

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

From: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste
Mike Austerberry, Corporate Director of Enterprise and Environment

Date: 27 September 2011

Subject: Connecting with Communities – 2010/11 Annual Report on Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Activity in Environment Highways and Waste.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to update POSC Members on the activities that took place between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011 to consult, engage and involve all those who are interested in or involved with our services.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the main aspects of consultation, engagement and involvement within KCC during the financial year 2010/2011. It also informs Members on both existing and future work and highlights the changes the Council intends to make to further embed and extend engagement processes.

1.2 Whenever KCC makes a decision about improving or changing its services, it needs to be confident the decision is properly informed by public opinion. The reduction in budget allocation for public services means that it is likely that all residents will be impacted upon in some shape or form. At this time, more so than any in the recent past, it is important that the public has the opportunity to have a say about the services they receive. Public opinion should be viewed as an important tool for Councillors - the local decision makers - in making difficult decisions about where and how to reduce or redesign services.

2 KNOWN INFORMATION

2.1 It is important that we target our information and use our resources in the most cost efficient way. KCC has used customer insight to ensure that we provide information in a way that suits people best.

2.2 This area of work is driven by the information and data we hold about residents of Kent, including the feedback we get from customer comments and complaints. KCC also makes use of a number of data and information sources including 'MOSAIC' to provide insight into the background and lifestyles of residents across the whole of Kent.

2.3 Getting an insight into how customers are interacting with KCC, what they want and who they are is crucial to improving access to services. This insight can help KCC to predict what people will want and need in future. We can also find out who is or isn't interacting with the Council as well as over/under provision and over/under utilisation.

2.4 The Research and Intelligence Unit has corporate responsibility for all of the research and data areas outlined below:

- Demography
- Deprivation
- Economy and the labour market
- Land use:
 - Commercial
 - Housing
- Retail and town centres
- Customer Insight (MOSAIC).

2.5 The Unit collects, collates, processes, analyses and maps data for a wide range of projects across the whole of Kent County Council and beyond. All of the latest data and publications on these topics can be found on the Research and Intelligence website www.kent.gov.uk/research

2.6 This information is used before we go out to consult with the public. The knowledge gained through consultation is then fed back across KCC.

3 THE WAYS IN WHICH WE'VE INVOLVED LOCAL PEOPLE IN 2010/11

3.1 There are a number of different opportunities for residents, service users and other interested groups to influence decision-making and service delivery across all our functions. The main objectives for these consultation and involvement activities are:

- To find out what customers think about the services they have received or want to receive

- To find out what particular groups or audiences think about a given theme
- To find out what interested or affected people think about a particular proposal, policy or plan
- To include groups of interested or affected people in a decision-making or policy-making process
- To include groups of interested or affected people in service design and delivery, in order to improve those services
- To include groups of interested or affected people in the assessment or evaluation of services
- To involve residents in the recommendations of member community grants.

3.2 There is also a variety of methods and tools that are used to meet these objectives, as shown below:-

Satisfaction Surveys: As well as measuring satisfaction levels and monitoring them over time, surveys often include other questions which enable the services to act on the information provided to fix problems or take opportunities. The surveys are usually carried out using questionnaires (paper, email or online) or are done over the phone. They target service users and tend to be carried out by units with high levels of frontline customer contact.

Forums, groups and panels: The purpose of this sort of activity is to examine issues in greater depth and begin to explore solutions to problems or to identify new opportunities. They are 'qualitative' methods and the forums, groups and panels we run are generally groups which meet regularly to talk about a particular service. They typically involve around 5 to 15 people per group, and may be organised around a particular service, location or issue.

Participative events and processes: The main purpose of this sort of activity is to exchange views, opinions and ideas, and often making decisions together.

Market research: Main purpose of this sort of activity tends to be to generate actionable information about people, communities and groups who are, or who could be, using a service which we provide. We use it to identify opportunities for developing certain areas of our businesses.

Participatory Budget events (You Decide): The main aims have been to engage a wide section of the local community in the grant Decision-making process.

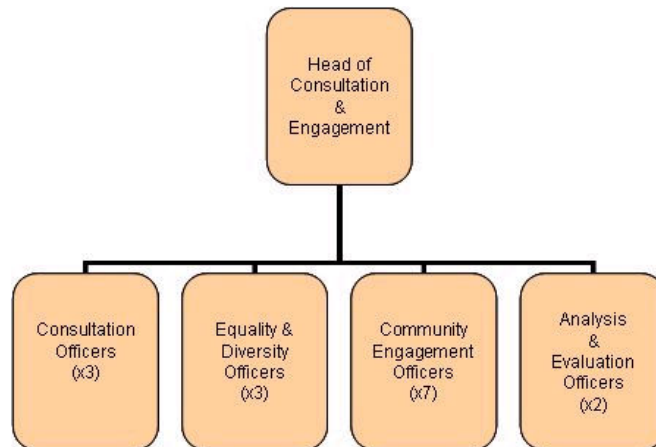
4 WHAT WE HAVE DONE

4.1 Detail of the consultation, engagement and involvement work carried out during 2010/2011 by Environment Highways and Waste Directorate is presented in Appendix 1.

5 RESTRUCTURE

The current team of Community Engagement Managers transferred into the Customer and Communities directorate in April this year, and as part of KCC's need to make substantial savings over the next three years, the division in which they are a part (Communications and Engagement) has undergone a restructure.

As officers are appointed to new roles within the restructure, the Consultation and Engagement team will be structured as follows:



The new team will have fifteen officers with different specialist areas all working much more seamlessly to support Consultation and Engagement.

5.1 Though good progress has been made there is still scope for further improvement and consistency in consultation and engagement practice across the Council. From September 2011 the consultation and engagement team will ensure:

- KCC does not target the same audience segment by age/interest/geography at the same time with two different consultations
- All questions asked are constructed in an appropriate and unambiguous method to ensure answers that are relevant to the topic and to an agreed accuracy
- A log of all consultations is kept so that there is visibility of the contact being made by KCC with its customers – and its impact.

5.2 The corporate responsibilities are for setting and supporting coherent standards, giving advice, challenging the business need and creating the opportunity for working with partners to share costs and findings.

5.3 We still need to make it even easier for local people to have their say and we also need to use their views and suggestions more effectively and - crucially - ensure we publicise what difference those views made when a final decision was taken. We will continue to explore how digital technologies could

be better deployed to make engagement work cheaper, quicker, more responsive, more relevant and more convenient for residents and businesses.

5.4 Participatory Budgeting (PB) events are a useful tool for engaging with communities where residents see that they can have an impact on the decisions to be made. The grant allocation process was a helpful starting point and PB has shown it has the potential to be a valuable tool across a wider range of discretionary service decisions.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The examples in Appendix 1 indicate the extent to which Environment Highways and Waste Directorate is using information from service users and other interested groups to influence its decision making. This is in keeping with the statutory **duty to involve** (even though the Coalition Government has indicated this is due to be repealed, the same duty will remain but become non-statutory), the Equality Act 2010 and with the culture being fostered across the Authority.

6.2 Twin pressures are influencing our consultation, engagement and involvement work. Firstly there is pressure to improve the quality of the work we do, which arises from problems that other authorities have had when they have been judged to have acted incorrectly or inappropriately. This pressure concerns what we consult about, when we consult and how much detail we use to inform the consultation process and the ultimate decision making.

6.3 The second pressure arises from our budget position and the need to reduce significantly the overall amount of our resource committed to consultation, engagement and involvement.

6.4 Because some consultation work, for instance, must be done and must be done to a particular standard and timescale, the outlook for the future can be summarised as **doing less work overall but doing the work we do better and more efficiently and effectively.**

6.5 This work will continue during 2011-12 and three particular priorities will be:

- Undertaking a rigorous and mandatory assessment of all consultation, engagement and involvement proposals at a very early stage, in order to identify those projects that are not a priority and will not be pursued and also those that are a priority and don't just need to be done but need to be done in a demonstrably exemplary manner.
- Exploring how digital technologies could be better deployed, to make engagement work cheaper, quicker, more responsive, more relevant and more convenient for residents and businesses.
- Using every opportunity to keep down the costs of consultation exercises; minimise duplication and to make best use of the analysis and information that is collected.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the contents of this report and **COMMENT** on the priorities identified in section 6 above.

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Appendix 1

Environment Highways and Waste Directorate 2010/11

This report summarises the consultation, engagement and involvement activities of the Environment Highways and Waste directorate for the year to March 2011. On the 1st April 2011, some services were moved to the Customer and Communities Directorate, and other services were brought in to become part of the new Environment and Economy Directorate.

For the purpose of this report, activities by the following services are addressed:

- Kent Highway Services
- Environment and Waste
- Integrated Strategy and Planning

Some of the services are universal, such as the disposal of the county's household waste, and also the maintenance of Kent's network of over 5,000 miles of roads by Kent Highway Services. EHW delivers more specialist services, such as heritage conservation, and until 1st April, managed services such as KCC's 12 Country Parks, and the Countryside Access Service.

Kent County Council's Sustainability and Climate Change team operates from within EHW (now Enterprise and Environment), and has a KCC-wide remit.

1.1 Statutory consultation

Some teams in EHW carry out statutory functions, such as managing the county's 'Definitive Map' and the strategic planning function, working with stakeholders to produce strategies for the county such as the Local Transport Plan and the Minerals and Waste Development Framework. The Planning Applications team are responsible for managing the formal planning approvals process for major developments (such as waste and mineral sites) and KCC's own community developments such as new schools or highway schemes.

Consultations on these issues are communicated to interested stakeholders using a range of different media, and advertised on the council's consultation portal on the main website, (www.kent.gov.uk/consultations).

- **Minerals and Waste Development Framework (MWDF)** As Kent's Minerals and Waste Planning Authority, KCC is responsible for managing the development of the Minerals and Waste Framework for the county. The stages in the development of the MWDF are outlined in legislation.

The consultation on the first phase to develop the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy took place from 24th September to 19th November 2010.

Issues and possible options for consideration were set out, asking for feedback from a wide range of stakeholders.

The consultation on the second phase took place from 31st May to 9th August 2011. The consultation period was extended by two weeks due to the scale of interest from the public, to ensure everyone had a chance to respond.

- **Local Transport Plan 3 - consultation.** In April 2011, the county council adopted its third Local Transport Plan (LTP), which covers the period from 2011 to 2016. The consultation on the draft LTP took place between 30th September and 31st December 2010. The Plan will help deliver the regeneration of Kent as outlined in our 20-year transport delivery plan, entitled '*Growth Without Gridlock*'.
- **Planning Applications:** Kent County Council deals with applications relating to the county council's own developments, waste developments and minerals developments. All Planning Applications considered by the Planning Committee are subject to formal public consultation prior to decision.

At intervals, all Planning Authorities are required to update and revise their local validation documents relating to the information needed to accompany planning applications. From 18th October to 13th December 2010, there was a public consultation on KCC's draft new validation documents, and the final version was published on March 31st 2011.

- **Changes to the Definitive Map of Kent's Public Rights of Way (PRoW).** The Definitive Map is the legal record describing the position and status of every public right of way in Kent. KCC is responsible for the statutory process to change Definitive Map. Proposals to add, remove or divert a public right of way must be advertised to allow the public to comment or challenge. When confirmed, the information is supplied to Ordnance Survey, who use it to show public rights of way on their maps.

1.2 Surveys and engagement to improve customer service or manage performance

Customer feedback is essential to provide information to help us improve our services. This applies not only to directly delivered services such as the Country Parks, but also to services that are provided under procured contracts, such as the management of our Household Waste Recycling Centres.

- **Customer comment cards at Country Parks:** Comments on catering at Shorne Woods have resulted in a review of the café layout and a new system for service is in place. Comments on retail have resulted in a review of retail policy. The Country Parks Annual Report now

includes a section on how information gathered from visitor feedback has been used to improve the service.

- **Household Waste Recycling Centres** – onsite surveys and online feedback survey on www.kent.gov.uk These are used to monitor customer satisfaction with the Household Waste Recycling Centres, and are essential to enable the monitoring of contractors' performance.

- **The Highways Tracker Survey** During November and December 2010 the annual Kent Highway Services Tracker Survey was carried out amongst a sample of Kent residents, county members, district members, parish and town councils. The survey concerns satisfaction with the condition of roads, pavements and street lighting, issues relating to feelings of safety and perceptions of congestion. The final report is available on the council's website at:
<https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/roads-and-transport/road-policies/KHS%20Tracker%20Survey%202010.pdf>
Comparative data provided year-on-year by the Tracker survey is extremely helpful in evaluating KHS' performance over time. In order to secure this for the future, more cost effective ways of carrying out this work are actively being sought.

- **Contact Centre Call-back survey for Kent Highway Services.** This is a monthly 'temperature-check' to obtain customer feedback on requests for service from the highway-using public. Contact Centre agents call back 100 customers from those who have logged requests for service in proportion to the volume of calls received. Therefore, if 25% of calls relate to street-lighting, 25% of the calls are made to customers who have logged street-lighting requests. The summary is reported in the core monitoring report to Cabinet. It is discussed at the monthly balanced scorecard meeting with the Director and reported each month to Team-leaders. Action is then taken to address any issues.

- **Explore Kent engagement activity with walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.** As part of the Countryside Access service, Explore Kent provides information for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders in Kent. Development of the Explore Kent guided walks website is part-funded by the Eastern and Coastal Primary Care Trust, with the objective of delivering improved health outcomes by engaging with target communities in the east of Kent.

Explore Kent promotes a healthy lifestyle with information about walking routes, guided walks, and events such as the annual Walking Festival. Interactive engagement with walkers, cyclists and riders is carried out online, using social media and feedback from events via the online contact form.

1.3 Participative groups and events

Our engagement with user panels and community representative groups demonstrates our commitment to enabling public participation in the development of policy and to obtaining specialist user advice on improving services.

- **The Kent Reference Panel (KRP)** The KRP is a two-way communication between KHS and representatives from key access groups across the county. The panel helps to inform policy development and provide invaluable advice on projects and strategies, and cascades information to local Access Groups in the county. Our engagement with the panel demonstrates our commitment to work with the local community and involve disabled people in improving accessibility to the highways network.
- **The Kent and Medway Gypsy and Traveller Forum.** Meetings are held with Gypsies and Travellers to discuss important issues. Meetings are held four to six monthly at various venues across Kent.
- **Countryside Access Volunteer Warden scheme.** KCC manages Kent's 4,200 miles (6,700km) of public footpaths, bridleways and byways providing free access to the county's countryside and coast. Volunteer Countryside Access Wardens help keep these valuable routes open and easy to use. The volunteers help by cutting back vegetation, fixing path signs and being the 'eyes on the ground' for their community by reporting back any bigger problems. There are over 240 trained wardens in Kent.

1.4 Consultations to help us improve our strategies or policies

Added weight and authority can be given to the development of strategies and policies by consulting with stakeholders and partners to obtain their views and input. By this means, buy-in can be achieved from a broad range of interested parties, strengthening the final document.

- **'Growing the Garden of England: a strategy for environment and economy in Kent for the next 20 years,** was revised through consultation with an extensive set of partners during the summer and autumn of 2010. The strategy was launched in July 2011. It supports the revised Vision for Kent, to deliver social, economic and environmental wellbeing for Kent. It sets out how we will achieve a high-quality Kent environment, low carbon, resilient to climate change and that has a thriving 'green economy' at its heart.
- **Rail Action Plan for Kent** Following extensive public engagement and consultation, the final version of the Rail Action Plan for Kent

informs KCC's submission to the Department for Transport (DfT) for the awarding of the contract for the delivery of the Integrated Kent Franchise (IKF) from 2014 onwards. (See case study at the end of this appendix).

- **Consultation on a Standard Palette of (construction) Materials for use in Public Realm Schemes.** This consultation was carried out with development partners to identify fit-for-purpose materials for use in the public realm that offer opportunities to deliver viable, good quality, safe and readily maintainable schemes that respect local context. It took place in January and February 2011.

Shaping strategy and policy

The Rail Action Plan for Kent

The Rail Action Plan for Kent is a 15-point plan that was developed after extensive consultation with local rail and commuter groups, MPs and Kent's Parish, District and County Councils. It aims to shape the next Kent rail franchise from 2014.

The plan took shape through two rail summit events involving a wide range of stakeholders. The draft plan was made available for public consultation from 1st December 2010 to 28th February 2011. The draft plan was revised and presented to the Transport Minister, Theresa Villiers at a meeting in Westminster by Leader of Kent County Council, Paul Carter and KCC Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste, Bryan Sweetland.



The main recommendations are:

- High Speed services all day to Deal & Sandwich
- Reduced journey times along the North Kent line from the East Kent coast via Medway to Victoria & Cannon Street
- New City service all day on Maidstone East line to Blackfriars (Thameslink from 2018), to reinstate City connections from Maidstone and West Mailing
- Retain Cannon Street for Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells
- New direct service to Gatwick Airport

Leader of Kent County Council Paul Carter said:

“The Rail Action Plan is about standing up for Kent's rail users and making sure we get the service we want.

“In bringing together the views of rail travellers and local communities across Kent, our Rail Action Plan is a unique and persuasive contribution to the Department for Transport as it begins to shape the next Kent Rail Franchise.”