

By: Keith Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste  
Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services

To: Cabinet – 14 January 2008

Subject: **KENT/SWINDON PARTNERSHIP**

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report advises Cabinet on the outcome of the Kent/Swindon improvement partnership.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) In October 2004 Swindon Borough Council (SBC) and Kent County Council entered in to an improvement partnership. The purpose of the partnership was to improve the Swindon Social Services performance within a period of up to three years with a headline measure of improved performance agreed at a move from zero to two stars as assessed by the Commission for Social Care Inspection – Ofsted for Children’s Social Services from 2005/2006. At the end of the partnership in November 2007 SBC’s performance on Adult Social Services was assessed as two stars while all services for Children and Young People, including Education, under the Ofsted APA Framework were assessed as 2 overall, equivalent to one star under the previous CSCI star rating process.

## **Background**

2. (1) The thinking behind the model for capacity building, which formed the basis for the Swindon/KCC partnership, was developed by KCC in 2003/2004. The principle behind the model was that local Government is a family and that sustainable performance improvement can better be achieved by bringing strong and weak performing authorities to work together rather than through the traditional route of commissioning external consultants. This model is described as Local Government Franchising which brings about systems change required to achieve sustainable performance improvement by current managers and practitioners in both authorities working alongside one another over a period of up to three years, rather than the much shorter and limited consultancy interventions.

(2) The financial terms of the contract have been for SBC to pay up to £3.6 million including payment to KCC as well as other local forms of support to KCC over three years to deliver the agreed performance improvement. The Department for Communities and Local Government – formally the Office of Deputy Prime Minister – supported the model of local Government franchising and the partnership from the outset. The ODPM contributed £820k to the franchise pilot and the Department of Health £180k to defray the cost to SBC.

(3) The risk taken by SBC in both financial and reputational terms was balanced by the risk to KCC, both in the event that the partnership did not result in the performance improvement in Swindon and if KCC Social Services were to decline in performance.

(4) The costs of KCC staff working in Swindon were fully met by SBC and Government, with funding for the back fill of staff working on the project in order to maintain services in Kent.

## **Project Management**

3. (1) The franchising model is based on whole system performance improvement with risks equally balanced by both partners to achieve sustainable change in the medium term. Following initial analysis and negotiation in the period October 2004 to March 2005 six partnership workstreams were identified with tight technical project management to ensure resources were effectively applied and progress kept under review through a traffic light system. The workstreams identified were:

- (i) Adult Workstream: Modernising team structures, improving management and facilitating integration with health (SBC is coterminous with Swindon Primary Care Trust Adult Social Care and other SBC services managed together through the joint appointment of a Chief Executive from 2006).
- (ii) Children's Workstream: Improving Child Protection practice, commissioning of services and managerial capacity.
- (iii) Human Resources: Addressing workforce issues identified by SBC and external inspectors.
- (iv) Investors in People (IIP): Achieving external accreditation of IIP to address human resource and organisational issues.
- (v) Finance: Building capacity and skills to improve systems and processes.
- (vi) Contracts and commissioning: Improving procurement and commissioning including market management with the independent sector.

(2) Performance on the contract was monitored throughout the Joint Partnership Steering Group, Chaired by the Chief Executive of SBC and attended by the SBC Cabinet Member for Social Services, Keith Ferrin for KCC Cabinet throughout the duration of the contract, together with the Strategic Director of Social Services (from 2006 the Managing Director, Adult Social Services). CSCI, Ofsted and DCLG were also represented. The SBC Benefits Review 2007, attached as an appendix, describes four phases to the project:

Phase One: Introductions and initial workstreams. October 2004 to March 2005.

Phase Two: Interim management: Acting Director of Swindon Social Services, Andrew Ireland – April to December 2005.

Phase Three – Kent Lead with strengthened workstreams – Jan Bumstead leads for Kent. January 2006 to March 2007.

Phase Four - Swindon lead and planned withdrawal, April to September 2007.

## **Outcome**

3. (1) The purpose of the Partnership has been to improve the performance of Swindon Social Services within a period of up to three years with the measure of improvement defined as a move from no to two stars in the Annual Performance Assessment undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (Ofsted for Children's Services from 2005/2006). Swindon Social Services achieved one star on their Social Services performance on both Children's and Adults in 2004/2005 and one star again for their performance on Adults – and its equivalent for children under the APA – for 2005/2006. In 2006/2007 Swindon Adult Social Services achieved two stars and Children's Services one star equivalent, although performance had further improved during 2006/2007. Both independent judgements are made on the basis of sustainability and over the three years of the Partnership Agreement there has been strong evidence of sustained improvement even if Children's Services, including Education, fell short of achieving a two star equivalent for 2006/2007.

## **Lessons Learned**

4. (1) The benefits review sets out the key achievements and challenges in detail, although completed before the star rating was announced. These are summarised below:

### **Key Achievements:**

- (i) Bringing the partners together to take the risk and see it through when previous forms of intervention had failed to improve Swindon's performance.
- (ii) Improving staff morale and confidence, for example through IIP and establishing quality service awards which continue to work successfully in Kent.
- (iii) Strengthening financial control and business planning; developing effective commissioning, contracting and performance management capacity.
- (iv) Through the KCC Cabinet Member supporting and mentoring Swindon Members to raise aspirations for the borough and its citizens.

### **Key Challenges:**

- (i) Initial perception by some Swindon staff of the intervention as an imposition of Kent practices.
- (ii) Building trust among key partners, particularly in the light of failure of previous interventions by consultancies. When the Swindon Director of Social Services left during Phase One, a Senior Officer from KCC Social Services – Andrew Ireland, the Area Director East/West Kent was appointed as an Interim Director of Social Services for Swindon. This was important in developing key relationships but was not in scope at the outset.
- (iii) The distance between Kent and Swindon caused some personal difficulties for the KCC staff involved whose commitment throughout was exceptional.

(2) The prime lesson learnt is that with risks and incentives evenly balanced for both partners front line, support staff and managers can achieve sustainable improvements in performance through transfer of learning by staff from KCC and Swindon working together. This requires resilience and commitment as policy and managerial context change over a three-year period as is always probable. The partnership produced

a range of innovative ways to transfer learning as well as through facilitated workshops and practice audit. Swindon staff took part in conferences and exchanges in Kent and there were flourishing virtual working on specific projects. Leadership at Chief Executive and Cabinet level was critical in sustaining the partnership over three years. Kent staff have made the most of the opportunity to develop skills in another authority and have brought those back to benefit KCC in its delivery of social services. Finally, the commitment of KCC staff working in Swindon was exemplary while their colleagues in Kent also made a huge contribution to the success of the partnership by covering for absence even with backfill, while improving performance in Kent at the same time as we retained three stars throughout the period of the Partnership.

## **Conclusion**

5. (1) The Kent/Swindon partnership has been successful, both in achieving sustainable improvement by Swindon Council and in demonstrating the local Government franchising model can work through the family of local Government working together rather than interventions by external consultancies, which had been costly and failed over a long period. The partnership has been genuinely unique in its range and ambition. It has taken great commitment and resilience from Members, senior managers, frontline and support staff from both organisations during a period of major change for local Government. Its partnership has produced a rich source of evidence to guide future capacity building initiatives, which should be taken up by Government, academics and public agencies.

(2) In the end the partnership is about people – the people of Swindon and Kent have benefited from the commitment and skill of all those in Kent and Swindon who have made the partnership a success.

## **Recommendation**

6. Cabinet is asked to NOTE the contents of the report.

Oliver Mills  
Managing Director  
Kent Adult Social Services  
7000 4888