

To: Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities

Date: 11th January 2011

Subject: The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This report updates members on activity relating to the “*Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading – Involving the Whole Community*” and seeks their comments on, and suggestions for, the content of a strategy document which will encapsulate the approach.

FOR CONSULTATION

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. In March 2009 the Communities Policy Overview Committee confirmed its support for the development of a Literacy and Reading Strategy which would be a legacy of National Year of Reading 2008. Members recognised the significant contribution of Communities services to the literacy agenda and stressed that there should be an emphasis on engagement with young people.

1.2 In January 2010 the Committee was updated on the continuing momentum of work in this area and it was reiterated that the Kent Approach was 2-pronged including a focus on the development of functional skills, including writing, as well as the development of an enjoyment of reading as a life skill. Members highlighted the importance of literacy to support community safety, the need to develop literacy skills at Key Stage 2, and the needs of adults and children with dyslexia.

1.3 Colleagues in CFE are playing an active and valued role as partners on the project and the need for a *Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading* has been endorsed by Cabinet, Chief Officers Group (now Corporate Management Team) and the Kent Partnership. This report now invites members’ views on the draft text (at Appendix One) for a document which will encapsulate the approach and which can be used as a focus for communication during 2011. Suggestions for design and presentation will also be welcomed.

2. AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE “KENT APPROACH”

2.1 The ultimate twin goals of the strategy are to improve standards of literacy and to engender a love of reading. In working towards this an important contribution will be made to the three ambitions of *Bold Steps for Kent* i.e. to grow the economy; to tackle disadvantage and to put people in control.

2.3 The intention is to establish and consolidate a simple and sustainable approach to achieve the aspiration of 100% literacy by raising awareness of literacy needs; by promoting the benefits of reading and by raising awareness of the excellent good practice that already exists. In so doing Kent County Council and a growing number of partners will aim to promote a culture where everyone aspires to read and also to provide excellent signposting to skills development opportunities, services and support.

3. PROGRESS

3.1. A Strategic Manager in Libraries and Archives, is managing the project and reports to a KCC Project Board chaired by the Director for Communities Cultural Services. Board Members include the Executive Director of the Kent Economic Board, CFE's Senior Adviser Teaching and Learning/Curriculum, KASS Area Management Team Support Manager West Kent, Community Learning and Skills' Head of Learning and the Head of Libraries and Archives

3.2 An Implementation Group has informed, supported and championed the development of the project. The Group includes managers from across KCC including Communities (Community Learning and Skills, Libraries and Archives, the Youth Offending Service and Youth Service); CFE (Alternative Provision, Early Years, Minority Ethnic and Bilingual Service, Parenting, Reading Recovery and Study Support); KASS (Valuing People), and CED (Innovations, Business Solutions and Policy). It also includes a growing number of external partners including Aim Higher (a partnership of Kent's universities and the Open University, 7 FE colleges and around 60 schools), Amicus Horizon Housing Association, Canterbury Christchurch University, Connexions, the Employment and Skills Board, Jobcentre Plus, Kent Association of Training Organisations, Maidstone District Council, the Probation Service, Volunteer Reading Help and West Kent NHS.

3.3 Partners have identified 15 priority audiences. These are:

- Early years children and their families
- Children at Key Stage 2 transition and their families
- Looked After Children
- Deaf children
- Men and boys
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- Children and young people excluded from school
- Gypsy Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage
- Families whose first language is not English (ESOL)
- Adults with literacy skills below Level 2
- People who are out of work or on working age benefits
- Health patients in particular people with mental health issues
- Adults with learning disabilities
- People on probation or at risk of offending including young offenders
- People living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage

3.4 The project has attracted national recognition and endorsement including the opportunity to engage with 2 national pilots led by the National Literacy Trust on behalf of the Department for Education. *Partners in Literacy* aims to increase reading in the home during a child's early years. *Words for Work* has engaged local businesses to support communication skills development in 9 secondary schools through a mentoring scheme.

Director of CFE, Rosalind Turner, addressed the National Literacy Trust's Partners in Literacy Conference in December. A range of good practice in Kent is showcased on the National Literacy Trust's Wikireadia at [www.wikireadia.org.uk/index.php?title=Main Page](http://www.wikireadia.org.uk/index.php?title=Main_Page)

3.5 Presentations have been given to a range of organisations including the Kent Community Development Managers Group, Kent Housing Officers Group and Kent Public Health Board all of whom have endorsed the approach being taken.

3.6 Pilot projects have also been identified to inform the on-going development and roll out of activity and these include:

- Amicus Horizon partnership to target families in Swale
- KCC Employee volunteering to support Literacy
- Libraries and Archives' Summer Reading Challenge targeted at Reading Recovery schools.
- Rapid English partnership including work led by Connexions to target NEETs in Kent Thameside
- Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) to support reading in schools
- Youth Offending Service Literacy and Numeracy scheme to raise the attainment of high-end offenders

3.7 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. The project will promote positive images of reading and of our target audiences and we will seek to benefit and involve everyone who lives or works in Kent, regardless of first language, ability, gender, age, race, religious belief, gender identity or sexual orientation.

4. NEXT STEPS

4.1 Working with the Implementation Group, the Project Manager will:

- develop pages on kent.gov.uk to host *Involving the Whole Community* and act as the vital signpost that is required to ensure everyone is aware of the help and support that is available through Children's Centres, Schools, Skills Plus Centres and Libraries.
- harness the use of social media and other new opportunities to engage partners, volunteers and target audiences
- involve local media in a high profile literacy and reading promotional campaign
- establish a Kent Literacy and Reading Partnership Forum to continue the dialogue and take a shared approach to ensure the long-term success of the project
- identify Kent Reading and Literacy Champions; people who live in the county or have strong associations with Kent including celebrities, sports stars and people from all walks of life, including KCC Members, to act as ambassadors for literacy and reading across the county and in their communities.
- identify ways to address the skills needs required to deliver the programme of activity including use of Plain English, storytelling and skills needed to engage a wide range of audiences from early years to adults with learning disabilities.
- plan a high profile programme of promotional activity during 2011 including a series of roadshows across Kent's Districts. Other opportunities will be taken to engage our target audiences including the business community at Kent 2020 in April and the Early Years Conference in the autumn.
- continue to link literacy and reading to Kent's highest priorities including engagement with the new Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), with the Health

Service requirement to *'provide access to alternative therapies for psychological disorders'* and with the Community Safety priority to reduce re-offending.

- establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the success of the initiative including social and learning outcomes.

5. RESOURCING

5.1 Literacy is even more vital during an economic downturn and the aims of the Kent Approach can be achieved through directing and prioritising existing services. Most importantly the human resources also exist; not only teachers, tutors and librarians but also the people of Kent who love to read and the organisations which work with our target audiences including Volunteer Reading Help, the Probation Service, Health Service and the District Councils. Our partners bring a range of skills and access to other resources as well as energy, enthusiasm and new ideas. Maximising access to, and synergy between, these resources will be critical to success.

5.2 Existing forums and events will be used wherever possible to engage audiences and ensure sustainability. The Kent Approach will also link to existing initiatives where appropriate e.g. Early Reading Connects, Reading is Fundamental and Every Child a Talker.

5.3 Additional investment has already been attracted including funding from:

- Department for Education/National Literacy Trust for Partners in Literacy
- Department for Education Innovation Fund to support work in Swale and Thanet
- AimHigher to initiate Local Legends storytelling initiative
- AmicusHorizon to reach families in Swale
- YMCA to support work with NEETs in Kent Thameside

5.4 We will continue to pursue other investment opportunities including sponsorship for high profile promotional events and seedcorn funding to test different approaches to engage our audiences and attract new partners. We will welcome offers of funding in particular to help kick-start projects in local communities or countywide.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Members are asked to:

(i) NOTE this report and COMMENT on the draft text in the document attached at Appendix One.

(ii) ADVISE on ways in which KCC elected Members might act as champions for literacy and reading in their local communities

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