristol members to be more creative in their responses, potentially coming up with solutions the council hasn't thought of. Over 1600 people have now registered with askbristol.com to discuss a range of issues (from population of 410,500) - popular topics have been on graffiti and street art, waste and recycling and the future of Bristol's library service.

10.3.3 This could give future opportunities for the ongoing development of the Kent Residents Panel (KMCP – Kent and Medway Citizens Panel - new panel managed by Ipsos MORI) and also specific topic debate. Whilst taking part would in principle be open to anyone in Kent, targeted outreach would still be needed with particular communities whose views might otherwise be overlooked to ensure that the forum is representative.

Results from e-panel debates could help shape the Kent's development strategy, and inform policy and decision making on specific issues.

10.4 E- Petitions and campaigns

10.4.1 E-petition enables petitions to be live on the Internet, rather than just on paper. Enabling the petition and supporting information to be available to a potentially much wider audience, giving the opportunity to gather more names to support the petition. These can also provide the opportunity for discussion about the issue online. KCC has recently used its website for campaigns on

- Angel of the South – to gather support for proposed new £2 million landmark located next to Ebbsfleet International Station, near Gravesend.
- Campaign to support Kent's post office network

10.4.2 Bristol City Council's site (e-petitioner and Campaign Creator) is very interactive and enables the public to use the internet to raise petitions with the council, gather support and encourages and supports the development of campaigns (with around 40,000 signatures on 100 e-petitions, 9,500 on the highest supported petition). There is scope for better interaction in these areas on the KCC site to open up dialogue and debate, for example campaigns generated by Local Boards and local people.

"Don't just complain ... campaign". e- democracy project manager Bristol City Council

10.5 Webcasting - The recent extension of webcasting of key council meetings will help to spread participation and information about democracy. The press and public will be able to access meetings at a time and location convenient to them. There are a few issues relating to webcasting which are being considered as part of the modernisation of Democratic Services and Local Leadership. The possibility of links with Kent TV to provide a monthly feature on Local democracy and the decision making process, interspersed with extracts from the webcasts would be welcomed.

10.6 Video Conferencing: Video conferencing, trialled by the Select Committee was very successful. This provided the opportunity for the Committee to speak with experts from other areas without the need for long distance travel. This offers scope for Committees and elected members to talk with key representatives/speakers via video link, saving time and reducing carbon footprint – including community groups or representatives, officers from across the county, MPs, Chief execs, experts from other areas or overseas, schools etc, other County Councils. It may also help to engage the public and perceived hard to reach groups, and provide the opportunity to talk with end-users about local issues, policy proposals and debate topics in interactive session. It is not intended to replace face to face, but gives a good alternative. There needs to be a sharing of information about facilities that exist and how these can be accessed across Kent. For instance Sessions House has two locations: the Chamber and IT training room G67. The success will depend on there being facilities available in the right locations but every effort should be made to use them where possible. The cost for video conferencing at Sessions House was £35/hour for testing and online time.

10.7 E – consultation – revving the engines

10.7.1 Two-way communication is important and part of this is gaining a clearer understanding of local issues and priorities. E-consultation provides an opportunity to encourage debate and reach out more widely, for example initiatives such as 'Big Debate', and 'You Decide' giving the public the decision. This can be used to host, moderate and interact with a number of discussion forums on varying topics – such as forthcoming budget decisions, use of open spaces, Kent's impact on the environment etc.

'Redbridge Conversation', is a large-scale collaboration with the public to clarify local funding priorities. In particular it hopes to widen the consultation beyond the people who will get involved anyway, for example through area committees, and engage in more detailed discussions with particular sections of the community.

10.7.2 E-consultation initiatives could be timetabled to inform and ensure that authority functions are shaped around the needs and aspirations of the community. These can also be area based online forums, linked to Local Boards for example where participants can discuss issues relevant to their specific localities. One concern was that increased public engagement through e-forums might diminish the role of elected members as the representatives of their wards, but elected members can contribute to the debates and it can facilitate increased engagement between elected members and the public. Redbridge have set up seven such forums and have provided training for members on contributing to discussion forums.

10.7.3 E-consultation can include quick polls, online surveys, e-panels, discussion forums and deliberative polls. The KCC website could be extended to include e-consultation/e-forums to try and engage with local people as part of the priority setting, scrutiny and policy development processes between the public and elected members. It is noted that this is one tool in the box and will not necessarily suit everyone or every situation. Nationally and locally ran a Big Read campaign – similar principle could apply to Big Debate with online feedback – for groups, individuals, Café debate, student debate or older people forums for instance on key and engaging topic – ‘lets start talking’.

10.8 Blogs and Elected member websites

Blogs present a story telling environment, focussing on experiences, and an individual’s perspective – ‘Read my Day’. These are relatively easy to set up but need commitment from the blog owners to publish their entries on a regular basis. Growing familiarity and appeal for blog diary format. It was commented that Blogs are an important tool, can raise profile and may help change perceptions and can be a tool for election campaigns. The Leader of KCC has started a Blog – but currently this is not interactive. Interactive Blogs give need for moderation but also provide opportunity to open dialogue and receive feedback. Of the members who responded to the survey as part of this review 3 had already set up a blog/website and 6 stated that they were interested in doing so.²¹

10.9 Kent online

10.9.1 The council’s website is used by residents and staff and is increasingly used as source to get information, contact details etc and a good source of information. The information is there if you are looking for it – but as with consultations it does not necessarily encourage participation or involvement. For example ‘have your say is almost tucked away on KCC website and not visually prominent or engaging, no linkage to activities carried out by Kent TV, which also has ‘have your say’ and local debates which could initiate campaigns, formal debates on issues the public have raised. It is currently confusing. The modernisation of Democratic Services proposes a review of the web pages relating to the decision making process. This needs to be wider and draw in all of the strands for involvement and influencing decision making - brought under a single banner/portal that is easily identifiable – especially if the principle of more interactive initiatives is agreed. It was also noted that some pages on the web e.g. linking to the Local Democracy Campaign were out of date, and did not reflect the work Kent has done and may need refreshing.

²¹ for more information and useful guide – ‘Civic Leadership Blogging – How to use weblogs as an effective local leadership tool. Local e-gov 2005’ may be useful

10.9.2 Consultation is typically seen by many as surveys/questionnaires – but includes involvement/engagement activities in broader sense. This needs to be made clear. Also if we are to use more interactive technologies as a tool for engagement and revitalising Local Democracy, the marketing and signposting of the varying opportunities including e-democracy will be important. Communications will be key to the success of these initiatives – especially as asking people to get involved and try a new method.

10.10 Web 2.0 and email alerts

10.10.1 As well as considering more interactive communications the sites themselves can also be more interactive allowing for personalisation. For example Redbridge's new council website, Redbridge-i, enables users to customise and personalise it, using features based on Web 2.0 principles. Users can modify the features that appear on the homepage and their layout on the page. These include internal and external modules, for example 'my councillors' or BBC news and weather. Users accessing services through the site can also register to personalise the site based on their postcode. Information such as the location of recycling points, library opening times or transport services, will then relate directly to their locality. They can request emails alerting them to changes to services, for example informing them of waste collection times during holiday periods. The new Modern.gov will enable some email alerts to be generated, and could for example notify about new consultations and papers.

10.10.2 Wiltshire County Council uses 'Acknowledge' – a system which allows the public to register and leave a message about a concern. They receive an automatic acknowledgement of their concern (as with queries to KCC libraries for instance) but also an email link and attachments of helpful information on that subject. This could include a committee report on that issue or notification if that issue is due to be considered.

10.11 KENT TV, INVOLVE and 'Citizen Kent'

10.11.1 There is a need to empower local authorities to have a conversation with residents about certain issues before they are 'formally consulting'. This type of ongoing dialogue and feedback should also be classified as involvement, though it is argued this will inevitably be with the engaged to start with, raising issues about representation.

10.11.2 The Select Committee met with Involve – an organisation whose core focus is *"To show how public participation can positively and productively change the lives of individuals and improve the working practices of institutions."* As part of their investigations the Select Committee heard that 'Kent TV is a very positive and bold step but could still go further'.

10.11.3 An interesting opportunity arose to work with INVOLVE and develop ideas on how to engage the citizens of Kent in some of the big issues the government faces; opening up dialogue with Kent communities. Including how we could maximise value from Kent TV, how it might link to webcast debate and live online interaction, as well as programme of 'in person' contact plus resident driven content. InVolve are developing ideas and are in the process of putting a proposal forward. The Select Committee welcome this opportunity and are keen to see this taken forward.

10.11.4 Kent TV is evolving and are also in discussions with Democratic services as part of their modernisation programme about a regular democracy feature. Kent TV has

presented opportunities to encourage topical debate on views at a local level and could be used in tandem with greater engagement. A minor comment was that it was not clear what happens to the information generated by the debates – could they be channelled to start campaigns, inform areas for consultation or review?

10.12 Broadband

10.12.1 As we embrace technology as a means to increase involvement of citizens and communities it is important to consider the availability of Broadband across Kent. The Select Committee noted that based on figures available²² and defining anything over 764Kb as Broadband – 90% of local people in Kent can get Broadband, 10% can not.

10.12.2 It was noted that generally you need 2Mb and above for Multi-media i.e. digital TV downloads; Kent TV, good video conferencing, and by this measure c18% cannot access these services or can only get speeds too slow for digital TV and other multi-media applications. It was also noted that Broadband coverage and access speeds are the responsibility of the commercial sector, with BT being the only supplier of telecommunications services to c80% of premises.

10.12.3 BT have a major programme of work called 21st Century Network (21CN) to upgrade all exchanges to modern digital switching, due to complete by 2012 and may address some of the issues, but this is subject to change. The committee were advised that the only certain solution would be for BT to replace existing copper runs from the exchanges to at least the street cabinets serving local premises but that this was extremely expensive and in the region of £270 million for Kent. BT has recently announced a national £1.5 billion programme to replace some of these copper runs – this amount is c¹/₁₀th the total required for a comprehensive solution. They have indicated that they would welcome local authority input for priorities – KCC have made representations and meetings are imminent.

10.12.4 KCC will be supporting three parish councils (Ulcombe and Sutton-by-Dover) in seeking broadband provision for their respective “not-spots” (centre of Ulcombe village, and East Studdal / Tilmanstone) in September 2008.

10.12.5 As already stated e-democracy is a tool within a box of tools and some people will prefer other methods of communication and involvement, so having a mixed economy to engagement opportunities will remain important.

“New technology has the power to change the way in which councils engage and work with their citizens: local e-democracy can open a door to a genuine, two-way dialogue and deliver democratic renewal from the grass roots up.”²³

10.12.6 A couple of insights from young people in Kent:

“would be interested in petition to better my home area” – young offender

²² figures are not available for Virgin (ex – NTL/Telewest – covering c20% of properties)

²³ The local e-democracy national project – Deeper and wider community engagement. IDEA 2005

“idea of accessing democracy through IT or television appeared to have most promise”

“is internet good way to find out things? internet was a great tool needed to talk with people”

10.12.7 In taking forward opportunities presented by e-democracy it will be necessary to do further work on the cost implications and current resources and capabilities of system. As a very rough guide based on figures from Bristol costs could be Web casting £20k per year, Quote of £2-3k for e-petition, Quote £5k View Finder, and maintenance of these @ £500 per year.

R10:

- a) Facilities for video conferencing should be utilized, maximizing opportunities in Kent with KCC and partners.
- b) Elected members should be supported in using this service through current resources, training and support mechanisms.

R11:

- a) Need effective promotion of E-consultation and decision making to raise profile and encourage local people to have their say and voices heard.
- b) All engagement activities and weblinks should be brought under easily recognisable umbrella and portal e.g. 'Ask Kent ', to ensure two way interactive communication.
- c) Facilities for blogs, emails, online surgeries, plus training and support should be available for elected members.

R12:

In promoting the role of elected members and interaction with communities KCC should embrace e-democracy/ technological solutions to make elected members activities more visible and to open up dialogue and debate, for example e-petition, e-campaigns generated by Local Boards and local people, and e-debate.

Section 2: Elected Members

11. Both representative and participative processes are essential for a healthy democracy and greater participation by local people in the local political process is vital.

Paul Coen, Chief Executive of the LGA said:

“The recent loosening of central government control has radically changed the way central government, local government and the voluntary sector work together. Local councillors have an essential role, providing representation, information and advocacy for the people they serve. Voluntary and community organisations can and do strengthen this role through their knowledge about local issues and links with local people.

“It is through representative democracy that elected councillors make tough decisions based on the competing interests of residents. Greater participation brings more diversity and encourages a fuller debate about issues that affect all our lives.”²⁴

11.1 There is still a need to support and convince some elected members of incentives and outcomes of involvement, through clarity of member roles, explanation of how improved resident engagement enhances their understanding/profile/influence and clear links to overview and scrutiny. There is a shared objective of ‘making better places’ – improving services, enhancing cohesion, building influence and engaging with individuals. Increased engagement of local people presents an opportunity to build democratic capital, improve links to democratic representation and improve local profile. KCC need to make it clear about value of both representative and participative democratic processes.

11.2 In meeting the involvement agenda successfully appropriate engagement will need to continue to be embedded as standard practice throughout KCC, central to service delivery, policy and decision-making. Elected members have a key role within this

- to understand the interests and requirements of the local community;
- to encourage their communities to take part and get involved, building bridges, fostering involvement

11.3 Local people need to feel that there are relevant and accessible engagement opportunities for them and know how to get involved, either directly or through their elected member – again underlining the importance of profile, awareness and communication. Once engaged opinions must be seen to be acted upon or considered.

11.4 Representativeness

11.4.1 It is recognised that in a descriptive sense elected members are unrepresentative of the population as a whole, for instance

- average age of a councillor is 58.3 years

²⁴ Votes for Voices. 24 July 2008. LGA and NCVO

- Younger councillors (under 45) are becoming rarer – 26% in 1985 down to 13.5 % in 2006, only 3.5 % are under 30 compared to 1/3 of the population in this age group
- Nearly 70% are men, Women comprise of only 29.3% (compared to 52% of the population)
- 97.5% are white (Source: Councillors Commission Dec 2007²⁵)

11.4.2 The current KCC membership does not reflect the diversity of the population it represents in a descriptive sense. It is agreed that this is an issue that needs to be addressed - but opinions are divided about how successful a drive will be to recruit more councillors from under- represented groups. Key points made were

- there is a clear role for the political parties to encourage more people to stand for election – nationally 90% of representatives belong to one of three parties
- 'time' was seen as a critical factor
- often the need for paid work and personal/family commitments prevent people from standing for election.
- Does the system of getting elected in practice preclude people who would be excellent local leaders but do not align to any particular national party?
- remuneration was key to encourage more people to stand for election.
- levels of remuneration - need to reflect importance of frontline councillor role
- elected members need to reflect the diversity of the population
- lack of awareness of what elected members do, how to stand for election and become a 'community leader'
- confidence,
- full recompense for child care/ care of elderly to enable them to full fill role
- in some parts of the European Union Councillors take allocated time away from work – employers are more accommodating – take account of career

11.4.3 It is important to note that the debate does not suggest that elected members of any particular age group, gender or ethnic background are capable of representing only people whose personal and social attributes are the same, or that seats based on a mechanistic headcount of local populations. It is however agreed that KCC could benefit from having a range of age, background and experiences among elected members.

11.4.4 Kent County Council and individual political parties could do more to promote how members of the public can become elected members and encourage people from those sections of the community not currently represented to stand at elections. There is a clear link to promote democracy and role of members as community leaders, how they became involved, what they do and how they can make a difference. Leicester City Council has run 'making your voice heard' prior to 2003 and 2007 elections to encourage people from more diverse communities to consider running for office, and that being a councillor can be both rewarding and challenging.

R13: Raising interest in both the opportunity and how to become an elected member needs to be clear and transparent. Agree more diversity in elected members is seen to be beneficial but is complex and worthy of separate study.

²⁵ Councillors Commission report: representing the future and article in Councillor spring 2008 'average white band'. The evidence confirms that the proportion of BME and women councillors is growing very slowly but the actual average age of councillors is rising.

11.5 Bottom up Communication: Understanding the views/issues of people in Kent

11.5.1 A key element of engaging communities is the relationship of elected members with their communities and understanding their views and issues but to engage need to build trust and improve perception. It is key that opportunities to influence decisions and be involved are highlighted and that debate is opened up to the public, through which elected members can achieve better representation by having a greater understanding of the views and issues of the public.

Key points supported by research²⁶ are

- elected members need to be far more available and accessible to the public, “out and about” more in their communities. Face-to-face contact is the key to building up trust, interest and dialogue
- more visible and seen to be connecting more with the communities they serve in order that they can provide real community leadership.

For example by using neighbourhood walks, listening events and question times to enhance elected members’ visibility in their local areas, develop an ongoing dialogue about the things that matter most to local people and inform local action, priorities, policies and service planning. Community action planning is one of the most powerful forms of citizen engagement and local working, especially when it manages to combine substantial resident participation and ownership with real engagement on the part of the service providers who will be responsible for implementing many of the actions proposed. It can be seen in a wide variety of practices – from the parish planning approach seen in rural villages and often engages a majority of residents there, to participatory appraisals with which South Tyneside has been experimenting.²⁷

Participatory appraisal - prioritised views of local people as ‘experts in their own neighbourhood’ focusing on issues such as drugs, crime, barriers to employment, graffiti and education. Teams made up predominantly of residents were trained in techniques of participatory appraisal using flexible, accessible and interactive tools like maps and spider diagrams – to identify problems and solutions. The team canvassed a cross-section of their community leading to a local action plan for all stakeholders.

Neighbourhood walkabouts to pin-point and resolve local issues and raise visibility. Walkabouts involve councillors, community council board members, the police and other agencies. Positive response by residents of the ‘council’ coming to them - resolved some issues on the spot, fed others into local action plan.

Votes and voices

11.6 How better to engage - public access to elected members

11.6.1 There needs to be a renewed focus on how local people can communicate with Kent and in particular elected members, providing a wider variety of opportunities

²⁶ Perceptions of local govt.DCLG

²⁷ How Local Government devolves and why. Part 2: developing local strategies. Hilder. Young Foundation 2006

for face to face and online discussions. There is a clear role for elected members and this role in informing, consulting and involving the community needs to be promoted within Kent – both leading engagement and following up where residents are dissatisfied.

11.6.2 Elected members as a part of this need to be more easily accessible and continue to aim to be more responsive to the needs of different communities, exploring different approaches of how to get in touch.

11.6.3 In the elected members survey (based on 48 responses) the top five ways elected members engage with their communities are:

- 46 (96%) use Local boards
- 41 (86%) attend village/school fete
- 41 (86 %) use leaflet or community newsletter
- 38 (79%) attend parish councils
- 35 (73%) use door to door

Only 43% of those who responded write to schools and arrange visit as part of Local Democracy week or hold surgeries. 13 members used local media, 9 members write to all new residents when they move into their ward and 5 members send 18th Birthday cards to introduce themselves and opportunity of voting.

11.6.4 *Other ways elected members engage/raise their profile with local people include:*

Street letters, own website/blog(3 members), visit schools and give talks, visit local shopping areas/facilities regularly – being visible as local, street surgeries with MP, walk the ward, run activities events such as 5 a side and 11 a side football, good contact with district councillors in division, attend youth advisory groups, engage with local organisations, annual networking evening with VCS, attend Youth Council.

11.6.5 *Things elected members would like to do in the future but haven't had time to yet included:*

- 27 (56%) said nothing
- 3 said writing to new residents, new citizens and 18+
- Blogging
- Harvesting email addresses to send e-bulletins
- Playground surgeries, online surgeries and joint surgery with parish clerk
- Activate first class leisure facilities
- Set up elder and community forum
- Like input into LSPs and CDRP
- Rolling van on local democracy and initiatives – e.g. Lancashire mobile bus

11.6.6 During the investigations issues around perceived safety were highlighted – for example how to make it safe to go to houses or perceived fear of visiting particular communities alone. Members need to feel safe to carry out their roles and to have some guidelines reflected within their roles and responsibilities.

11.6.7 Some Members were interested in particular how they could build links with Local Gypsy and traveller communities in their areas. There was also an apparent lack of knowledge/awareness amongst members of the rights of different sectors within

communities in respect of voting – e.g. British Forces, Gypsy and Traveller Community, and prison Offenders. Briefing notes were provided to the Committee on these. It may be useful to share/make this available to other Members through the information point.

11.6.8 The question of how to engage with people in urban blocks, which have very low election turn out figures was raised. It was commented that people don't go to ward surgeries and the pathway had to be through Members being more visible in their wards and going to people. Suggestions to overcome this were 'getting out there' and hold surgeries/café talks in places where people are already going, making it less separate.

11.7 Contact details and Surgeries

11.7.1 The KCC website and A- z contain information about every elected member including details of members, contact arrangements and email links. The KCC Contact Centre can also advise residents on who is, and how to contact their local elected member.

11.7.2 Elected members arrange surgeries where residents can talk with them about issues that concern them. The arrangements for and frequency of these vary according to the individual members preferences and some members find these are not effective, but have worked well when in places that people already go – shops, library, gateways. There is scope to develop online surgeries, opening up accessibility to those who are time poor, have caring responsibilities, don't engage with traditional surgeries. The terminology however may need looking at for something more up to date and engaging.

11.8 Democracy hubs - within gateways

11.8.1 One-stop access points have recently been established in Kent to provide more integrated access to local services and other public agencies. There is a need to ensure that officers within gateways can provide information on how the public can become involved in local decision making, raise issues, contact local members and find out about key decisions and the forward plan, cabinet and scrutiny functions. Local elected members could also be co-located to provide services to local people through a presence at such sites. The presence of the County Members means that issues affecting the whole community, such as health and community safety, can be raised and the members can use their community leadership role to raise these issues with the relevant body.

11.8.2 Important that local service centres should readily provide information and guidance on councils and the decision making structure. The information format needs to be accessible and engaging. For example ideas such as Libraries wish cards could be incorporated in this for visitors, with Local Board contact information, examples of local action and to enable local people to communicate their local wish list.

11.8.3 Visibility is key, with support from KCC to publicise and promote the role/profile of members -what they do and create greater recognition of the role of elected members within the community. Also key to increase the opportunities for opening dialogue with elected members - technology could achieve this. It is important to acknowledge that there is no one answer and some of the techniques proposed are

new. Elected members should be supported in delivering alternative forms of engagement as discussed in the e-democracy section.

11.9 Role of Elected Members – role descriptions

11.9.1 There is no clear perception and understanding from the public of the role of elected Members. Also, if there is no outline of what is expected, someone from a background not familiar with Local Government would not know if it was something they could do and what commitments it might entail. Members of the Select Committee commented on the importance of all elected members but especially those newly elected members having an understanding of their role. It is a representative and governance responsibility rather than a job, and needs greater clarity about the role, expectations and duties. 'Role Descriptions' are the way forward to help advance skills, time management and help current and potential members understand what is expected of them. Elected members will have different styles and different requirements and all share ward responsibilities. Exemplars of best practice for varying aspects would be useful, and can be linked to discreet member section on website.

11.9.2 The recent White Paper (Strong And Prosperous Communities), has high expectations for the future role of elected members and comments that many elected members may require mentoring and training to take on further community development roles locally (both soft skills such as brokering and action planning, and skills to challenge local views appropriately. The success of localised arrangements will be dependent on high calibre local elected members. The work being carried out by the recent Informal Member Group (IMG) on member development will ensure that Kent has high calibre local Leaders. The importance of there being a work/life balance for elected members and the need to have a level of commitment to the community to carry out their role satisfactorily needs to be reflected. The Member Development IMG is looking at roles of elected members as part of its remit. Starting points for development exist in current national paperwork and other authorities. The Select Committee support the development and introduction of 'role descriptions' for all elected members in Kent.

11.9.3 It is important for all elected members to understand their roles – there should be an introduction to local government for new members with little or no knowledge of local government. The LGA Councillors guide is intended to help elected members be high calibre and effective community leaders – we should ensure that every member has a copy of this.

11.10 Local Boards

11.10.1 There are a number of ways that a local authority can establish the views and opinions of its citizens. One is through participatory forums or regular consultative meetings such as Local Boards. The important role of elected members as representatives and local leaders is emphasised throughout this report – Local Boards are one of the main ways in which members engage with local people and explore new ways to enhance the role of elected members in the communication process.

11.10.2 Local Boards have been in place since 2004, devised as a method for moving away from committee structures and getting people more involved in the decisions on county council priorities that will affect their local areas - a forum for local communities to raise their concerns directly with their elected member. However it was

noted from Insights gathered by the Committee that awareness of these was low, and would attend but were unaware of them.

11.10.3 Are these supported by a communications plan to ensure work and links are highlighted? If not should they be? Currently there are no resources for advertising and proper promotion.

11.11 Using elected members to change perception

The visibility of elected members also affects residents' perceptions and members are often 'the council' in the eyes of many residents. There are as in all Councils good and bad elected members and views on involvement with residents and how to approach this mixed. Some local members are heavily involved in community events and forums - others are more distant from their local communities. Where members are actively involved, there are obvious benefits – increased awareness and understanding of members and how to raise issues. As discussed elsewhere in this report specific events can help raise profile and understanding - for example 'speed dating events with the community', democracy campaigns etc; and communication has a key part to play.

R14: 'Top tips' and contact details on making contact with seldom heard/ perceived hard to reach communities should be included in all new ward packs.

R15:

- a) The introduction of role descriptions for all elected members needs to be supported.
- b) The IDEA Councillors guide should be actively promoted and need to ensure all elected members have a copy.
- c) Training for elected members in ways of local government and ongoing training to help elected members carry out their role effectively should be actively supported.

Section 3: Structures and localism

12. Successful community engagement has four components: first, finding out about citizens' fears, concerns and preferences, second, engaging local people in discourse about local issues, third, developing communities' capacity to participate and four the ability to respond. This section of the report considers the way forward for localism and local democratic structures to support the strengthening of local democracy and empowerment of local people and frontline members. The current emphasis on devolution and a move to local area working places much greater responsibility on KCC to demonstrate they can engage with local people and provide more responsive and effective services – empowering Local Boards is a key step.

12.1 In strengthening democratic accountability there is a clear leadership role for local members through Neighbourhood or community representation. All councillors have a role in advocating the needs of their communities whether urban, rural, parished or unparished - a crucial role in making difficult decisions, allocating scarce resources, articulating challenging messages and working as community leaders. It is crucial that Members are enabled to fulfil this role in order to advance community involvement in decision-making, in accurately identifying local needs, and in helping to assess the impact of delivery. There is a clear need for both representative and participative democracy and there is room for both and the closer the links between these models of democracy, the better the quality of decisions.

12.2 Important questions of the committee included:

- *How can local boards be supported in delivering effective community governance and empowerment?*
- *How much capability is there to take responsibility for initiatives locally? Where is this capacity – in communities, the council, elected representatives or partners?*
- *What is the nature of the commitment to devolution? What are the concerns of local politicians?*

12.3 Unitary or enhanced Two tier working

As discussed in the Going Local supplementary report Sept 2007 – arising from the Kent Commitment is the need for a political interface to complement two-tier working and to focus on local issues and priorities through involvement of KCC, Districts and other service providers. There needs to be more effective joint working which is clearly evident to local people – between KCC, District, Town and parish councils and service partners. The benefits or otherwise dependent on opinions of unitary status were discussed as part of the community involvement agenda, being more local and transparent.

12.4 Kent is currently a two-tier system of Local Government and although consideration of unitary status was not part of the remit of this Committee it was considered an important issue – would it remove barriers and increase effective engagement, closer working and recognise the legitimacy of all stakeholders? Partnerships built on shared information, positive attitudes, willingness to work closer together to meet local priorities, be more responsive locally and an active dialogue

between those providing services to and those using services in a neighbourhood/community.

12.5 Localism

Local boards in general can undertake a number of activities, from acting as sounding boards and avenues for community voice, to developing and monitoring local action plans and even becoming involved in service delivery – for example Community Boards in Wiltshire. KCC has built substantial capacity in Localism since 2004 through Local Boards and Neighbourhood forums – however these currently have few formal powers. Both Member and officer roles are fundamental to the development of local involvement and making a real commitment to dialogue, listening and local action is a key factor in their success or failure.

12.6 Local Boards/neighbourhood forums are seen as a key method to bring KCC, elected members, and decision making closer to communities, and these are currently evolving and seek to be more effective. They are in the process of changing dependent on the area needs and set up – as one size does not fit all to provide a clear and visible vehicle for local people to express their views and concerns. The recent successes of neighbourhood forum pilots in Dover were discussed – it was agreed that the extension and empowerment of neighbourhood forum is a powerful idea.

12.7 An ongoing programme of support for elected members in their community leadership role is crucial. Using a mix of traditional and innovative engagement approaches to strengthen councillors' representative role through participatory means and developing strong, active communities, where local people can see that the things which matter most to them are being addressed, that they can influence decisions and come together to make the difference.

12.8 The localism agenda is changing how we engage people with democracy. There is a need to keep the momentum going and continue to make step changes to reach the final goal of democratically active communities and more locally responsive services. To be effective the Boards/forums need to have power to make change happen and to be visible. It is hoped that increasing and strengthening involvement and empowering frontline elected members will in turn raise the profile of Boards and Neighbourhood Forums and embed them as not an adjunct to what we do but how we do things.

12.9 A fundamental factor in creating change in our communities is being able to use what everyone has to offer to the full – elected members, local people and partners. Positive attitudes and structures that reinforce this recognition are key; facilitated by commitment to increase participation and devolution, and where the legitimacy and potential contribution of other stakeholders is recognised and welcomed. It is important that Members/Boards have officer support to improve services at the community/neighbourhood level; that there is a clear delivery mechanism for delivering action plans and clear outcomes; and that there is proactive, widespread and creative community engagement.

12.10 There are many different approaches to participation through different devolution strategies (each mixing citizen engagement, devolved governance and

responsive management in different ways) - the key strategic building blocks to take this agenda forward (as outlined by Hilder)²⁸ are:

- continued Citizen engagement, empowerment and participation, including new kinds of community development and action planning
- devolving power, governance and democratic decision-making, including to frontline councillors
- redesigning management to be more responsive, through Localising services, under which staff, management processes, decisions and/or delivery mechanisms are decentralised, and Neighbourhood partnership approaches, which bring together public service partners, with citizens and representatives.

12.11 Community plans are a powerful tool in engaging the community, identifying priorities, such as in used in Wiltshire County Council, with clear SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time specific. Evidence based community planning with tangible outcomes have the potential to keep up good local interest and involvement. Another example of devolving services to operate at a local level is Wiltshire's Parish stewards scheme, which is run and controlled by parish councils (cutting grass, cleaning road signs, undertaking other maintenance of public areas and facilities) – based, delivered and controlled by the community. Further examples include siting of dropped kerbs, joint working with communities on speed bumps asking the community for suggestions of how and where best to manage and enforce speed limits and favoured designs, and the re-development of a secondary school and consultation – which changed plans and actually increased capital receipts. Running local services in this way will depend on elected members and officers having sufficient delegated powers and support of bottom up working and a commitment to maximum public consultation as early as possible. Training for both officers and elected members in the facilitation process will be essential.

12.12 Many service areas are already highly devolved managerially and operationally – however there is positive opportunity for further specific delegation of some services, although capacity for day to day management of services at a local level is a major issue, and view that service procurement and delivery is best with agencies with appropriate professional resources and capacity, and that over delegation could in itself compromise service standards and performance.

12.13 It is the opinion of some elected members that the new executive arrangements have marginalised and disenfranchised a large proportion of its elected members. The modernisation of Local Boards needs to establish a local executive having real power at a local level to influence the provision of schools, libraries, youth services, transport etc and local priorities. There needs to be wider opportunity for front-line councillors to develop community roles from a position where they are empowered to do more. This will mean Cabinet and chief officers “letting go” more, within well defined parameters and considering local delegation, including the enhanced and improved devolution of resources and power. Local Boards need more commitment through devolution of funds to be able to make evidenced based local decisions – with delegated authority assigned to it to act as a local executive arm of the council. A process of evolution not revolution.

²⁸ How local government devolves and why - Part 2: developing local strategies - Paul Hilder (November 2006) The Young Foundation.

12.14 Comments by the Select Committee on Local Boards in Kent following discussions with the Community Liaison Managers included -

- variable success: well supported in some areas not all, not liked by all districts
- must have outcomes clearly defined, good for significant issues such as Library closures
- difficulty arises from lack of interest from some Local Board members
- localism agenda gives KCC the ability to work at a local level with district and parish councils. We have the tool kit to do this but need to have the ability to change at the central level - need to do more than just talk about this.
- more interest from Parish Councils than District Councils – issue of transparency and communication – need more linkage with Districts.
- importance of clear rules of engagement when working with partners
- Kent Commitment can work if want to learn from Wiltshire model in how they go out to the public - their localism style could apply here in Kent even if not Unitary. Can we allow Local Boards to make decisions? Should be no ranking on Local Boards.
- need ability to be responsive, working with partners, need senior officer support
- apparent lack of interest and awareness of the public – also commented on by CPA inspectors

12.15 It is recognised that new arrangements and responsibilities have created training and development needs for some Members. For example tapping into the power of the media and marketing, public speaking skills, ability of chairs and styles of meetings contributing to the success or not of Local Boards, engagement techniques, how to get recognition etc. The Member development IMG is looking at the changing role of members and skills to equip them to be high calibre and effective local leaders, and provide practical support for councillors in their representative role as effective community advocates and leaders. The committee has not considered these issues in depth and anticipates the findings of the IMG to address these issues.

12.16 Variable ability of chairs was raised as an issue and discussed as part of the recent Going Local IMG. Sharing chairmanship of Joint Local Boards/neighbourhood forums could help build stronger bridges with partners and the community. It was also suggested that time and style of meetings should be reviewed; they could be held in the day, involve Age Concern, schools etc, smaller group discussions and be more participatory and deliberative. Availability of better facilities and hospitality were a key issue and seen as key to welcoming and encouraging local people to participate. The importance of publicity and promotion of the Local Boards (and successor bodies), their events and successes is a critical factor if the public are to be encouraged to become more involved.

R16: To effectively strengthen local structures for community engagement and encourage involvement in local decision making need

- a) Localism to be more outcome focussed
- b) mechanism for prompt feedback to the public on specific issues
- c) to explore further with District, Town and Parish Councils and other local partners what they believe would improve community engagement
- d) to devolve power and resources to support local priorities and action, from discretionary funds being delegated to local forums for decision making.

e) Chief Officers and Cabinet should identify which services can be delegated to local level and be influenced by members in their representative capacity based on views of community priorities and preferences.

13. Participatory Budgeting

13.1 Participatory budgeting or “community Kitties” were pioneered in Brazil involving local people in spending decisions through public meetings and votes to set local priorities and fund projects and services.

13.2 The empowerment white paper published July 2008 gives communities a stronger voice in local decision making and delivery of services, and a greater say on how public money is spent, encouraging take up of participatory budgeting by all Local authorities by 2012.

13.3 Twenty two Local Authorities have signed up as pilots from a few thousand to several million pounds. A good example is the pilot by Newcastle City Council –

Pilot Example: The “u-decide” children and young peoples participatory budgeting (PB) pilot used a participatory grant making model, with children and young people targeting the funds city-wide, and won an award for Innovative Engagement 2008.

Also, after successfully piloting Participatory budgeting in three wards since 2006 Newcastle City Council is extending this to 5 further wards. The money allocated to spend via PB methods varies from £5000 to £200,000 in each of the five wards. Newcastle City Council has also agreed to devolve £2.25million for young people to decide how to spend it through city-wide PB events.

13.4 By 2010 local authorities will be able to devolve 5% of their budget for youth services, with young people deciding how that money is spent. By 2018 the Government Department for Children, Schools and Families aim that up to a quarter of the budget could be devolved in this way with young people having a direct say.

13.5 Clearly KCC already involves service users and residents in much of what it does, through for instance consultation, service design, focus groups etc. There is however an expectation of more involvement and devolution - participatory budgeting/community kitties is one way that KCC could devolve decision making and show they are meeting the duty to involve people. To what extent should KCC adopt participatory budgeting and amount of devolution of actual cash to communities to decide how to spend on their local priorities?

13.6 There are tensions around budget devolution beyond that operated by Local Boards and Local Member grants, between the principles of devolving spending power to communities and retaining budgeting power with elected representatives and the Council. The current agenda is to empower communities through devolution, however it is feared by some that participatory budgeting would remove control from elected members and power to effect change.

13.7 In taking this forward it is proposed that KCC could consider a proportion of its budget for devolution to communities – taking account of KCCs statutory or already devolved (e.g. schools) spending. Looking at a percentage of the discretionary fund available, estimated as just under £100 million; 2% would devolve £2million, 10% would devolve £10 million.

13.8 It was the view of the Committee that in establishing participatory budgeting, individual member grants should remain and that participatory budgeting should be from reallocation of discretionary funds to reflect evidenced locally determined priorities, however there was concern that spending should remain within the overall budget. In principle individual Local Boards or group of elected members could pool part of Member Community grants and use this for participatory budgeting locally should they wish to, dependent on resource to manage the process.

13.9 The mechanism for involving local people in participatory budgeting could for example

- be linked to an e-democracy initiative (“We asked... you said... **you did**”),
- interactive nominating and voting for priority projects through Kent TV (along lines of BBC Restoration series) and communications team
- a cash sum for allocation at budget setting workshops run by Ipsos MORI,
- cash sum linked to participatory/neighbourhood appraisal and action plans by local residents (e.g. South Tyneside) or linked to Local Boards
- through Kent and Medway Citizens Panel, Residents panel forum
- devolved to town and parish Councils.

13.10 Although the decision on the mechanism needs further open debate, the options mentioned highlight some of the possibilities and that there is clear scope for greater involvement. It is important that if the principle is supported, need continuum of member involvement and depending on the mechanism used that elected Members are engaged. Elected Members have a role as community champions to promote and raise the profile of opportunities ‘face to face’, supporting specific projects and encouraging local people/communities to become involved. Spin-off benefits are that some mechanisms may help raise the profile/awareness of elected members and the council and build trust.

R17: The opportunity for participatory budgeting from devolved discretionary funds should be provided within the next budget year, with delivery mechanism to be determined, and a sum of underpinning monies to enable local people to determine how the resource should be spent.

13.11 If the principle is supported further work will need be undertaken in taking this forward to determine the mechanism, outline overall costs, transparency, budget and resource implications. Different mechanisms will have different supporting and administrative costs associated with them.

Conclusions

14. It is evident in this report that KCC has arrangements in place to enable people to be more actively engaged in shaping the future of their communities – giving them influence over local services and action – but there is much scope for strengthening this and taking it forward.

14.1 As highlighted in the report the promotion of opportunities and how local people are getting involved will be key. The move towards community engagement and localism agenda will only work and be effective if KCC successfully strengthens involvement of local communities and improves dialogue by embracing both traditional methods and new technologies. Two-way communication is essential. It will be important for Local Boards /and their successor bodies to continue to respond to local circumstances, become more outcome focused and have the resources and devolved power to make local evidence based decisions. Elected members are key as community leaders and need to be supported to deliver their changing roles effectively – within a framework that embraces both representative and participative democracy.

Appendix One: List of hearings and discussion groups

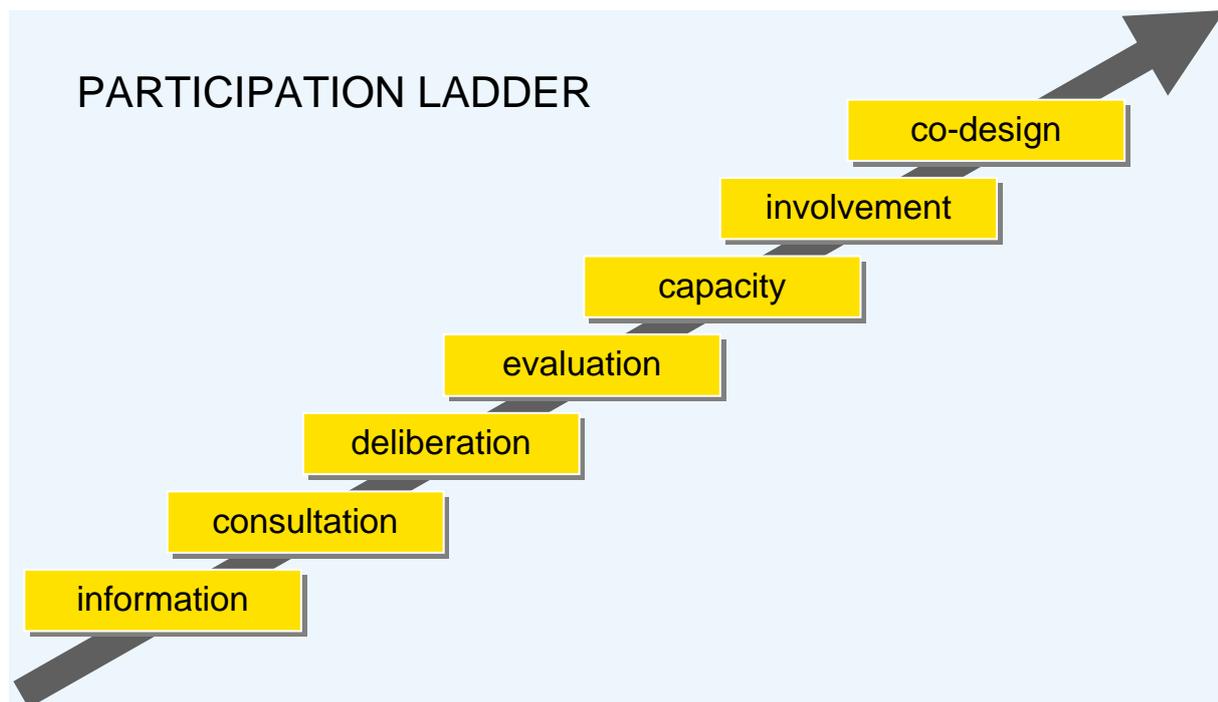
Hearing date	Witnesses who attended hearing sessions
Wednesday, 9 April	Richard Wilson – Involve
	Paul Wickenden Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager – Local Boards and Neighbourhood Forums
	John Thomson, Deputy Leader of Wiltshire County Council
	Barbara Bradley, Jenny Hanna – Hawkinge Partnership
Friday, 18 April	Elderly Persons Forum, Princes Park, Dartford
Monday, 21 April	Insight Gathering at Ashford Gateway
Wednesday, 23 April	Insight Gathering at Coldharbour Library
	Insight Gathering at Surestart Milmead
	Insight Gathering at Thanet Gateway, Margate
Thursday, 1 May	Rodney Williamson- Kent Association of Local Councils KALC
	Carol Hayward, Corporate Consultation Manager, Bristol City Council, Video Conferencing
Wednesday, 7 May	Sittingbourne Young Offenders Group, New House Sport and Youth Centre, Chalkwell Road, Sittingbourne Kent
Wednesday, 14 May	Dartford Young Carers, Enterprise House 8 Essex Road, Dartford
Friday, 16 May	Kent Deaf Youth Gang and Medway and West Kent Deaf Forum
Monday, 19 May	Community Liaison Managers KCC
Monday, 19 May	Kent Youth County Council, New House, Youth Centre, Chalkwell Road Sittingbourne
Thursday, 22 May	Hawkinge Partnership, Heron Forstal Avenue, Hawkinge,
Wednesday, 18 June	Andy Wood, Head of Financial Management

Appendix Two: Ladder of Participation

Participation can be defined as the active and positive involvement of people in decision making processes which affect them.

However for participation to be **effective** it needs to go a step beyond this and allow people to not only be involved but to also influence these decisions and decision making processes. Therefore:

Effective participation can be defined as ‘the active and positive involvement of people in decision making processes which affect them, including the right and means to influence these decisions and the decision making processes.’



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Glossary and Abbreviations

DCLG -	Department for Communities and Local Government
IDEA -	Improvement and Development Agency
IMG -	Informal Member Group
KASS -	Kent Adult Social Services
KCC -	Kent County Council
KYCC -	Kent Youth County Council
LCSPs –	Local Children’s Service Partnerships
LGA -	Local Government Association
SILK -	Social Innovation Lab for Kent

Community

Communities can be:

- Groups of people living in the same area.
- People that share an identity. For example, people of the same age, gender, ethnicity or faith.
- People that share an experience, cause, interest or concern.

Community development

Active empowered communities are able to participate in community development. Community development can be defined as the collaborative actions taken by communities and public bodies to achieve social justice and change by identifying and meeting community needs.

Community engagement

Community engagement describes a number of different processes, which help to build empowered communities that take an active part in improving the quality of their lives.

Community engagement includes:

- consultation
- community capacity building
- empowerment.

Consultation

Consultation is about:

- talking to a community in order to understand its needs and views
- involving people in making decisions about the things that affect them
- responding to what a community tells you.

Empowerment

Empowered communities have both the capacity and the opportunity to develop their communities.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The **Duty to Involve** seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say, and embed a culture of engagement and empowerment across the authority's functions, and requires authorities to involve *representatives of local persons*ⁱⁱ. This comes in to force on 1 April 2009 (set out in part 7 section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).

ⁱⁱ **“representatives of local persons”?**

The duty defines the term “local persons” to refer to those likely to be affected by, or interested in, a particular authority function. The term “local persons” is not simply a reference to local residents, but includes people who work or study in the area (including those who work for the authority); visitors; service users; local third sector groups; businesses; and anyone else likely to be affected by, or interested in, the function. The phrase “representatives of local persons” refers to a mix of “local persons”, i.e. a selection of the individuals, groups or organisations the authority considers likely to be affected by, or have an interest in the authority function. In the context of the duty the “representative” does not refer to formally elected or nominated members of the community, such as councillors.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Devolution strategies** - these are the various ways which councils have adopted in engaging with their citizens and communities.

Six different devolution strategies

These ideal-type strategies each mix **citizen engagement, devolved governance** and **responsive management** in different ways:

1. **LOCALISED MANAGEMENT** *Making services more responsive, effective and efficient*
2. **NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT** *Combining community involvement with localised management*
3. **COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT** *Engaging citizens, building social capital and stronger communities*
4. **DEVOLVED GOVERNANCE** *Localised decision-making centring around elected representatives*
5. **PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE** *Combining devolved democratic arrangements with active community involvement*
6. **MIXED MODELS** *More equal focus on citizen engagement, devolved governance and local management*

Source: How local government devolves and why. Part two: developing local strategies, *Young Foundation* (2006), as referred to by Savage 2007

^{iv} **The Local Government White Paper, 'Communities in control: real people, real power' July 2008:** The key themes are power, influence and control: who has power, on whose behalf is it exercised, how is it held to account, and how can it be diffused throughout the communities we live in. It deals with seven key issues:

- Being active in your community;
- Access to information;
- Having an influence;
- Challenge;
- Redress;
- Standing for office; and
- Ownership and control.

Some of the provisions in the White Paper will require legislation and the forthcoming legislative programme contains a Bill - the Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill that will deal with some of this. Alongside the paper is published - Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance. 'It covers the duty to involve and duties around Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in the *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007*. It also replaces previous guidance on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Sustainable Community Strategies'.

^v **Local Boards** - Active in the community -hold regular public meetings across Kent for residents/citizens to come and have their say about issues that affect their community. The format of these varies depending on the Local board. They also fund local projects.

Local Boards provide an opportunity:

- for elected members of the county council to work more closely with the public, and with voluntary and private sector partners locally, to meet the aspirations of local people
- for a regular forum for community consultation and participation that will encourage discussion and debate on matters of particular local interest
- to consider the need for services in local communities, and look at the effectiveness of existing services
- for KCC's Cabinet and Cabinet Members to consult on strategic issues affecting a Local Board's area.

There are 12 Local Boards in Kent, each one covering a district council area. Residents can suggest topics for discussion. Also some Local Boards take questions after presentations as well as a general question and answer session at the end of the meeting.

What funding is available? There are three types of funding residents can apply for:

1. Member Community Grants
2. Small Community Capital Project Grants
3. Local Schemes Grants

^{vi} **LGA Reputation Campaign 12 core actions -**

Cleaner, safer, greener -

- adopt a highly visible, strongly branded council cleaning operation
- ensure no gaps or overlap in council cleaning and maintenance contracts

-
- set up one phone number for the public to report local environmental problems
 - deal with 'grot spots'
 - remove abandoned vehicles within 24 hours
 - win a 'Green Flag' award for at least one park
 - educate and enforce to protect the environment

Communications -

- manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council
- provide an A-Z guide to council services
- publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents
- ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services
- communicate well with staff so they become advocates for the council

^{vii} **Kent Youth County Council elections** - Each year there are 10 formal sittings of KYCC. There are seats available for 48 young people - four from each of the 12 local district or borough councils within the Kent County Council area. Candidates may stand for election in either the district or borough where they live or the one in which they go to school, college or work. Members are elected for one year with the option of continuing for a second year to support newly elected members.

In the 2006 elections there were 57 candidates, 120 polling stations, and 28593 votes cast. In 2007, there were 74 candidates, 132 polling stations and 30241 votes cast. The 48 new KYCC Members were announced on 1st December 2007. they will be joining the young people who were elected last year and who have chosen to serve a second year in office. (<http://kent.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/democracy-and-elections/kycc/>)

^{viii} **British Citizenship** - one of 6 different types of nationality in the UK, some of these were defined in the British Nationality Act 1981, which came into force on 1 January 1983, changing the laws that define how citizenship can be obtained. Only British citizens have an automatic right to live and work in the United Kingdom and to apply for a British passport. Those with other forms of British nationality must obtain permission to live and work here. (Source <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship>)

The Cost (fees payable) of applying to be a British Citizen depends on the type of application. It was noted that fees are prescribed in law and only part may be refundable if applications are unsuccessful or withdrawn, except for declarations of renunciation. For example the Costs for Naturalisation as a British citizen (form AN) is

£655* for a Single applicant:

£735* for a joint application (husband and wife or civil partners who live together applying at the same time)

*The sum of £80 per applicant will be refunded if the application is unsuccessful or withdrawn and you are not invited to a citizenship ceremony.

Source: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/applying/cost/>

^{ix} The **Citizenship Ceremony Pack** contains information on

- the Lieutenancy of Kent – history, role, facts;
- sheet on where to find Job and work experience opportunities in KCC
- Issue of Explore Kent
- Citizenship ceremony customer survey
- Border and Immigration Agency – message from Home Secretary
- British Citizenship – some information for British nationals (dual nationality, right of abode
- Invitation to apply for a British passport and application form