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To: Learning and Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Subject: The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading: a strategy to engage the whole community

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

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

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Purpose

1.1. The need for a strategy, known as the “Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading”, has been endorsed by Cabinet on the 30th March 2009, Chief Officers and the Kent Partnership. The strategy aims to engage the whole community and will help underpin the work schools, 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.

1.2. The Kent Approach recognises that there is much good practice but that there is a need for a more strategic and joined-up approach. It will seek to engage communities across Kent to enhance the teaching of functional literacy skills in schools and adult education centres through the development of new partnerships and initiatives. It recognises that everyone has a stake in this agenda and that we can only achieve our aim of 100% literacy if we work together and takes a community approach to literacy and reading. All Directorates are actively involved.

1.3 The Kent Approach also recognises that reading benefits health and wellbeing. It will seek to promote a love of stories from the earliest age to stimulate a desire to learn to read. It will also promote the enjoyment of reading to people who suffer ill health including mental illness, to adults and children who have learning disabilities, and to people who are isolated or lonely. KASS and the health service are key partners.

Drivers

1.4 *Literacy Changes Lives: a summary of the impact of reading on individuals, communities and the nation* www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/Literacy_changes_lives.pdf provides evidence that places reading firmly on the agenda of those who lead work to improve people's lives and the wellbeing of local communities. In relation to learning and employment Literacy changes Lives highlights the fact that:

- 70% of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic English
- currently one in six adults cannot read at the level expected of an eleven year old
- over 95% of all employment in the U.K. requires employees to be able to read

1.5 Research into attitudes towards reading commissioned by DCSF has highlighted that only 24% of C2DE parents see the link between reading and success in life. See [www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes to Reading in England](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes_to_Reading_in_England)

1.6 Literacy and reading support all 5 aims of Every Child Matters and are vital to the 3 main pillars of the new CFE structure:

- primary health care
- educational provision and attainment
- safeguarding and child protection, health and child development

1.7 Given that this is a long-term aspiration it is vital that we target those who are most in need as a first priority. Priorities for CFE include Early Years, Key Stage 2, National Challenge Schools and their communities - including feeder primary schools, children and young people in care and those on free school meals and engaging with families and communities where literacy is an issue and where reading is not valued – utilising different approaches to adult literacy and family learning to engage people who do not currently engage. We will work with Children's Centres, schools, Social Care teams, the voluntary and community sector and the Leaving Care service.

Aims

1.8 The aim is to develop and embed a culture where everyone in Kent, regardless of first language, ability or age, aspires to read and where there is excellent access and signposting to skills development opportunities and support. The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading recognises that:

- functional literacy skills i.e. the ability to read are the key to a fulfilling life
- that reading and success go hand in hand
- reading can be anything, not just books, anytime, anywhere
- it is never too early or too late
- a love of reading can enable us to escape from or cope with the challenges of modern society including ill-health, loneliness and depression
- we must foster a climate where reading is valued and enjoyed in every home and every community

1.9 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 engage a wide range of organisations, staff and individuals in championing reading and literacy; to strongly encourage experimentation and creativity (as is demonstrated in section three below); to put in place mechanisms for joint planning, commissioning and delivery of support programmes; to obtain feedback and evidence around 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.

1.10 The work to develop the Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading is led by Libraries and Archives working closely with CFE, Adult Education, KASS and a wide range of other partners beyond KCC including Health and the Voluntary Sector. This recognises the role of libraries in promoting an enjoyment of reading as well as providing opportunities for learning. This role includes signposting, for example, to adult education programmes and facilities, and in helping to stimulate the love of reading which is essential if children and adults are to aspire to learn to read or improve their reading skills.

1.11 The Project Manager (based in the Communities Directorate) is working closely with many CFE teams. In the past 6 months she has worked closely with the Extended Services Team and has met the Early Years Team, LCSP Managers, Reading Recovery, Educational Psychologists and has given a presentation to National Challenge Schools at their request.

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 this project. 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 Partnership and Operations (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), Connexions, District Councils, the Employment and Skills Board, the Health Service, the Housing sector, Jobcentre Plus, the Probation Service, and Volunteer Reading Help. It is envisaged that the Implementation Group will become a standing forum for the promotion of literacy and reading in Kent, based on a well established model in Rochdale. It will ensure that the Kent Approach is championed and sustained in the longer term.

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 in Literacy, National Literacy Trust)

3.4 Kent is actively involved with the DCSF-sponsored Partners in Literacy (PiL) initiative delivered by the National Literacy Trust (NLT). We will be a pilot for PiL in 2010-11 having recently been awarded £40k funding for the appointment of a Coordinator. The coordinator will be based in the Learning group in CFE and will concentrate on engaging families with young children (0-5) and those families from disadvantaged backgrounds in literacy and reading programmes and activities –working closely with Children's centres and schools. The NLT is working with local authorities to develop a strategic and coordinated approach to literacy, with a focus on literacy in the home. The long term goal is for more families to access local provision and actively support speaking, listening, reading and writing in the home.

3.5 Kent was also involved in a survey conducted by the NLT 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

3.6 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

Partnership approach

3.7 The "Kent Approach" is also a catalyst for new and innovative partnerships in which Children's Centres, Schools, Kent Adult Education Service and a wide range of partners are playing a central role. Some 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, the LCSPs, Libraries and Adult Education and supported by DCSF Child Poverty Innovation funding. Amicus will celebrate a Year of Reading in 2010 with events and activities 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. .
- 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. A wide and innovative range of partners, including Turner Contemporary, 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. as well as the LCSPs, the Youth Service, Libraries and Adult Education.

- 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 family 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. Our adult education service provides a wide range of free programmes and initiatives to support literacy including Skills Plus Centres and Family Language, Literacy and Numeracy programmes. KCC is committed to achieving the Go Award which has been developed to enable local authorities to demonstrate their commitment to the Government's basic skills strategy, Skills for Life by working with their employees at all levels to address skills needs including literacy.

3.8 We continue to explore new opportunities to progress our aims and to test new approaches. We will see 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.
- Expand the number of '*Reading Buddies*' schemes in schools where young people and adults listen to children read, including KCC Staff Volunteers, and a new employee volunteering scheme at Maidstone District Council which is being established for this purpose.
- Pilot a R.E.A.D. (Reading Education Assistance Dogs) scheme, linked to Volunterr Reading Help and Reading Recovery, 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 to provide baseline
- map current provision
- confirm priorities and target audiences
- 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 organizations.
- Initiate the Kent Conversation, Charter and Challenge

4.2 The Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading recognises that many of the services, facilities and activities that are needed to achieve the goal already exist. 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. Bookstart enabled us to reach 47,944 pre-school children in 2008-09 including 100% of babies at registration, 83% of children aged 18-30 months via health visitors, and 100% of children aged 36-48 months via Children's Centres and other partners. CFE will work with Communities to find ways to sustain the Bookstart beyond 2010-11. We will continue to pursue investment opportunities including seedcorn funding to test new approaches which will engage new audiences and new partners. This might provide opportunities for KCC Member grants to support local initiatives.

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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