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and  
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To: Corporate Policy Overview Committee 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Subject: Connecting with Communities

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. This report sets out a brief overview of the activities across KCC to engage and listen to the views of direct services users and residents. It also suggests a number of areas of improvement for further consideration.

## **2. Direct Service Users**

- 2.1 KCC services have a long history of good practice in the ways they involve direct users of specific services in the running and improvement of those services. The scale and extent of this involvement has not previously been recorded and shared across the organisation in a comprehensive way. What has been reported (by extracting information from Business Plans) has focussed solely on specific consultation and survey work. Appendix 1 is a working draft which sets out the overall picture. The final version of these details will be made publicly available and kept up to date via the re-vamped kent.gov website
- 2.2 One of the challenges of this volume of current service-led activity at the local level is making sure that service users, colleagues inside KCC and in partner organisations as well as KCC elected Members are aware of what is already happening and able to get involved in it. The proposed development of part of the kent.gov website will help address this.
- 2.3 The second (and equally difficult) challenge is to ensure that information from these activities can be more easily shared within KCC and with partners. Obviously most of these activities are about a very specific service (or specific facility) and involves those people who are the direct service users. It is reasonable to assume that most of what is said in these groups and fora is unlikely to be of wider relevance beyond the service or facility to which the group directly relates. However on those occasions where there is wider relevance or where the response needs to come from a different service (or even a different organisation) we need to make it easier for service managers running these group to get that information to the right people.
- 2.4 The proposal therefore is to make it quick and easy for service managers to use the new kent.gov 'portal' on consultation and involvement to enter information that they feel is of wider relevance than just their service or facility. This would then be able to be searched by locality or by keywords so other managers, Members, partners and residents could see what issues were being raised and what the response was.

### **3. Surveys and market research**

- 3.1 KCC undertakes a small number of very large-scale market research surveys every year. Service units also have access to an online questionnaire system (SNAP) for smaller more informal polls. The most well-known of the large-scale surveys are the Children and Young People Survey currently carried out by the NFER and the Highways Tracker Survey. We are also required to use the nationally-developed 'Place Survey' to provide the information for a number of the National Indicator Set PIs. Every District Council conducted a postal Place Survey in the Autumn of 2008 and we conducted a face to face equivalent at the same time (aggregated results from the postal surveys and the results of the parallel face to face survey are attached as Appendix 2).
- 3.2 Again there are two clear ways in which we need to improve our use of surveys. The first is to be clear that whenever any service within KCC is commissioning formal professional market research, the rest of KCC is given the opportunity to join in the commissioning so that we have fewer, more inclusive polls. We will therefore introduce an internal mechanism to prevent polls taking place before this 'cross-check' with other services has taken place.
- 3.3 Ultimately the same principle ought to apply across partners, obviously on a voluntary rather than enforced basis. For example, if there are future 'Place Surveys' in Kent and Medway these should be done as one commission on behalf of all public sector partners, not separately by all 14 local authorities. This should save both time and money.
- 3.4 One of the common threads of many of these surveys is the identification of the issues and topics that people in Kent feel are important to their quality of life (and in some cases they also identify the things which they feel most need improving). This may not have direct links to specific public services, but should nevertheless be useful information that we use as a guide to the sort of information we publish (in hard copy and electronically) and to the sorts of topics that could feature on Kent TV – preferably as content created by local residents themselves. An example of this already exists in a video on Kent TV made by young people in Betteshanger.

### **4. Customer insight**

- 4.1 This area of work is driven by the information and data we hold about residents of Kent, including the feedback we get from customer comments and complaints. At the last meeting you received the corporate overview report on the volumes and trends from comments and complaints and this report will be an annual feature of all POC agenda.
- 4.2 KCC also makes use of a number of data and information sources to provide insight into the background and lifestyles of residents across the whole of Kent and attached as Appendix 3 is a short summary of the most well-known of these – MOSAIC.

- 4.3 As part of the Access Kent programme referred to elsewhere on this agenda, partnership funding from the EU Interreg IVa programme has been obtained for all 14 Kent local authorities to work with French partners to use this customer insight and profiling as the basis for a shared approach to shaping future service delivery – especially in relation to the location of public access premises.

## **5. Working with partners**

- 5.1 Much of what the paper has covered in the preceding sections relates to people who are users of specific services or to the collection and use of data and other information.
- 5.2 By definition, work with those who are direct users of a specific service is likely to be of relatively little direct relevance to the wider organisation or to partners, although we do plan to make it easier to share the information which does emerge. What is more critical to do on a more corporate basis and with partners is work which involves the views of people simply as residents of Kent, whether they are a direct service-user or not.
- 5.3 For KCC, by far the most significant example of this form of involvement is the work of Members individually and through Local Boards and Neighbourhood Forums. Work to strengthen the links and the information flows between existing service-based involvement and the continuing development of these Member-led initiatives includes a revision and strengthening of the communication role of the Community Liaison Managers.
- 5.4 Partner organisations are also involving local residents in broader ways, most notably (PACT) the partnership initiative led by Kent Police, where individuals at the very local (Parish or sub-Parish level) are invited to express their views about issues affecting their community. While it may not be feasible for KCC to attend every individual PACT meeting, the process developed by Kent Police to aggregate and analyse the issues being raised within a District is easily communicated via our Local Boards and Neighbourhood Forums plus the Local Children's Services Partnerships and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.
- 5.5 Over the course of 2009/10 we will be working on a number of practical ideas and pilots to develop joint approaches with our partners to involving residents. Separate reports on proposals and pilots will be brought forward to the Committee over the course of the next 12 months.

## **6. Recommendation**

**Members are asked to note the content of this report and its Appendices and endorse the principles on which the proposed improvements are based.**

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