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**By:** Nick Chard, Cabinet Member for Finance  
Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services and  
Chair of the Better WorkPlaces Steering Group  
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Regeneration

**To:** Corporate Policy Overview Committee, 24 January 2009

**Subject:** *Better WorkPlaces* (Office Transformation) – Vision for Future  
Office Locations

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** *Better WorkPlaces* (formerly known as the Office Transformation Programme) is a programme of change which aims to ensure that we have the right buildings in the right places for the 21st century - for contact with Kent residents and for our staff, in conjunction with partner agencies, and to deliver real efficiencies (including reduced office costs)

Directorates have been working in a coherent and consensual fashion since early 2008 to turn this aspiration into a realistic county-wide plan of action – based on an agreed series of protocols. The Vision Map, which forms the backbone of this report, has been jointly developed to meet their needs.

This report informs Members of the future plans for the office estate, as agreed in December by the *Better WorkPlaces* Steering Group,

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## Introduction

1. (1) In March 2008, Chief Officer Group signed up to a series of Objectives & Protocols (Appendix Two), including elements of mobile and flexible working, to guide us in transforming our office estate. The publication of the document demonstrated in earnest the commitment of senior officers to this programme of change, with the following key objectives:
  - (a) **Improved relationships with the public**
  - (b) **Joint working with partner agencies**
  - (c) **Fiscal discipline in asset management**
  - (d) **Productivity gain**
- (2) The Programme is overseen by the *Better WorkPlaces* Steering Group, chaired by the Managing Director of KASS, and with other directorates represented by their Resource Directors. Additional strategy groups and implementation teams exist and meet when needed, comprising experts from those directorates affected by the issues being discussed.
- (3) In addition to progress on “bricks and mortar” issues, which has continued apace, significant progress has been made on the cross-cutting issues of Human Resources & Information Systems, and Communication. We are also ensuring themes such as environmental performance, and accessibility, are addressed appropriately.

- (4) A data collection exercise has been carried out across the county to ascertain the number, location category, and potential level of flexibility of all staff in those office buildings to be included in the programme.
- (5) Operational and other non-office buildings are not directly involved in the programme; however, they will form part of the overall solution, and the future face of Kent County Council.
- (6) *Better WorkPlaces* may be considered to be the “back-office”/support complement to the Gateways, and the programmes are in close contact.
- (7) *Better WorkPlaces*’s prime catalysts are the lease expiry/break dates on our existing leasehold estate, which in some cases are as late as 2015. We will vacate buildings considered surplus to requirements at the earliest practicable opportunity, however we anticipate the Programme lasting around seven years.
- (8) Savings are based on the current over-provision of desks, and by extension, office space, given present moves to new patterns of work and improved information systems, and new locations for contact with Kent residents.

## **A Future Vision for Office Locations**

2. (1) We anticipate reducing the number of main office buildings from the current 21 “County Offices”, to 6 “Key Offices” (Appendix One). This is based on detailed discussions with directorates over several months, to ensure that they would be able to deliver services appropriately from those locations. The Vision Map was approved by the *Better WorkPlaces* Steering Group in on 18 December 2008.
- (2) Directorates have borne in mind the likely issues arising from current restructuring processes, and related consultations. The Steering Group will continue to monitor the implementation of the *Better WorkPlaces* Vision Map to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- (3) Our ability to deliver a reduction on this scale is based on number of factors, including:
- (a) Continued commitment and co-operation from all Directorates;
  - (b) Rigorous implementation of the “Objectives & Protocols”, and future supplementary guidance;
  - (c) Use of other KCC (and partner agency) buildings (including Gateways, libraries, etc) for client contact, touchdown and meeting purposes;
  - (d) Adequate resourcing for the programme, primarily on an invest-to-save basis
- (4) As a significant programme of modernisation, *Better WorkPlaces* represents a financial investment in our services, and will free up significant savings over the entire period. The future office estate will provide benefits for staff and clients, as well as for services, and in terms of finance and property. The exact nature and quantity of these benefits may vary according to specific circumstances, but will include:
- (a) **For Services**
    - Premises fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
    - Better situated accommodation
    - Synergy with other organisations

- Flexibility to introduce new working practices
- (b) **For Kent Residents**
  - More convenient, varied access to services
  - More welcoming environment
- (c) **For Staff**
  - Adoption of flexible working practices (with IT support)
  - Improved working environment
- (d) **For Property**
  - Less property
  - Modern, better maintained/managed
  - More sustainable
  - More consistency between office environments
  - Joint use of property
  - Less constrained portfolio
- (e) **For Finance**
  - Potential receipts from disposals
  - Lower operating costs
  - Greater clarity in accounting for office space

### The Vision Map in more detail

3. (1) The Vision Map (Appendix One) illustrates shows the proposed distribution of Key Offices (and Intermediate Solutions – see below) relative to County Hall, and current and future Gateways. Please refer to the key on the map. Dates under each logo on the map indicate the anticipated delivery year.
- (2) In **Maidstone**, we envisage making better use of Sessions and Invicta Houses, to enable us to relinquish other sites in and around Maidstone – notably Brenchley House and Bishops Terrace – when their leases expire.
- (3) In **East Kent**, we plan to have **Key Offices** in the following locations:
  - (a) **Whitstable** – the existing Brook House (subject to efficiency review), or a replacement building in a similar location
  - (b) **Dover** – Thistley Hill, *Better WorkPlaces*'s first “new” office - a former primary school at Whitfield currently being converted into offices
  - (c) **Ashford** – the existing Kroner House (subject to efficiency review, and possibly minus the “annexe”), or a replacement building
  - (d) In addition, we will need to consider the case for an **intermediate solution** in **Thanet** to take account of the concentration of service users in that district, and in Swale given the lengthy travel times to **Sheppey** from either Ashford or Whitstable. These solutions are more likely to be small office locations, linked to other KCC services or partner organisations
- (4) In **West Kent**, we plan to have **Key Offices** in the following locations:
  - (a) The **A20 Corridor** between Aylesford and Wrotham – in place of the current office at 17 Kings Hill Avenue, our most costly building, and covering a wider range of staff and services
  - (b) **Gravesham** – the existing Joynes House (subject to efficiency review), or a replacement building nearer the outskirts of Gravesend
  - (c) **Tunbridge Wells** – location to be confirmed, most likely between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells
  - (d) In addition, we will need to consider the case for an **intermediate solution** in **Maidstone**, to take account of CFE's Mid Kent area requirements. This solution is more likely to be a small office location, linked to other KCC services or partner organisations

(5) Gateway information is provided on the map to demonstrate the locations of the future “public face” of many of our services as described in 1. (6) above. The Gateway programme is delivered separately from *Better WorkPlaces*, so this report will not provide detail on those locations.

(6) In addition to the *Better WorkPlaces* and Gateway locations indicated on the map, it is important to remember that other front-line buildings (including libraries, adult education centres, youth centres and social care premises) are not affected by this programme, and will continue to provide local services to meet local requirements.

### **Current Progress**

4. (1) A number of projects under the *Better WorkPlaces* programme are already under way:
- (a) **Thistley Hill** (Whitfield, Dover) – see 3. (3) (b) above. This building, due to open fully by June 2009, will enable us to close offices at Cambridge Terrace and the Megger Building in Dover, and co-locate two Local Children’s Services Partnership teams, and provide capacity for future moves.
  - (b) **Lyons House** (Tonbridge) This building will close in March 2008, as part of the future picture for West Kent outlined in 3. (4) above.
  - (c) **Castle Street** (Canterbury) This building will close in March 2008, as part of the future picture for East Kent outlined in 3. (3) above.
  - (d) **Queens House** (Folkestone) Preparations are being made to exercise our option to vacate the Third Floor in 2010, and the remainder of the building in 2012.
- (2) In each of these cases, the Objectives & Protocols (Appendix Two) will be invoked to provide for increased flexible working and improved use of office space.
- (3) The *Better WorkPlaces* Steering Group received reports on these projects in December 2008, and is satisfied with their progress to date.

### **Consultations**

5. (1) The Vision Map has been developed by all directorates working together – and as such, represents a truly corporate and consultative approach.
- (2) Consultation at the local level, including the statutory personnel consultations in the lead-up to any relocations, are carried out by relevant directorate colleagues, reporting in to the Programme.

### **Local Members**

6. (1) Local members will be consulted in accordance with the Property Management Protocol, as is usual in these matters.

### **Conclusion**

7. Members of the Corporate Policy Overview Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

**Background Documents:**

Appendix One – *Better WorkPlaces* Vision Map

Appendix Two – *Better WorkPlaces* Objectives & Protocols

**8. Author Contact Details**

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