

To: Communities Policy Overview Committee - 26 January 2007
From: Cabinet Member and Managing Director for Communities
Subject: Draft Vision for the Communities Directorate
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: A Vision for the Communities Directorate is being prepared and Members comments and views are invited in order to inform its development

FOR INFORMATION

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Communities Directorate was established in April 2006 and represents a wide range of community services that are delivered to and with the people of Kent, through a combination of in-house provision, commissioning, partnership arrangements, and the contribution of thousands of volunteers.

1.2 The potential that arises from joining these services into one portfolio and Directorate is significant. It is an exciting and evolving opportunity which will be shaped by staff and service users themselves over the next few months, and on a continuing basis, and the draft Vision attached at Appendix One represents the first articulation of this.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the development of a Vision for the Communities Directorate and comment on the draft attached at Appendix One.

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The Communities Directorate

A Vision for the Future

Draft

INTRODUCTION

The Communities Directorate came into existence on 1st April 2006 and this document begins to set out a vision for our work in the future. It builds on the aims and aspirations set out in the Kent Partnership's Vision for Kent as well as the county council's strategic direction as outlined in Towards 2010, the Medium Term Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan. It will be underpinned by annual service plans approved in April each year.

It is being developed in the context of significant changes nationally, new ways of thinking about service delivery and rising public expectations for excellence and value for money. These provide major challenges and opportunities and also an environment in which innovation and new ideas will be encouraged to thrive. The new Local Government and Public Health Bill focuses on service delivery at neighbourhood level and is likely to have an impact on Communities and the services that we provide. The direction in which we are heading will put us in a strong position to respond.

The services provided by the directorate already touch the lives of thousands of people in Kent, of all ages, every day, and in some cases 24 hours a day, providing them with the opportunity to learn, improve their well-being and get involved in their community.

They include Youth Services, Adult Education, Libraries, Archives and Sport and Arts Development which contribute to the quality of life of people of all ages in the county. They also include Registration Services for important life events for people in the county; and they help groups of people who have special needs or who need help in reaching independence – for example people who are vulnerable through offending, and alcohol or drug misuse. The Directorate also leads the authority's contribution to Community Safety in the county, through Trading Standards and the Community Warden, Handy Van and Home Safe schemes; and through strategic emergency planning in Kent.

Many of our services work closely with each other already and we will actively encourage further integrated activity. We also recognise and value the significance of the work within Kent's communities that is carried out by others in KCC; by district councils and other partners; by the voluntary and community sector and by thousands of volunteers who work, for example, with youth groups and in youth justice; support sport and libraries and encourage creativity in the arts. We are part of a strong network and look forward to continuing and developing these relationships.

THE OVERALL VISION

Successful communities are made up of individuals who actively work together towards common goals. We want to encourage people to have confidence in their own abilities and their potential to influence decisions that affect them. Fundamentally, we want communities to be fun, rewarding and safe to be in, supportive to people at vulnerable times, and places where people are involved in decisions that affect them locally.

The services in Communities have a significant contribution to make to this ambition and the outcomes we would like to see are: -

- More people participating in their local community: volunteering to help local playgroups, acting as a mentor to local young people, raising funds for a holiday for local carers
- More people involved in shaping their future: for example joining local community action groups to shape the town centre and getting involved with local decisions which bring about changes to community resources
- More people motivated to develop themselves and others: taking up informal or formal learning: recruiting others into learning or community activity and promoting healthy lifestyles
- More people taking part in cultural, sporting and community events; local youth theatre is growing; sports clubs membership increases
- More people are working alongside our community safety officers to increase the sense of safety and wellbeing.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The way we go about our business is integral to service delivery and at the heart of our work will be three core principles:

“To continuously *improve* our locally delivered services; to *involve* communities in shaping them and to extend the positive *impact* they have, especially in our more disadvantaged communities”.

We will shift the expectation of our services from doing things to communities to doing things with communities. Our work will be characterised by enabling others; and we imagine a Kent where communities are playing a strong role in service development and provision, and where any boundaries between local government and communities are invisible.

We want to see a world where our front line staff can advise on a whole range of services, where perhaps health workers can recruit learners into adult education and where there is a volunteer infrastructure of community champions, acting as ambassadors for community improvement and development

We will also encourage the influence of local people over the use and management of our community assets and make it possible for users of all ages to get involved in, and contribute to, the development of services. We will ensure a co-ordinated approach to consultation and will take complaints and customer feedback very seriously.

Our staff have a well deserved reputation for working innovatively to ensure value for money and the best possible service, and they always be highly valued, empowered to make local decisions. Staff development will be a high priority.

They are currently based in over 200 different locations in the county and we will use technology to improve internal communications, enable flexible working, and make the most effective use of our property assets. Modernisation will also be a cornerstone of the way in which we provide our services, using technology to its full potential.

Working with our partners to deliver services is crucial and we will remain committed to this in the future – for example in relation to the joint services that we host such as the Youth Offending Service and the KDAAT and those that we commission on behalf of others such as Sports and Arts Development.

Finally, and importantly, we are committed to ensuring excellent value for money and will be proactive in seeking out more efficient or effective ways of working.

These are some of the aspirations and principles which will guide our work. The following sections introduce some of the activities that we are already involved with to help make our vision a reality. They also summarise future commitments and we would welcome your contribution and ideas on how to put these into practice. The themes are cross-cutting and all our units contribute to them in some way.

PUTTING USERS AT THE HEART OF OUR SERVICES

We are in touch of thousands of people of all ages throughout a year - well over a million calls are taken in the contact centre, there are XXX thousand visits to Register Offices, XXX 'hits' on the pages in the KCC web site relating to our services; large numbers of people in local communities meet the Community Wardens on a daily basis; over a thousand teachers, coaches and volunteers receive sports training - this list can grow and grow.

Our relationship with the public is sometimes complex, for example in Regulatory and Youth Offending Services our staff are also enforcing the law but, whatever the relationship, our staff re committed to making the experience highly professional, and to ensuring that our services will be accessible to everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, age, disability or social situation.

Improving access already in action – case studies including:-

Communities services joining up in the Ashford Gateway and Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope

Access to sport for the disabled- 2006 Kent Disability Youth Games

Increased library opening hours

Commitments for the future. We will

- Develop a new “What’s on in Kent” web site which at the touch of a button will list sports and leisure activities for all age ranges in the county.
- Expand opportunities for self-service through KCC’s website and experiment with the use of SMS texting
- Contribute to further development of the Gateway “single access” concept by co-locating as many of our services as possible, physically or virtually
- Develop a public involvement strategy and enhance the way in which we deal with and use complaints and customer feedback to develop services
- Ensure that our services deliver outcomes or products that the customer finds valuable.

SAFE COMMUNITIES

Communities that are successful and thriving must not only have low levels of crime but also be places where people feel safe. Being a victim of crime, or fearful of crime, or suffering from anti-social behaviour or nuisance can be extremely disturbing and has a huge effect on the quality of life. We will support our vision that all communities should be safe both through the services we provide and by working closely with partners in the police and fire and rescue services, the voluntary sector and Kent Probation Service.

Case studies of current innovative work that will be further developed

Community Wardens

Tackling doorstep cold calling on the elderly

The Power Project (YOS)

Commitments for the future. We will

- Ensure children and young people are safe and feel safe in the communities where they live, go to school, work and travel
- Sustain the successful service provided by our Community Wardens and extend the Handy Van Service to adults with disability
- Support Kent Police in their visible Neighbourhood Policing programme and work with them and Crime and Disorder Reduction partnerships to strengthen police presence in problem areas
- Continue to alert people to the activities of rogue traders. especially those involved in door-to-door sales to elderly people, and increase the number of offenders prosecuted
- Support young people to reduce the risk of them offending

**STRONG AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
- PROMOTING WELL-BEING**

Strong communities undertake activities to sustain themselves, are independent, and support their most vulnerable members They act to promote social cohesion, and are confident about the future. Vibrant communities are places where people can enjoy taking part in community activities and where it is easy to get involved. People know on whom they can count to act on their behalf and to support and promote their interests; they value differences of opinion, they know that everyone is a stakeholder and create opportunities for everyone to get involved.

Case studies:

The Youth Service work alongside District Councils in Kent and the voluntary sector to support localised youth plans

The Handy van scheme which fits alarms and aids that help vulnerable and infirm people to stay in their own homes.

Healthy eating in schools and sports programmes

The Communities Directorate also strongly supports and values the role that the voluntary and community sector plays in building strong and vibrant communities, encouraging voluntary participation in the local community and delivering public services. They help to provide the invisible glue that gives us all a sense of community.

Our commitments. We will:-

- Develop closer links with Local Boards in order to ensure that there are focused opportunities for us to meet the public and discuss our services
- Ensure that participation in local democracy is encouraged for example through the Kent Youth County Council
- Promote the importance of volunteering and build the army of volunteers that will be needed for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.
- Continue to encourage participation in sport, leisure and cultural activities
- Establish a biennial Youth Games and support Kent Youth Theatre activities
- Support specific projects such as the Turner Contemporary which will revitalise and strengthen particular areas
- Take a lead in developing a cultural strategy for Kent

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A learning community is one where people have access to learning throughout their lives and want to make use of learning to grow and enrich their lives, as individuals and as families. It can lead to radical change and is ambitious for all its members to achieve prosperity, educational success and a sense of achievement. We will actively promote community learning and development and contribute towards eliminating the skills gaps.

Current innovative practice- case studies

Kent Learning Champions, a scheme run through Adult Education, recruits successful local learners to act as champions – or ambassadors – of learning within their communities.

First steps learning programme to give people confidence to embark on more formal learning programmes

Book-start – promoting learning at an early age

The Youth Services alternative curriculum programme

Commitments for the future. We will:

- Meet the learning needs of the community through Kent's libraries, youth and Adult Education services
- Promote learning about harmful substances and their effects through the Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team
- Promote learning through the voluntary sector where possible
- Reduce the number of young people not in education, training or employment
- Further extend the Kent Success Apprenticeship Programme within KCC

FEEDBACK

As our Vision evolves into service plans and actions, it is vital that they continue to be shaped by those who are delivering and receiving services. We want to generate a discussion about the future and ensure that the vision for community services in Kent remains consistent with that of other partner agencies. People who use our services can also do their bit to ensure that we operate effectively.

Please can you:

- Let us know what you think of our direction
- Give feedback on the services you deliver or receive
- Tell us how you think services should be developed in the future

The final version of the first Communities Vision to be available in 2007, and we would be delighted to hear from you before then. We will, though, revise this document on a regular basis, so please feel free to send us your thoughts and comments at any time.

Your suggestions can be sent to:

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