

By: Chairman of IMG on Members Information

To: Selection & Members Services Committee – 4 July 2008

Subject: Interim Report from the IMG on Member Information

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides a progress report on the work of the IMG on Members Information

Introduction

The IMG was created as a result of member dissatisfaction about the quality of information which they receive, particularly in relation to activities within their own electoral divisions. Its Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix A. And are aimed at putting into effect the Council's resolution of 23rd March 2006 that:

'the Information Point (should) coordinate a Member Information Service across the County Council.'

Whilst the IMG was appointed on 10 October 2007, its work has been delayed awaiting the outcome of consultancy work into the way KCC currently deals with Information Management; RSe Consulting expect to make their report at the beginning of July. In the interim, the IMG has visited other authorities, viewed alternative systems, interviewed officers from within ISG, and initiated a member survey of information sources and preferred ways of receiving information. (See Appendix F for work programme.)

We have come to a number of preliminary conclusions.

Conclusions

Responsibility For Information Management.

There is no single officer within KCC who is responsible for the Management of Information held by KCC, or local and central Government information relevant to Members. Mrs Dean attended an LGC Conference on Information Management at which it became apparent that a number of authorities have such an officers, variously titled as Head of Information, Head of Knowledge (Audit Commission) Head of Information and Knowledge Management (Leeds City Council), Head of Research and Innovation, Head of Information and Analysis, Knowledge and Learning Team (IDeA) etc.

Lee Hemsworth, Head of Information and Knowledge Management at Leeds City Council suggested that the title 'Head of Information' was too restrictive and the chosen title needed to reflect the ethos of information as corporate resource.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the Information Point has been identified as the primary Member Information resource. Currently, the Information

Point officers sit within the Chief Executive's department.

However, there has been no capacity within the Democratic Services to manage 'information services' for Members and the service has been historically managed by the Libraries and Information Services unit within the Communities Directorate.

This results in:

1.1 The absence of a culture or system which places informing and consulting local members at the heart of decision making. Members frequently complain that they discover events and projects taking place in their divisions far too late to inform or consult with residents and thereby influence policy and activity to suit local needs.

1.2 The lack of a system of information and knowledge management which enables members to identify research, documents and all staff within the authority who are working in the same area of interest, and thereby ensure they are working cooperatively. The IMG has frequently had to retrace its steps on discovering relevant information almost by accident (e.g. the discovery that KCC had already purchased an IT programme known as Sharepoint used extensively by Westminster City Council to improve information to its members). There is no directory of staff identifying what they do. Quote from a senior member "It's almost impossible to find out within this authority who is working on what." We believe from evidence given to us by officers that they experience similar difficulties.

1.3 The lack of an identified officer with sufficient seniority and independence to ensure that information required by members is made available in a timely and user-friendly manner, and only withheld for proper reasons. Constant reference to the Director of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer is an inefficient use of his time.

We note that the CPA Inspection Report makes the following observations particularly with regard to non Cabinet members,

'In the Council's membership, better-supported and earlier engagement of opposition and backbench Councillors in decision-making and performance monitoring is needed, to build trust and openness and to ensure the views of all communities are fully heard before decisions are made.'

'Officers' capacity to support overview and scrutiny appears unusually small and can be a limiting factor in pre-decision debate. As a result opposition views are formulated and considered too late in the process to help the robust and inclusive development of policy and priorities.'

'Presentation of performance monitoring information to Councillors outside the Cabinet, while it has increased recently, remains unusually limited. Policy Overview Committees have in recent months taken on a six-monthly performance monitoring role, although their approach to and rigour in this is, so far, inconsistent. This is the only formal mechanism for presenting backbenchers with in-year performance information. There is no electronic 'dashboard' or regular reports for backbench and senior opposition members to monitor areas of individual interest, or performance more generally. The ability of backbench and opposition Councillors to be alerted at an early stage to areas meriting scrutiny and challenge is therefore hampered. The new IT system will put the Council in a position to remedy this.'

'The Council provides good leadership on community safety and is innovative and creative but backbench Councillors and opposition leaders are not kept as well-informed as they need to be to be fully-engaged.')

Recommendations:

We recommend that:

R1. A head of Information Management is appointed reporting to the Chief Executive.

This is essential and should happen without delay.

We are told that each department has an Information Officer, but discover that this officer performs different functions in different departments, sometimes limited to issues of Data Protection and Freedom of Information requests rather than the facilitating of information flows and analysis which is what is needed.

We note that a post is being advertised within the Corporate Policy unit for which the job description contains the following paragraph.

'Direct the activity in...:

- *Research and development – establish a shared evidence base for informed policy making throughout KCC, delivered through a small corporate resource and teams in Directorates using a service level agreement approach.*
- *2. Co-ordinate the research work across KCC acting as the setter of standards and client for the work done. Ensure there is no duplication of effort and that cutting-edge techniques and technologies are applied and information is shared and used appropriately to inform policy development'.*

This post is intended to act as the key client on behalf of the policy function. This reflects the kind of officer we envisage, but with responsibility for policy and operations across the whole authority.

There appear to be two options for the structure supporting Information Management. One option would be to ensure that all officers with Information Management responsibilities work as a corporate team by removing them from Departments into a corporate unit under the Head of Information. The second option would be to ensure expertise and commitment remains by leaving officers within departments. Having taken evidence from a number of witnesses in this field, this second structure our preferred option. However we wish to make it clear that within this option it will be essential that the Head of Information Management ensures corporate working, and in particular that members receive in a timely and user friendly manner the information they require to carry out their jobs.

R2. It is recommended that to address the complex nature of Member Information, a collaborative management board for the Information Point be set up - comprising a Member from each political party, a library manager and the Head of Democratic Services. Staff within the Information Point should ideally be dedicated posts, seconded into the Democratic Service Unit from Library and Information Services - to ensure the continuity of training and professional support links currently available from the Libraries Unit are

maintained. Line Management should sit with the Head of Democratic Services.

A Service Level Agreement should also be put in place between the Chief Executive and the Libraries Service to ensure that:

- The public library catalogue can still be used to record all materials held at the Information Point and thus facilitating continued access to the catalogue from any pc with the Internet.
- All library databases and subscriptions, currently used, can be accessed by the Information Point staff.

Members Survey

2. The results of the members' survey are contained in *Appendix B*. The survey revealed that though many members use a wide variety of sources of information, there is a need to do the following:-

2.1 to remove duplication between the work of The Information Point, the Departments, the Media Centre and outside sources of information. Westminster City Council have created an Information Protocol which sets out what information is required to be placed on the members database, and which officer within the relevant department is responsible for providing and updating it. The House of Commons Library has a protocol which identifies which documents and information should be placed in the Members Library (and therefore available electronically also) as a matter of routine.

2.2 to provide more analysis of information so that members can easily identify which items they wish to explore further and which can be discarded.

2.3 on induction, members should receive a directory of, and training in what services are available to members at the Information Point. This should be reinforced by permanent displays in the members lounge. A summary of the services provided by Information Point are attached at *Appendix C*.

(Staff at the House of Commons Library told us they overcame this problem by regular 1:1 visits to MPs and their support staff, often in their constituencies. Tower Hamlets created their Information System essentially to store all the latest existing information from a variety of sources in one place so that it could be retrieved and analysed easily and quickly. However comparatively low use of the system by members has suggested that a review is now needed of how far the system falls short of what members require. Westminster City Council set up two Member Focus Groups to consider the information needs of members and to trial the system as it was being created to ensure it met their needs.)

2.4 to discuss with individual members who do not wish to use computer access to information how their needs can be met.

We recommend that:

R3. An urgent audit of staff engaged in Information Management across the authority be carried out, and duplication between them eliminated. RSe consultants have been asked to suggest how this could best be done in view of the varied responsibilities of officers.

R4. Time released in eliminating duplication is invested in increased analysis of information to assist members.

R5. Members' induction should encompass the rights of members to information, and the services available at the Information Point in depth, and interviews with each member arranged.

R6. A rolling programme of interviews with members should be arranged such that each member is contacted by Information Point at least bi-annually.

R7. An Information Protocol is prepared which sets out what information members require continuously 'on tap', and provides contact details for named individuals within the Directorates who are responsible for providing and updating it, and sets out how this fits in with the work of the Information Point.

R8 A Members focus group be set up to produce a list of information members require and to trial any IT system subsequently set up to deliver this to ensure the information system meets members needs.

R9. We believe such a system would be of value to colleagues in other Kent authorities and that a subscription service should be marketed.

3. Information Technology

The existing system

3.1 There has been much criticism from members of KNet and the www.kent.gov.uk website (to a lesser degree) with regard to their lack of usefulness to members and the lack of an adequate search engine and index.

3.2 There is no method by which members can insert their electoral division or Postcodes and discover what activity is going on within that area. Robin Harris of Tower Hamlets used the phrase 'one click councillor' to describe the aim to provide members with the information they need by only one mouse click on the portal.

3.3 Officers do not appear to be prompted in any way to alert local members when they are working on projects in which local members have an interest.

3.4 Seminars for members are provided regularly and attendance is often low due to members' commitments elsewhere, but no electronic record is made of these sessions for use by members in their own time, or indeed sale to other authorities who are all expensively reinventing the wheel.

3.5 The current review of member training will result in a programme which is better focussed on members needs; research skills need to be part of this programme. Stephen Dale (IDeA) highlighted the move away from using search engines such as Google which are insensitive to the needs of the user, to more

focussed social networks such as the IDeA Communities of Practice. These networks link organisations and individuals with common needs and interests so that the pool of information and network of informants searched is more focussed and therefore more likely to produce better quality, more relevant responses which in turn contribute to the learning of the network.

3.6 Westminster City Council as a Unitary Authority has already made available to members a wide range of information by map and by written list, including planning applications and their progress through the system, (now overtaken by the government planning portal) street lights and schedule of repairs, road repairs needed and scheduled, road closures, locations of schools, social service centres, bus stops, etc. In addition, the Police have provided crime statistics, and indicators of deprivation and health are also available on the same property based maps. Tower Hamlets have a similar system which enables members to search for information within any area for which they can choose the boundaries.

3.7 It is clear that members would benefit hugely from such a map based system which could provide a wide range of information on their divisions. Much of the information they require lies within the Environment and Regeneration Directorate who are currently working on improving the information available in Kent View (<http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/kentview/>) We are surprised that this work has not been drawn to members attention for their input. Much work remains to be done but it clearly forms the basis of what members need.

3.8 We understand that the Kent Partnership Board has discussed in principle the sharing of information between the partners through a common portal. It seems to us that this is an essential development where increasingly the Council as a whole and individual members will be achieving outcomes for their divisions through partnerships and pooled budgets of other Kent based bodies. We understand that the cost of such a shared database would be considerable...in excess of £1.5 million. However, clearly sharing this cost between the members would both reduce the cost to each member of providing their own dedicated system, and eliminate the possibility of using incompatible systems. Where partners share information the principle becomes *'input once, use many times'*, the possibility of errors should be reduced, and systems should enable automatic updating, Lee Hemsworth said that "the aim was to have a single version of the truth"(Membership of Kent Partnership Board is available at *Appendix E*).

Tower Hamlets Council set up their system driven by the requirement of their LAA partners to have access to one another's information. This included the London Assembly, Police and CDRPs, Fire Service, Health including GP practices, Housing Associations. Voluntary Organisations and the and the FE Sector. The system initially focussed on the Performance Indicators to be delivered by the LAA, and information can be searched by reference to the five corporate priorities of the council. Robin Harris reported that the sharing of information also brought the partners closer together and encouraged corporate working; health organisations in particular were pleased to have access to council social and demographic information to enable them to target campaigns effectively. The results of consultations and survey work by any of the partners is shared and the Council wants to develop real time tracking of activity by the partners eg to measure whether health campaigns are being reflected by a change in the pattern of visits to GP practices.

Warwickshire have created the Warwickshire Observatory bringing together information from the County Council, District Councils, PCTs, Police, and Birmingham City Council).

We recommend that:

R10. A Members portal is developed which provides:

- all information as set out in the Information Protocol which will include the requests formulated initially by the Members Focus Group;
- where appropriate information should be available in map and list form, by development of Kent View if appropriate, to enable the easy comparison of data from a variety of sources;
- an easy reference screen or 'dashboard' on which details of events/ projects being worked on in each County division are listed;
- a current directory of officers names and contact details by function;

R11. An electronic prompt be devised to remind officers when local members need to be consulted and informed;

R12. All training sessions for members should be recorded, made available at any time via the portal, and marketed to other interested bodies.

R13. The Kent Partnership Board be encouraged as a matter of urgency to progress work on sharing of information and use of compatible systems to facilitate this. If this were to be agreed, the partners would then contribute to the Information Protocol described above at R7.

R14. This IMG or a successor body be charged with driving through the actions agreed from this report, and that quarterly reports are submitted to the Selection and Member Services Committee on progress.

IMG on Members Information Terms of Reference:

- The Steering Group gave consideration to its terms of reference which were agreed as follows:-
- To explore what facilities Members require (in terms of information) to enable each Member to discharge their role as a County Councillor;
- Exploring best practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom in information management; and
- To recommend to the Selection and Member Services Committee how County Council Policy can best be implemented, to ensure the Information Point is the focal point for Member Information.

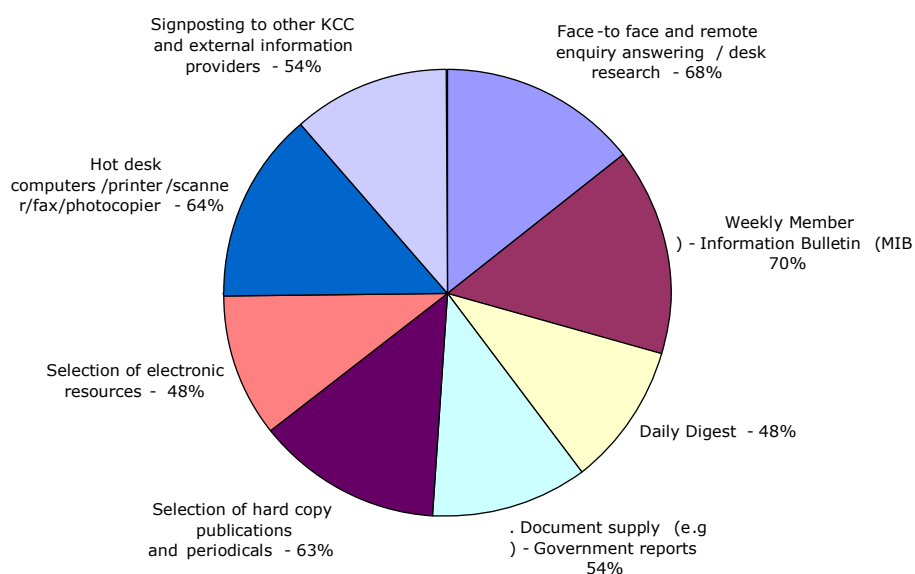
Members Information Survey Analysis & Results (May 2008):

Analysis of the data from the 56 returned questionnaires indicates awareness of the information resources on offer and the role and activities of the Information Point are not fully understood

1. *The Information Point, which is based in Sessions, supports the business of the authority, individual Members, committees and the officers who support them through the provision of library and information services.*

The following services are currently available via the Information Point	Which are you aware of? %	Already use %	Don't use %	Would use %
Face-to face and remote enquiry answering/ desk research	67.86	55.36	17.86	12.50
Weekly Member Information Bulletin (MIB)	69.64	82.14	12.50	5.36
Daily Digest	48.21	39.29	28.57	14.29
Document supply (e.g. Government reports)	53.57	42.86	26.79	19.64
Selection of hard copy publications and periodicals	62.50	50.00	25.00	12.50
Selection of electronic resources	48.21	33.93	19.64	19.64
Hot Desk computers/printer/scanner/fax/ photocopier	64.29	41.07	35.71	7.14
Signposting to other KCC and external information providers	53.57	37.50	26.79	19.64

Which Information Point services are you aware of?



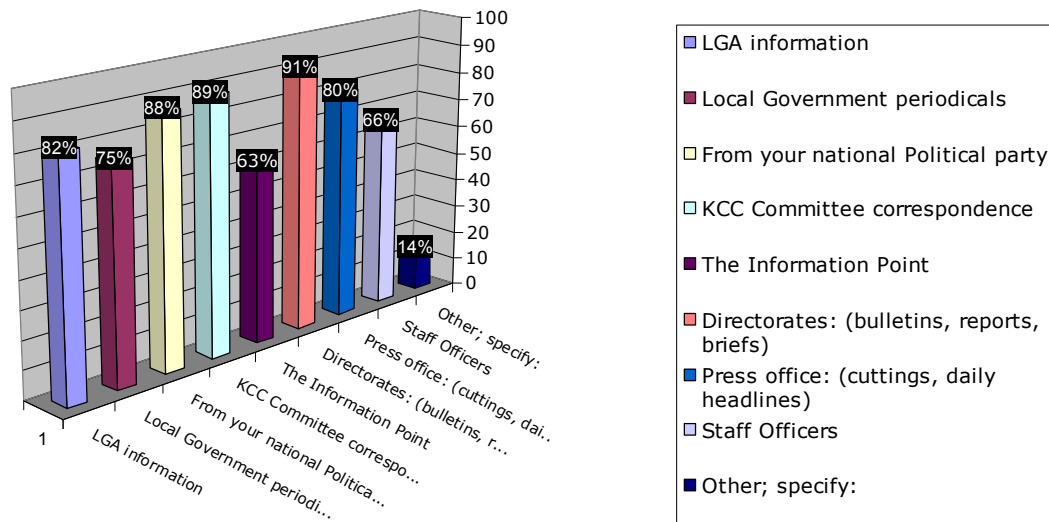
A high number of the people who are aware of the services provided by The information Point use them already or would use them.

However a significant number of people do not use the service pointing to a lack of awareness of the range and nature of the services available.

2. How do you source your information?

Source:	Use: (Yes/No*) (* if 'no' go to column 2)		If 'no' would you like to access (%):		Preferred format: Electronic (E) / Paper (P) (%):		Average response: Usefulness rating: (1: useless – 10: excellent)
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	E (%)	P (%)	
LGA information	82	9	5	2	38	27	6
Local Government periodicals	75	13	2	5	18	38	6
From your national Political party	88	5	4	2	43	21	7
KCC Committee correspondence	89	5	5	2	32	41	7
The Information Point	63	13	7	7	30	25	7
Directorates: (bulletins, reports, briefs)	91	4	5	0	39	36	7
Press office: (cuttings, daily headlines)	80	13	11	2	34	36	7
Staff Officers	66	7	5	0	30	20	8
Other:	14	0	0	0	4	9	8

How do you source your information?



Members use a wide range of sources of information with that received from Directorate being the most common. Although The Information Point is currently the least used of the sources listed, satisfaction is proportionately high.

Additional sources of information mentioned include the media (newspapers, radio, TV), the Internet, professional publications, MP/parish/district, individual KCC officers and member portfolio information.

There is no clear preference for either paper or electronic with both formats garnering similar amount of votes.

3. *What type of additional information would you like to be able to access? (For example, something you have used in a different role, internal or external).*

A large amount of people did not fill this section. Those who did asked for agendas and minutes of meetings, specific statistics/ data and reports, information relevant to their division.

Several people complained about receiving large amounts of irrelevant materials and requested information in a more concise format.

4. Which particular areas of policy are you interested in?

Environment	68%	Planning	64%
Social Care	55%	Education	63%
Health	50%	Regeneration	66%
Children & Family	55%	Culture	45%
Tourism	48%	Transport	75%

5. Do you currently use?

The KNet (KCC Intranet)				The KCC website	www.kent.gov.uk		
Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less
16%	21%	11%	28.57%	21%	36%	6%	13%
Too difficult to use	7.14%			Too difficult to use	5.4%		
I cannot access it	7.14%			I cannot access it	0%		
Nothing of interest for me	1.79%			Nothing of interest for me	4%		

The KCC website is better used than the KNet but overall both media are still underused possibly due to lack of awareness of the information contained within and how to access it.

6. *What further help do you need? e.g. IT training; access to resources available in a previous role (which); more analysis; how to use KNet/KCC website; awareness of available resources (paper and electronic).*

IT training (from basic 'crib sheets' to specific applications e.g. PowerPoint). There also were requests for training relating to facilitation, leadership, time management and admin support.

The Information Point

'Supports *the business of the authority, individual Members, committees and the officers who support them - through the provision of library and information services*'.

Services

The service currently offers:

- **Remote and face-to-face enquiry answering.** The majority can be answered at point of contact, within at least 48hrs - or by negotiation.

The enquiry point is available Monday to Friday 9am-5pm; extended remotely until 6pm and on Saturdays 9am – 5pm via *Ask a Kent Librarian*, the sister general public service based at Springfield.

- **Current Awareness monitoring** (for example - *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill*) - which includes e-mail Bulletins.

- Periodicals (hardcopy & electronic) & newspapers.
- Selection of quick reference, reports and statistical data.
- Document supply - i.e. Government Reports.
- Material researching and purchasing service
- Signposting to other KCC providers of information
- Hot-desk PCs and study space.
- The service also manages the Legal Services collections.

- **Access to Kent library resources** (print and electronic) - including:

- Over 2 million books
- UK and European legislation
- Market research
- Company information (inc. searches)

- Access to electronic subscriptions from your desktop at: <http://www.kent.gov.uk/onlinelibrary>. This includes texts such as 'Who's Who', newspaper articles and Information on subjects such as business or health from commercial databases or tried and tested free-web sources.

Information Flows:

Current awareness email 'bulletins'.

The Information Point compiles and disseminates current awareness bulletins on a daily and weekly basis. It can also monitor and alert you on specific subject areas.

A **Digest** is produced on a daily basis. This is similar to the news sheet that the House of Commons Library produces. It includes government and national press releases, recent publications and parliamentary monitoring (Hansard).

- **The Member Information Bulletin (MIB)** - is produced weekly and is a synopsis of selected government and national press releases, recent publications, parliamentary monitoring and other information relevant to local government. It also contains KCC Member Decisions.

They currently also produce versions of the MIB for the *NHS Overview & Scrutiny Committee*, the Communities Directorate, one for the Press and one for the Kent Partnership.

Internal Bulletins/Alerts

In addition there are various **Internal Bulletins/Alerts** produced by different units within Directorates.

1. **Children, Families and Education (CFE)** produces a current awareness sheet that is loaded onto the Education Cluster Web.

2. **Communities** have a 'bulletin' compiled and distributed by the Information Point.

3. **Corporate Communication** distributes a *National News Headlines* bulletin twice daily and a hard copy press cuttings service.

4. The **Environment and Regeneration Analysis & Information Team (AIT)** produces Bulletins on seven main topics:

1. 2001 Census

2. Population

3. The Economy and the Labour market

4. Deprivation

5. Retail and Town Centres

6. Housing Land

7. Employment Land Use

5. **The Social Services Library and Research Centre** produces several different 'Bulletins'.

This page has been left blank prior to the conclusions of the Focus Group (as detailed in R8).

Kent Partnership

The Kent Partnership is made up of representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sector:

- Graham Badman, Managing Director, Children, Families, Health and Education Kent County Council
- Andrew Bowles, Leader, Swale Borough Council
- Harvey Bradshaw, Area Manager, for Kent Environment Agency
- Roy Bullock, Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Jim Cameron, Group IT Director, Saga
- Rob Cameron, Natural England
- Chris Capron, Chief Executive, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Paul Carter, Leader, Kent County Council
- Barry Clout, Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Services
- Lesley Davies, Area Director Learning and Skills Council
- Roger De Haan, Chairman, Creative Foundation
- Dr Annette Doherty, Senior Vice President, Pfizer
- Clair Fisher, Area Lead for Kent and Medway Government Office for the South East
- Michael Fuller, Chief Constable, Kent Police
- Peter Gilroy, Chief Executive, Kent County Council
- Bob Goldfied, Chief Executive, Port of Dover
- Professor Julia Goodfellow, Vice Chancellor, University of Kent
- Charlie Hendry, Chief Fire Officer, Kent Fire and Rescue Service
- Roger House, Regional Chairman, Federation of Small Businesses
- David Hughes, Chief Executive, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

- Megan McKibbin, Executive Director, Kent Economic Board
- Brendan O' Connor, Interim Representative West Kent Primary Care Trust
- Sir Graeme Odgers, Chairman, Kent Economic Board
- Meradin Peachey, Director of Public Health, Kent County Council
- Steve Phoenix, Chief Executive, West Kent Primary Care Trust
- Susan Priest, Area Director, for Kent and Medway South East England Development Agency
- Robyn Pyle, Director, Land Securities Development
- Lynda Russell, District Manager, Job Centre Plus
- Dev Sharma, Kent Director, North West Kent Racial Equality Council
- Mike Snelling, Leader, Gravesham Borough Council / Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
- Colin Tomson, Chairman, Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust
- Bishop Stephen Venner, Bishop in Canterbury Churches Together in Kent
- Paul Watkins, Leader, Dover District Council / East Kent Partnership
- Chris Wells, Cabinet Member, Children Families and Educational Standards Kent County Council
- Nigel Whitburn, Kent Association of Parish Councils
- Yvonne Wilson, LSP Manager, Medway Council
- Christopher Garland, Leader, Maidstone Borough Council
- Rob Woolley, Kent Children's Fund
- Sir Robert Worcester, Founder, MORI and Chancellor, University of Kent

The members of the IMG are grateful to the following people who gave evidence to us.

Officers of the Kent County Council

Kent Connects & ISG, Peter Welsh, Head of Analysis and Information

Kent View, Alan Lloyd, GIS Manager

Outside witnesses

House of Commons Library

- Dora Clark – Head of Reference Services Section
- John Prince – Head of Reference Room
- Rob Clements, Director of Research
- Edward Wood, Director of Information Management
- Bob Twigger, Director of Information Services for Members
- Keith Parry, Senior Library Clerk, Parliament & Constitution Centre
- Brigitte Onyskiw, Executive Assistant to the Librarian House of Commons Library

Westminster City Council (Unitary Authority)

- Rachel Brown – Web Editor Corporate Information Sites
- John Dimmer – Head of Policy

London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Robin Harris, This Borough Manager