

By: Leader of the Council

To: County Council – 11 December 2008

Subject: Localism – A Strategy for Success – Update

Introduction

1. (1) I informed the County Council on 19 June that I would report to the Council before the end of the year on the discussions I had asked Cabinet Members, the Vice Chairman of the County Council and the Chairmen of the Local Boards where they exist to lead on with all of you on your aspirations for the model(s) of localism you will personally support and wish to see within the area you represent. You will recall that I informed the County Council on 19 June 2008 that “one size does not fit all” , and it is important that together with partner organisations you have the opportunity to say what is your preferred option

(2) I set out below the aspirations and progress which has been made on these discussions to date for the County Council’s information.

Summary of Discussions

Ashford

2. (1) Members who represent an Ashford electoral division will be meeting again on the afternoon of the County Council. There is general agreement that Neighbourhood Forums should be established (although one Member favours maintaining the Ashford Local Board).

(2) The composition of each Neighbourhood Forum would include all three tiers of local government in the Ashford area (or in the case of Ashford Central – the appropriate Urban Forum in replacement of a Parish Council). The Forums will work to the needs of the local community as a group and it is suggested that representatives of young people, the voluntary sector, other community leaders from the business sector, faith groups and/or Partnerships and PACTS may be invited to join the Forum as elected representatives think appropriate. The proposed roles and responsibility of the Forums are to:-

- (a) to disseminate information to local community leaders about relevant issues so that they are better informed to communicate these issues to residents;
- (b) to collate information from the local area (about community aspirations, satisfaction with Council services, issues of concern) and communicate this back to the Neighbourhood Forum Members;
- (c) to promote active participation of the local community leaders in representing their views and informing decision making at a local and countywide level;
- (d) to create an identifiable set of actions from each meeting as appropriate and to follow these through with the relevant decision making body;
- (e) to liaise with other Neighbourhood Forums in the Ashford area and consider joint working on shared goals and priorities; and

- (f) to produce an annual report with the actions and news from the Forum to be presented at the annual public meeting.

(3) These aspirations/proposals have not been formally presented to or considered by the appropriate Committee at Ashford Borough Council.

Canterbury

(4) Discussions have only recently taken place on the way forward with Members who represent a Canterbury electoral division and no firm conclusion have been reached. The Leader and Chief Executive of Canterbury City Council are very interested in achieving a merged Kent County Council/City Council arrangement by the beginning of the next municipal year.

Dartford

(5) Members who represent a Dartford electoral division are keen to see the work of the Dartford Local Board continue but with its membership extended to represent all three tiers of local authorities.

Dover

(6) Members will be aware that the Dover Neighbourhood Forums pilot was extended earlier on in the year. This model was recognised by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Inspection Team as a good model.

Gravesham

(7) The County Council and Gravesham Borough Council have agreed to three pilot Neighbourhood Forums; Gravesham West, Gravesham East and Gravesham Rural. The first round of these Neighbourhood Forum meetings is taking place in December/January.

Maidstone

(8) Discussions with Members who represent a Maidstone electoral division have proceeded well with colleagues from Maidstone Borough Council and a representative of the Kent Association of Local Councils. Agreement has been reached in piloting three area Neighbourhood Forums across the Borough and work is in hand for these to be established early in the New Year. These will include the area County Members, nominated Borough and Parish Councillors and others from residents groups, Health, Police, Fire and voluntary services etc.

Sevenoaks

(9) Discussions have taken place with colleagues from Sevenoaks District Council and Members who represent Sevenoaks Electoral Divisions. The discussions with colleagues from Sevenoaks District Council did not agree a way forward on the basis of local fora, and a more imaginative structure, building on the best features of the local board is currently being devised for consideration.

Shepway

(10) A range of views have come forward from Members who represent Shepway Electoral Divisions, ranging from those who would like to see the existing Shepway Board maintained and others who would prefer to have a neighbourhood Forum for their own electoral division.

Swale

(11) Productive discussions have taken place between Swale Borough Council, the Kent Association of Local Councils, Members from the Voluntary Sector and all Members who represent a Swale Electoral division. By the time the County Council meets, there should be a formal agreement between the two Councils to establish a stronger link to the Swale Local Strategic Partnership which will create three Local Engagement Forums which will be piloted across the Borough. The Local Engagement Forums will be the Isle of Sheppey, Sittingbourne and Faversham. The existing Borough Council Area Forums and the Local Board for Swale will be suspended. Swale Local Engagement Forums will be semi-autonomous with Members who represent a Swale Electoral Division, Borough Ward Members, representatives from the Parish/Town councils, Local Strategic Partnership representatives and local organisations. It is planned that the first round of meetings of these new forums will take place in January 2009.

Thanet

(12) Discussions with the Members who represent a Thanet Electoral Division and colleagues from Thanet District Council have resulted in a conclusion that the Thanet Local Board works well but further discussions should take place to increase its membership from interested partner organisations.

Tonbridge & Malling

(13) There has been a useful dialogue with the Leader and Chief Executive of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to consider how the two Councils work in partnership to meet the emerging agenda of Community Engagement.

(14) The proposal is that the Joint Local Board should be abandoned and instead both authorities should continue to explore how to build on the good building blocks already established by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council through the Tonbridge Forum and the Parish Partnership Panel. There is consensus that the two Forums (Tonbridge Forum and the Parish Partnership Panel) should be chaired by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council with a Vice Chairman being drawn from the County Council Members who represent Tonbridge & Malling Electoral Divisions. Members who represent a Tonbridge & Malling Electoral Division will be entitled to suggest items for inclusion on the agendas for the two Forums, which will be agreed to by the partner bodies involved in each Forum. This will happen through an agenda setting process involving officers from both Councils.

(15) Consideration will be given to at least one of the Parish Partnership Panel meetings in the municipal year taking place in a venue other than the Council Chamber at Tonbridge & Malling offices at Kings Hill. It is suggested that the Parish Partnership Panel should be invited to consider this proposal.

(16) As with some other districts, some Tonbridge & Malling County Members would like to have a specific forum for their own electoral division and to include other representative groups e.g. resident groups, local borough members, the Police, etc.

Tunbridge Wells

(17) Members who represent County Council Electoral Divisions for Tunbridge Wells have recently met and agreed that the existing Tunbridge Wells Local Board should continue and a further discussion around the model which might be appropriate for Tunbridge Wells should take place after the County Council elections in the latter part of 2009.

Resources to support the New Pilot Models

3. (1) Two new Community Liaison Managers have recently been appointed to respond to this emerging Community Engagement agenda and the new pilots which are being established.

(2) The County Council will need to continue to monitor the pilot models of Local Community Engagement across the County and ensure that there are sufficient resources to respond to the emerging agenda.

Recommendation

4. The Council are asked to note the progress in responding to the emerging range of Community Engagement pilots being established across the County.