

To: County Council - 6 September 2007

By: Assistant to Chief Executive

Subject: Informal Member Group "Going Local" - Concluding Report to County Council and Cabinet September 2007

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: The report:

- (i) Provides outcomes from the work of the Informal Member Group on the Localism Agenda both in Kent and nationally, reaches conclusions and makes recommendations and suggestions for future actions;
- (ii) Places before County Council Members recommendations for future direction, with particular reference to the Kent Commitment, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, the Lyons Review and Member Roles, so that Members' comments can inform future consideration by Cabinet and Chief Officers;
- (iii) Suggests innovative and flexible use of modern technology including websites and Kent TV to influence and improve future engagement with public service users throughout Kent.

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY MEMBERS SO THAT THEIR VIEWS CAN BE APPENDED WITHIN THE INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP'S REPORT TO CABINET.**

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#### **Section A: Introduction and Background**

1. This report on "Going Local" represents the conclusion of detailed work which commenced in March 2006 following the appointment of the Informal Group (IMG) by the Leader of the County Council, Mr Paul Carter.

2. The Leader gave the IMG the following Terms of Reference:

*"To make recommendations to the County Council on*

- (a) functions which could be undertaken by a Local Democratic Structure; and*
- (b) the impact of the Government Agenda on Localism for current democratic structures "*

3. The extensive work to date has been summarised in a number of interim reports to County Council (25 May 2006) and Cabinet (September 2006). The work has examined in detail aspects of KCC's strategies, policies and service operations, all of which currently have an impact at local level. It has also looked in depth at the existing Local Boards framework and the emerging Joint Local Board Pilots and Neighbourhood Forums in Dover. The IMG has also examined the role and functions of the Kent Partnership, Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, with particular emphasis on Member roles.

4. The IMG has also examined a framework under which functions and some local decision-making could be delegated to local level. A risk analysis was also carried out in parallel with that framework.

5. Customer access to Members and Member roles were also examined, particularly the effect of the development of Gateways via a roll-out programme across Kent.

6. In parallel with the work of the IMG there have been, and still are, significant developments in terms of policy direction and drivers at both local and national level. Collectively, these are:

- (1) the Local Government White Paper and the subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill
- (2) the Lyons Review and Place-Shaping
- (3) the "Kent Commitment" agreed in January 2007 to improve Two-tier Working between KCC and District Councils
- (4) the Local Agreement and District Chapters
- (5) Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2008 and future Corporate Area Assessment
- (6) the mixed performance of some current Local Boards, CDRPs and LSPs
- (7) the public's wish to be involved in local service planning and delivery and to see outcomes from their input

7. The report considers the way forward for Localism in Kent within this context, and especially those factors which could influence future community engagement strategies. In particular the report addresses the changing role of Members, and the use of new technology and multi-agency centres as well as more traditional styles of engagement to facilitate appropriate and effective two-way communication with the public on local service policies, priorities and performance.

8. The report also looks at how, on behalf of local communities, there could be service performance review and positive scrutiny of locally delivered services by joint authority bodies led by Members.

9. Many services are already highly devolved in terms of local delivery, but Members of the IMG believe there is a strong case for further local delegation in defined service areas and within a clear framework. The arguments for this case were made in 2006 and should be taken further. With any scheme of delegation there would need to be an appropriate framework for risk management and governance.

## **SECTION B**

### **1. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP**

- 1. KCC has built substantial capacity in Localism since 2004 in terms of networks, awareness, trust and capability to work at local level with tangible outcomes; it now needs to develop local networks further in order to maximise potential.**
- 2. The current Local Boards, (LBs) are popular and well-supported in some areas but not all; LBs have had variable success and are not liked by all Districts. KCC therefore needs to consider what other forms of structure would help develop the localism agenda.**
- 3. Kent's engagement with Parish and Town Councils is innovative and very well-developed compared to other authorities (South-East England Employers' Conference, 28 June 2007); this needs to be a stepping stone to future success in community involvement in local services.**
- 4. "One size does not fit all": Kent is a county with widely varying characteristics and needs; within a single framework for Localism in Kent, KCC and its partners should use innovation and flexibility to achieve best outcomes for its public and other Partners (this has already been exemplified in Dover and in Tonbridge & Malling).**
- 5. Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Comprehensive Area Assessments require that there is more effective joint working which is evident for the public to see; this must be borne in mind in any future strategy for localism.**
- 6. There needs to be acceptance of the legitimacy of the role of all Members, KCC/Districts/Town/Parish Councils and others as equal partners on local bodies.**
- 7. Member and Officer Roles are fundamental to the development of effective local involvement; Members and local officers need to be proactive, fair, firm when the situation demands, and operate in a style which is appropriate for their public, the meeting or event.**
- 8. There needs to be wider opportunity for front-line councillors from all parties to develop community roles from a position where they are empowered to do more; this will mean the Cabinet and Chief Officers "letting go" more, within agreed and well-defined limits, and considering local delegation.**

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP**

- 1. The principle of setting up Joint Local Boards/Forums with District Councils and Town/Parish Councils should be accepted.**
- 2. A new Strategy for Localism should build on the capacity gained from Localism Initiatives to date and use this to maximum potential.**
- 3. KCC and its partners should build on the positive outcomes from Dover Neighbourhood Forums , Tonbridge and Malling Joint Local Board and successes at the more effective Local Board meetings held during the past three years.**
- 4. Localism should be more outcome-focussed with regular reports to Cabinet/Cabinet Members and others; there should be prompt feedback to the public on specific issues raised at local meetings; electronic media and the KCC website should be used for this.**
- 5. Two key objectives in the way forward should be to meet the “place-shaping agenda” envisaged by Lyons, and to encourage all political representatives to become champions and leaders of their communities.**
- 6. There should be clear links to LSPs, CDRPs and other structures set up in response to new initiatives, for example Childrens’ Trusts, with Member roles and accountabilities defined to meet objectives of the Kent Commitment and individual council needs.**
- 7. Local Board outcomes need wider publicity at local level, not just in the Press, but through structured local networks including the development and use of modern systems including the Web and Kent TV. There may be a resource implication for this.**
- 8. Chief Officers and Cabinet should identify which services can be delegated to local level and be influenced by local Member views based where possible on community needs and preference.**
- 9. Budget options and priorities for local service provision should have major Member influence locally so that the prioritisation of spend at local level is a bottom up process within an overall financial settlement.**
- 10. KCC should explore further with District Councils and other local partners what they believe would improve community engagement at all levels within their District, within the objectives of the Kent Commitment.**

- 11. KCC should adapt Local Boards and extend Joint Local Boards and Neighbourhood Forums to other Districts according to local wishes.**
- 12. Member Development (including the need for training of Chairs of Local Boards and Forums) should be structured to achieve the objectives set out above and to embrace KCC's "Ways to Success" strategy so that the public's views and needs can be understood and responded to in an appropriate way.**
- 13. There should be an improvement in informal consultation processes for local services (eg based on similar lines to those currently operating within Kent Highway Services), and resources should be made available for the new strategy**
- 14. Use the roll-out of Gateway Facilities for co-location of Member and Local Services Surgeries.**
- 15. There should be a mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the overall structures emerging from the Kent Commitment and associated new partnerships.**
- 16. In light of the emerging policies on Localism, resources should be made available to enable the new strategy to be delivered; the role and number of Community Liaison Managers will need to be re-defined together with the need for support staff.**
- 17. Selected KCC grants and those of other public, private and voluntary bodies should from 2008/09 be aligned with the objectives within KCC and DC Community Strategies and be used as an incentive for leveraging in additional money and pooling of resources.**
- 18. Where there is agreement, there should be an option for Joint Transport Boards or Youth Advisory Groups to be merged with the new Joint Boards.**
- 19. Consideration should be given for new Joint Boards to play a role in Community Call for Action through local scrutiny; alternatively DC Scrutiny Committees could be augmented through co-option of KCC Members.**

- 20. Chairmanship of Joint Local Boards or Fora should be determined at local level and be open to Members from County, District, Town and Parish, on a rotational basis and according to local circumstances. There should also be a mechanism for planning and agreeing agenda topics throughout the year.**
- 21. Given its objectives for Localism, KCC needs to consider what its response would be in the event of a District Council not wishing to be a partner in such an enhancement to Local Boards.**

## **Section C: The National and Local Context on Localism**

10. Much has happened in the last year which adds further weight to "going local".
- The Power Commission has called for a democratic renewal which begins with local democracy.
  - The "place-shaping" role of local government and its locally-elected representatives, trailed originally by Sir Michael Lyons in an Interim Report, has become everyday language in little over a year. Place-shaping denotes a set of activities and behaviours which characterise the pivotal role of local government as described in the Final Report by the Lyons Inquiry, and the October 2006 Local Government White Paper. It is currently reflected in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill on its passage through Parliament and for which Royal Assent is expected in November 2007.
  - The same Bill creates a new Best Value duty to involve citizens in identifying local issues and solutions.
  - It also identifies specific roles for local Members in bringing forward Community Calls for Action and broadening the scope of local scrutiny to hold a much wider range of public services to account.
  - The Bill makes clear that a national concern for improved community cohesion will be dependent upon action at the level of local democratic bodies.

The significance of all these 'localism' developments has been clearly underpinned in the Kent Commitment agreed by the 13 councils in Kent in January 2007. Implementation of the Act will be done largely through regulation and guidance, and it is noteworthy that bodies representing the interests of local government, such as LGA, IDeA and LGIU, SOLACE etc, have taken a leading role. In the longer term, however, it is local authorities such as KCC and its District Council Partners who will have to be accountable for future direction, actions, and outcomes.

### **Kent Context: the "Kent Commitment"**

11. Arising from the Kent Commitment signed in January 2007 is the need for a political interface to compliment two-tier working and to focus on local issues and priorities through involvement of KCC, Districts and other service providers. A local interface would also provide linkages between "Vision for Kent" and "Towards 2010" with Local Community Plans and actions, and enable progress and performance to be assessed.

12. Within the context of the Kent Commitment, Member roles also need to be defined (as envisaged by Lyons), so that through detailed briefings and other meetings Members have sufficient knowledge and support to help them fulfil their emerging role. This will include greater Member empowerment over the family of



local public services within their geographic area, and transformation of governance arrangements. A joint county/district group of Leaders and Chief Executives is taking this forward to evolve governance and delivery structures which are appropriate to Kent. The precise linkages and relationships are still being developed.

## **Delegation and Devolution**

13. Many service areas are already highly devolved managerially and operationally. The work of the "Going Local" IMG, together with information gained from meetings with District Chief Executives and Leaders has suggested that further specific delegation of some local services is wanted and may be possible. However, discussion with Parish and Town Councils in various areas of Kent and also with KAPC has indicated that very few have the desire or more particularly the capacity for local day-to-day management of services at local level. There is a strong wish to be involved and consulted, but there is also a widely held view that service procurement and delivery is best left to those agencies with appropriate professional resources and capacity to do this. Equally, several districts share KCC's concerns that over-delegation could in itself compromise service standards and performance, particularly when BVPIs and overall accountability are taken into account.

**14. (1) The Informal Member Group takes the view that Chief Officers and Cabinet should identify which services can be delegated to local level and be influenced by local Member views based where possible on community needs and preference.**

**(2) Additionally, budget options and priorities for local service provision should have major Member influence locally so that the prioritisation of spend at local level is a bottom up process within an overall financial settlement.**

**(3) Members also believe that there should be an improvement in informal consultation processes for local services (eg based on similar lines to those currently operating within Kent Highway Services), and resources should, within reason, be made available for this.**

## **Pooling of Resources to Make a Difference at Local Level**

15. Currently KCC and DCs currently have many different funding streams for grants, but objectives, criteria and control frameworks vary widely. There is evidence from recent discussions to suggest there is a case for KCC, DCs and other public and private bodies to align grants more closely with Community Strategies, at the same time leaving some flexibility for Local Members. This could, in turn, present opportunities for large scale match-funding with outside bodies. However, in KCC it is recognised that individual Member Community Grants are very personal to Members.

16. The proposals within the Dover Neighbourhood Forum Pilots will offer some experience of this later in the year and in time for the 2008/09 budget preparation. Dover DC is contributing £45,000 to Localism in 2007/08. This sum

is being placed within the remit of the Neighbourhood Forum Pilots for recommendation to respective executives who will make final decisions.

**17. The IMG believes that selected KCC grants and those of other public, private and voluntary bodies should from 2008/09 be aligned with the objectives within KCC and DC Community Strategies and be used as an incentive for leveraging in additional money and pooling of resources.**

### **Looking to the Future:**

18. Local Boards have built effective local networks and capacity over the past 3 years. There are improved and sustainable links with DCs, parish and town councils, volunteer groups and other private sector and community groups. The full potential of these contacts has yet to be realised, but it is believed that the Kent Commitment, Lyons Review and Local Government Bill now all provide the opportunity for this to be achieved.

19. KCC has also led a significant development in communication between the public, Kent Parishes, and Town Councils via the Kent Parishes portal. This provides a link to a ready-made website for each parish and town council in the county, where parish clerks can publish information about their council such as agendas and minutes, plus local news, services and web links to local organisations and events. Many residents are already using the websites to get in touch with their parish council online, and there is great potential for further development and use in the future through KCC's support.

20. Districts' views on KCC Local Boards vary, but the majority find the links and the contacts, at Member and officer level, useful. Several have indicated within the past year that they would be willing to become involved in joint working, possibly within a future derivative of the current Local Boards framework. All Districts agree with KCC's view that "one size does not fit all" and welcome our willingness to be flexible in the approach to joint working. The Dover Neighbourhood Forum Pilots are progressing very well and are achieving their stated objectives through engaging more of the public - informally, but with local focus and clear outcomes and responses.

21. Several councils have indicated recently that they may be willing to work together at Member level. These would not necessarily be "joint local boards" but could also be modifications of current area committees, if that approach was deemed appropriate for all partners and could offer the possibility of making a real difference. Further exploratory work could be considered using lessons from existing pilots and also from DC Area Committee experiences.

## **New Techniques for Engagement: Electronic media and other methods.**

22 “Numbers through the door” is not the only way of judging success. We need to look at participation and outcomes. To meet the aspirations of the Lyons’ Report, and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill all elected Members must continue to adapt and modernise in the way public service providers engage the public. We must also understand our objectives for doing so. For example there could be wider development of Members’ own websites and “blogs” to seek local opinion. Major debates on topics such as Health and Climate Change could be the subject of simultaneous webcasting in different areas with a panel answering questions to all listeners from one of the main venues. Kent TV will provide huge potential for communication and engagement on major policy issues. Members and officers will need to change and adapt so that we and other partners can experiment more.

23. KCC has tried the “Question Time” approach, with success, and also the “local service workshop” format at Neighbourhood Forum Meetings and some Local Boards. The latter format has proved popular with presenters and participants, and has also led to clear action points to be referred to councils and external agencies.

24. **Other Local Authorities:** KCC’s “Going Local” IMG has looked at examples of Localism in other areas of England. For example, Lancashire CC, and Bucks CC have each operated a “Meet the Cabinet” Question-time in several venues; many authorities have a system of combined CC/DC and Parish/Town Forums.

25. **There are many other examples which are still under examination and which can inform future direction. However, because of its size and geographic complexity, Kent needs a solution which is flexible in approach and adaptable in style, with a focus on local outcomes and effective two-way communication for service users, service providers, and elected Members.**

### **26. Conclusions from the Informal Member Group**

- (i) IMG Members’ views were obtained at the meeting of the Group held on 18 July 2007, following which the Conclusions and Recommendations listed in Section B2 of this Report were agreed.
- (ii) These have been passed informally to Cabinet Members and to Chief Officers during August 2007. The response of the Chief Officer Group will be tabled at the County Council Meeting on 6 September.

**27. Recommendation**

**The views of County Council Members are now requested so that these, together with the IMG's Report, and the views of Chief Officers, can be passed on formally for consideration by Cabinet, so that a series of options can be developed for taking forward with other local authority partners.**

Report prepared on behalf of the Chairman and Members of the "Going Local" Informal Member Group.

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*Background documents: Nil.*

**.Dover Neighbourhood Fora** (update to August 2007)

- The principles were agreed with Dover DC, the Kent Association of Parish Councils and local Town/Parish Councils in the autumn of 2006, the first two rounds of meetings in public took place during November 2006 to June 2007. A 6-monthly progress report has now been prepared.
- All meetings have provided lively and interactive discussion on the main agenda topic. A significant number of outcomes have resulted, requiring action or consideration from services providers or from policy-making executives in KCC, Dover DC, Government Office for the South-East (GOSE), Health Authorities, and local ferry-operators. Feedback sessions have been held with Dover District Council officers and also with County Council Members.
- Key points arising from the Neighbourhood Forums are:-
  - The combined audience attendance for the first full round in late 2006/early 2007 was more than 200, with an average of more than 40, and a maximum of 60+ for the workshops at Deal. (This has since been exceeded by an attendance of 80+ at the second meeting of meeting of Deal Town Forum on 15 March 2007.)
  - nearly all local Parish and Town Councils have attended.
  - Kent Association of Parish Councils (KAPC) has been fully supportive and its representatives have attended wherever possible.
  - The Chairs elected are all KCC Members; Vice Chairs are all Town Council or Parish Council Members.
  - Parish Councils have clerked a small number of the meetings.
  - Within similar overall terms of reference, each Forum is different in style and outreach, reflecting the flexibility in approach.
  - The discussions have been interactive and very lively, with many good suggestions emerging for service priorities and changes; informal chairmanship and style have helped the process greatly.
  - Local Members are very pleased with overall progress, and feel the building of relationships and trust with the local community has been excellent.
  - The key challenge has been to respond to each community on outstanding issues, and to sustain interest and activity in the longer term; it has been agreed that setting agenda topics for the full year will help the process.