

**By:** Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities  
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**To:** Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 28 September 2011

**Subject:** **Connecting with Communities – 2010/11 Annual Report on Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Activity.**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to update Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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**

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**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.

(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.

**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) 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.

(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.

(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).

(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](http://www.kent.gov.uk/research)

(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.

## **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 involve residents in the recommendations of member community grants.
- 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

(2) There are 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.

## WHAT WE HAVE DONE

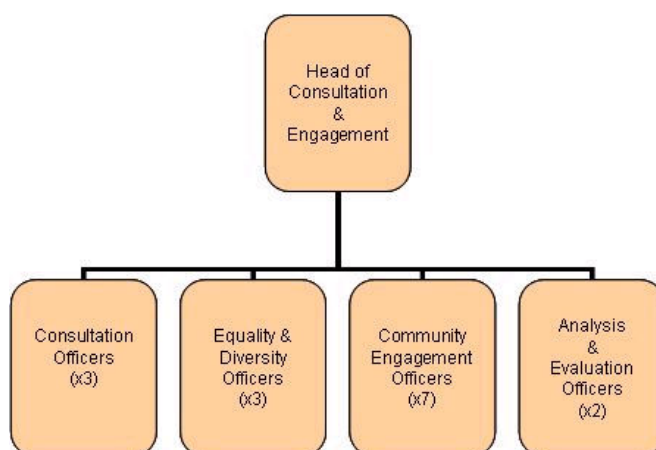
4. (1) Detail of the consultation, engagement and involvement work carried out during 2010/2011 by Children's Specialist Services is presented in the Appendix 1

## OUR PLANS FOR A NEW WAY OF WORKING

5. (1) The current team of Community Engagement Managers transferred into the 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 part of (Communications and Engagement) has been undergoing a restructure.

(2) As Officers are appointed to new roles within the restructure, the Consultation and Engagement team will be working in a different way, and will be structured as follows:



(3) Although we no longer have twelve Community Engagement Managers, the new team will have fifteen officers with different specialist areas all working much more seamlessly to support Consultation and Engagement.

(4) 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 there will be a central resource to 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) 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.

(6) 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.



## CONCLUSIONS

6. (1) The examples in Appendix 1 indicate the extent to which Specialist Children's Services 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.

(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.

(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.

(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.**

(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.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Members of the Specialist Children's Services 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 SPECIALIST CHILDRENS SERVICES*

### **1. Strategic Context**

The U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 12 states “Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for these views to be taken seriously.”

The Local Government and Public Health Act 2007, which came into force on 1 April 2009, and the “Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities” Statutory Guidance places a duty on Local Authorities to involve local people in planning and decision making.

Ofsted inspection frameworks, both at an establishment (e.g. school or Children’s Centre) level and at Authority level, include a focus on consultation and participation of children, young people and their families at all levels. This includes the requirement to ensure that the voice of those from more vulnerable groups is actively sought, heard and acted upon.

National policy has required that the views of children and young people are heard and acted upon. In this context participation is about not simply taking part or being present but rather having some influence over the decisions and actions affecting them. Participation can be seen at a personal level with children and young people able to influence decisions that affect them as individuals. It can also be considered in the broader context with children and young people as a group.

### **2. Local Context**

Specialist Children’s Services has a range of opportunities for children, young people and their families to inform and actively participate in the planning and review of a wide range of services and to influence planning in their local communities.

The views and experiences of children and young people are embedded in our performance frameworks and we actively use what they tell us as part of performance management, at a strategic, service and locality level.

All Kent Schools have school councils and many are developing opportunities for parents to become more actively involved in the education and wellbeing of their children and the management and strategic focus of the school.

We have commissioned Kent Children’s Fund Network to train practitioners in meaningful participation practice. In 2010/11 they will be developing shadow boards of children and young people to work alongside and inform each of the 12 Local Children’s Trust Boards. As part of the recent review of Commissioned Services, we have ended our contract with Kent Children’s Fund Network to deliver the Participate by Right! project. We are in the process of managing the decommissioning process. Our contract finishes on

30<sup>th</sup> September and we are celebrating the success of the project with a special morning event to be held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011

### **3. Activity this year**

We have adopted a range of opportunities for children, young people and their families to inform and actively participate in the planning and review of services, including universal, targeted and specialist safeguarding services.

**3.1** Some of the key activities which demonstrate the way in which young people are involved in decisions and planning at a strategic level are:

#### **Parent Participation Strategy – Disabled Children**

Lead Officer: Rose Dillon

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The Parent Participation Strategy has been written under the Short Breaks Pathfinder Programme and relates to the participation of parents in service planning and decision making processes for all aspects of the ***Aiming High*** core offer. Feedback has influenced wording and the PP Strategy has been re-issued, but will need to be updated from spring 2011 when the Kent Parent Participation Network (KPPN) becomes fully operational.

#### **Culturally Competent Care**

Lead Officer: Sue Clifton, Operations Manager Catch 22 16plus

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This is an opportunity for young people to feed back to practitioners and take part in training workers around cultural diversity, using a service user representative group from the Catch 22 service.

#### **Young People's Advisory Group**

Lead Officer: Sue Clifton, Operations Manager Catch 22 16plus

Telephone: 07775998178

e-mail: [sue.clifton@kent.gov.uk](mailto:sue.clifton@kent.gov.uk)

A group of looked after children, young people and care leavers meet monthly to discuss issues which they face and to make recommendations. Topics have included accommodation, education and finance. The meetings are minuted and information is shared with the Children in Care Council (CICC).

### **Kent Primary School Children's Council (KPSCC)**

Lead Officer: Emma Jenkins, Study Support Co-ordinator, ELS

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The KPSCC is attended by 69 Year 5 and 6 pupils twice a year and is chaired by the Kent Youth County Council. It is linked back to the School Council in each District and debates topics chosen by the children. Topics have included children's rights and environmental issues. Information provide improves study support and out of hours opportunities for children via Extended Services. The next meeting welcomes a new cohort of children and the children will be discussing the theme of 'Happiness' and their aspirations for their future. Date of the next meeting is 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

### **Kent Children's Trust Board panels of children, young people and parents:**

Panels of young people and parents have been established to act as reference groups for the work of the Kent Children's Trust Board and its Executive group. The panels give a view on key issues being considered by the Trust and act as a sounding board for the Trust. In addition the panels will also have an opportunity to raise their concerns and issues with the Children's Trust.

The Panels have been consulted on specific issues such as experiences of childhood in Kent, safety and access to services which has fed into the development of priorities of new Children's and Young People's Plan and the improvement of services through Kent Children's Trust Activity.

In March 2010 Kent Children's Trust took the decision to decommission the company, BMG, that was delivering the reference panels on KCC's behalf. It was felt that there were more cost-efficient ways to gather views on key issues. This work has been taken forward by the work of **Participate by Right!** who have worked in three pilot areas to develop mechanisms for children and young people to have their say on local issues.

## **Disabled Children's Council**

Lead Officer: Victoria Clarke, Participation Officer, ELS SEN&R

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A disabled children's council has been established in order to ensure that young people with disabilities are not marginalised and are able to participate in the decisions that affect the services they need and to influence the broader policy. This will also equip them with key skills to fully participate in civic society as they grow into adulthood. The first meeting of Disabled Children's Council took place 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010 at Rare Breeds Centre, Ashford. Children were able to have their say on the development of the Early Intervention & Prevention Strategy, be part of the consultation on the Special Education Needs Green Paper, vote electronically on the future of the Disabled Children's Council, produce a newspaper of the day and have fun. The meeting was a success with children voting to meet again in smaller groups at three venues across Kent to discuss issues important to them.

The Participation Working Group has continued to support the Kent Children's Trust with skills and expertise of a range of multi-agency partners on participation and engagement of children and young people. Partners include representatives from Kent Youth Service, CAMHS, Connexions, Voluntary & Community Sector, Kent Parent Partnership Service and Extended Services. The dedicated support from KCC to administer this group has been withdrawn as part of decommissioning of the ***Participate by Right!*** contract.

## **Young Inspectors project**

Lead Officer: Victoria Clarke, Participation Officer, ELS SEN&R jointly with Claire Traynor of Kent Youth service

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This is a joint project whose aim is to recruit and train disabled young people to inspect services. The young people chose the services they think should be inspected and get involved in drawing up the inspection checklist, visiting the service and writing up the report after their visit.

### **3.2 Additional survey activity:**

Name: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment parents survey

Lead Officer: Tony Alderton, Researcher for Early Years & Childcare

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Research on parental demand for childcare was partly undertaken by means of a large scale survey and this involved 1250 households responding (out of 6,253 calls) to a telephone survey in October 2010.

Name: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment annual providers' survey

Lead Officer: Tony Alderton, Researcher for Early years & Childcare

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Research on the supply side for the Childcare Assessment 2011 was undertaken in the form of a survey of childcare providers in September 2010.

Name: Children & Young People's secondary transfer survey

Lead Officer: Victoria Clarke, Participation Officer, ELS SEN&R

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13 children from 4 randomly selected mainstream schools were interviewed in 2010 about their experience of secondary transfer.

Name: Children & Young People's statutory assessment survey

Lead Officer: Victoria Clarke, Participation Officer, ELS SEN&R

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15 children and young people were interviewed in 2010 about their experience of the statutory assessment process and also their feedback on an information booklet that had been produced as a result of research the previous year.

Name: Parents' and Carers' statutory assessment survey

Lead Officer: Victoria Clarke, Participation Officer, ELS SEN&R

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69 parents completed the survey between July 2009 and July 2010 giving their views and experiences of the statutory assessment process. In addition 33 parents completed a survey on their views and experiences of the referral process for statutory assessment.

Name: Kent Educational Psychology Service parental satisfaction survey August 2010

Lead Officer: Andrew Heather, Principal Educational Psychologist, ELS

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Service Enquiry Forms were sent to a random selection of 145 parents who had previous involvement with an educational Psychologist, asking for their views and experiences. Some 90% of respondents agreed that the psychologist's involvement had been positive. Information received from respondents is generally used to review and modify practice.

A letter was sent to all recipients of the Service Enquiry Forms with the results of the evaluation and the findings from the survey are contained in the EP service Operation Plan which is available on the website.

Name: Family Group Conferencing feedback questionnaires

Lead Officer: Dawn Walsh, County Manager, Family Group

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Three families per team were randomly selected as soon as possible after the Family Group Conference to carry out a telephone interview of the key family members' experiences and the success of their FGC – resulting in an average score of 7 on a scale of 1 to 10.