

To: Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 12 January 2010

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities

Subject: The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading

Classification: Unrestricted

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## **Summary**

This report notes progress on the development of a Strategy for Reading and Literacy in Kent – known as the “Kent Approach” – and identifies next steps.

## **FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

1.1. In March 2009 the Communities Policy Overview Committee confirmed its support for the development of a Literacy and Reading Strategy. This recognised the significant contribution of Communities services to the literacy agenda and helps to maintain the momentum gained during National Year of Reading 2008. In particular Members were keen to see more activity to engage young people.

1.2. The need for a strategy, known as the “Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading”, has also been endorsed by Cabinet, Chief Officers and the Kent Partnership. It will help underpin Kent’s Regeneration Framework and the Children and Young People’s Plan and it also supports Kent’s Strategy for Later Life, Supporting People, the Strategy for Public Health in Kent, Supporting Independence, the Cultural Strategy and other priorities. The Kent Approach recognises that there is much good practice but that there is a need for a more strategic and joined-up approach and all Directorates are actively involved. The aim is to develop and embed a culture where everyone in Kent aspires to read and where there is excellent access and signposting to skills development opportunities and support.

1.3. The work is led by Libraries and Archives working closely with CFE, other colleagues in Communities, especially Adult Education, and other partners. This recognises the role that our services can play in the development of key skills and the engagement of key audiences.

1.4. The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading is to provide a sustainable model that eventually can become mainstreamed recognising that our aspiration for 100% literacy is long-term. The approach being taken in the first 18 months is to encourage experimentation and creativity (as is demonstrated in section three below); to put in place mechanisms for joint planning, partnership projects and for networking; to obtain feedback about what works, and to continue with robust information gathering in order to target activity. This will create the conditions for activity to be planned and sustained beyond March 2011.

## 2. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE “KENT APPROACH”

2.1. The Kent Approach aims to provide a continuous cycle of interventions, to enable Kent to reach its aspiration of 100% literacy, through three broad areas of action:- **Conversation, Charter and Challenge**.

2.2. **Conversation** aims to reach the widest possible range of partners and communities in order to get everyone talking about literacy and sharing responsibility to help find new approaches. Key questions will include:

- How can we raise standards of literacy?
- How can we introduce more people to the benefits of reading?
- What are the barriers to success and how can we overcome them?
- What can your organisation contribute?

2.3 . A **Charter**, Pledge or Reading Entitlement for the people of Kent will promote existing services alongside new offers and opportunities. It will aim to raise awareness of the range of facilities and activities that exist at local and county level.

2.4 Continuous **Challenge** aims to maintain commitment to seek new approaches until the goal of 100% literacy has been achieved. This will ensure that the Kent Approach is sustainable recognising that this is a medium to long-term aim. The role of KCC’s Members will be crucial including championing the Kent Approach at local level and ensuring that literacy is at the heart of Kent’s strategic priorities.

## 3. PROGRESS

### Project structure

3.1. A Strategic Manager in Libraries and Archives, Gill Bromley, is managing the project and she reports to a KCC Project Board chaired by the Director for Communities Cultural Services. Board Members include the Executive Director of the Kent Economic Board, the Head of Extended Services (CFE), Head of Kent Adult Education Service, Head of Libraries and Archives, and the Social Care Commissioner For Mental Health (East Kent Adult Services).

3.2 An Implementation Group actions, supports and advises on the development and delivery of the Kent Approach. This Group includes managers from Communities (Youth Service, Adult Education and Libraries and Archives), CFE (Early Years, Local Children’s Services Partnerships, Primary Strategy, Minority Ethnic and Bilingual Service, Supporting Parents, and Study Support), KASS ( Adults with Learning Disabilities) and CED (Innovations, Business Solutions and Policy) as well as Aim Higher (a partnership of Kent’s universities and the Open University, 7 FE colleges and around 60 schools), BBC Learning, Connexions, District Councils, the Employment and Skills Board, the Housing sector, Jobcentre Plus, the Probation Service, and Volunteer Reading Help. The Health sector and the Minority Ethnic service will join the Group as well as an expert in marketing.

## National recognition and involvement

3.3 National recognition of Kent's work during National Year of Reading has continued. *'Kent County Council is a valued partner in the National Literacy Trust's project Partners in Literacy. We continue to be impressed by the combination of strategic activity and sustainable solutions developed ..... We have been particularly impressed by the strategic work....(to) thread literacy into Thanet Works and regeneration activity led by Housing in Swale. This work has the potential to massively extend the reach of literacy support to the families who will benefit most from it. Kent is a shining example of an authority dedicated to making literacy a basic right for all of its communities.* (Manager: Partners for Literacy, National Literacy Trust)

3.4 Kent is actively involved with the DCSF-sponsored Partners in Literacy initiative delivered by the National Literacy Trust, with an aim of improving local outcomes for families through local coordination. It recognises that literacy begins from birth in the home and that the greatest effort should be placed on engaging pre-school children and their families. Kent was also involved in a survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust during the summer of 2009 which sought to:-

- baseline support for literacy in the home
- identify partners who work with families (particularly disadvantaged families)
- map support for families across the community
- identify signposting routes
- provide an opportunity for local partners to contribute ideas
- identify opportunities, good practice and barriers to the approach
- raise awareness of the Partners in Literacy initiative

3.5 In Kent, the survey was disseminated by the Kent Partnership and Children's Trust and attracted 253 responses. The results, at national and local level, highlighted some of the barriers to success which will help target future action. These barriers include:

- lack of confidence of parents and practitioners around knowing what steps they could take to access help and support for literacy
- attitudes of staff in some sectors which come into contact with adults with low literacy skills, including 'not my responsibility'
- a lack of effective signposting and referral

3.6 The "Kent Approach" is also a catalyst for new and innovative partnerships in which Adult Education and Libraries and Archives are playing a central role and some of them will pilot new approaches in 2010 to test models which could be rolled out more widely. These include:

- evaluation and expansion of the Doorstep Library programme which is managed by Bookworkers at Seashells Children's Centre in Sheerness and Millmead Children's Centre in Margate. Adapted from a model used in Southwark, the Doorstep Library provides highly skilled volunteers to read stories to children in some of our most deprived streets. It targets families who are registered with, but do not engage with the Children's Centre.

- work to raise literacy skills of up to 7000 housing tenants in Swale in partnership with Amicus Horizon Housing Association. Amicus will celebrate a Year of Reading in 2010 with events and activities each month linked to Adult Learners Week, National Children’s Book Week etc. Partners will also develop an approach using challenge and reward to encourage more people to read and develop their literacy skills. Challenges will include joining a library, visiting a Skills Plus Centre, using a website, reading 6 Quick Read books, becoming a Time2Give library volunteer etc. Work in Swale has attracted DCSF Child Poverty Innovation funding via the Local Children’s Services Partnership (LCSP) as well as housing association investment in literacy.
- Thanet Works and Thanet LCSPs’ work to raise standards in schools and get people into work which has identified literacy as the top priority. Literacy will be embedded into all Thanet Works initiatives. Partners will also develop an offer and a Route Map to literacy recognising the need to remove the barriers which prevent people accessing skills development opportunities and support. Many people are also unaware that the support provided by adult education and libraries is free. Working Neighbourhoods Fund and Child Poverty Innovation funding will support this work.
- a partnership led by Connexions in Kent Thameside which will target young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Key partners include the Youth Service and Y.M.C.A..
- ‘*Reading Buddies*’ schemes in schools where young people and adults listen to children read, including KCC Staff Volunteers, a new employee volunteering scheme at Maidstone District Council which is being established for this purpose, and a ‘doorstep library scheme’ in Thanet
- Support for the national Homelessness trailblazer initiative in Ashford where the District Council has recognised that literacy skills are the biggest single factor when it comes to a person’s ability to retain a job which will enable them to retain their home. The scheme has raised housing officers’ awareness of Adult Education and Library services so that they in turn can advise their tenants and other people faced with homelessness.
- Giving new momentum to existing programmes such as “test the organisation” and “book start”.

### 3.7 We are also exploring opportunities to:

- Establish a forum for literacy and reading in every District bringing together key partners around local priorities. This will also demonstrate that literacy is key to all strategic priorities including economic success, health and wellbeing, stronger and safer communities and enjoying life.
- develop a *Reading Recovery* scheme to support adult learners based on the model used in schools

- work with the Community Safety sector to target people on probation, young offenders and people held in police custody and also develop new audiences including young people not in education, employment or training .
- Pilot a R.E.A.D. (Reading Education Assistance Dogs) scheme, in schools and libraries where reluctant readers, in particular boys, are given the opportunity to read aloud to a therapy dog. The scheme operates in the U.S.A. and will link to existing use of therapy dogs in Kent schools.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCING**

4.1 As well as keeping momentum on the practical action described above, the priorities now are to:

- complete mapping including baseline and current provision
- confirm priorities and target audiences which include adult learners and families and other audiences referred to above
- identify further pilot projects
- develop an evaluation framework
- develop a Communications Strategy including effective use of internet and new technologies to reach target audiences. A virtual Partnership Network will enable effective 2-way communications as well provide as access to expertise and connections with target audiences. This network is expected to include 200 or more organisations.

4.2 The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading recognises that many of the services, facilities and activities already exist that are needed to achieve the goal. These include adult learning provision and library services as well, of course, as schools and extended services, children's centres, ESOL provision and many others. Maximising access to and synergy between these resources will be a critical success factor, especially during an economic downturn.

4.3 As demonstrated above, the Kent Approach is already attracting investment and CFE Extended Services has recently confirmed funding to enable Libraries and Archives to sustain the Bookstart and Booktime schemes for babies and early years children in 2010-11. The project will continue to pursue investment opportunities including seedcorn funding to test new approaches which will engage new audiences and new partners.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Members are asked to:

(i) NOTE the activity that has taken place and the continuing momentum of this work

(ii) ADVISE on ways in which KCC elected Members might act as ambassadors for literacy and reading in their local communities

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