

Proposed Response

In developing Maidstone Borough Council's response to the white paper we have considered the issues and implications for the three areas the paper is split into:

- Individual Services
- Neighbourhood Services
- Community Services

Whilst we welcome the intentions of the white paper we have also considered the areas that the white paper does not cover that would lead to more open public services. There are several gaps for example changes to contract and procurement rules that would allow more smaller voluntary sector and community groups to bid for services. The White Paper does not deal with the support required to encourage innovation and grow social enterprise to deliver services for residents. Other gaps include detail on how to measure the social and financial value of services – will there be a consistent approach nationally or is it up to us locally to determine how we measure success? The other area of concern is getting the critical mass of groups and organizations to run services and the support needed to do this. We have concerns that the accountability measures will increase bureaucracy and the administrative burden for local government and others recreating new regulatory bodies in place of those the government removed.

Individual Services

The paper outlines that funding will follow choice, there will be consultation on how to collect performance satisfaction data and there will be a means of redress through the Ombudsman. As a Council we are already considering implementing our own local accountability framework which will include measuring satisfaction with our services through a resident survey. As part of developing the accountability framework we will be introducing more performance reporting to our residents. We are concerned that the intentions of the paper in regard to collecting performance data will introduce new burdens and possibly reintroduce a new version of the place survey. We believe that it is important that we are accountable to our residents and any measures must be developed locally and reported to residents, rather than looking to national government. With regards to the focus on accountability and Members, Councillors should be given more training and support to act as community champions.

Neighbourhood Services

The paper identifies that neighbourhood councils could be given new rights to take over some local services. How will this be developed in areas that are not fully parished and/or areas where community groups are not well developed or willing to take on this role? The suggestion of a national framework for local schemes – seems to imply more regulation and control, which we would treat with caution.

Commissioned Services

The paper identifies that we should be focused on outcomes when commissioning services. We support this and agree that agreement of outcomes will be needed as part of any service model developed that involves the Council commissioning others to deliver services. We also agree that we need to transparently link payments to results and this should form part of any agreement we have in place with third parties. In terms of services commissioned by central government, no services have been identified in the paper, we will be reviewing this to identify areas where we may want to deliver services on behalf of others. The paper outlines that full access to public sector procurement and contract data will be given. This could have a financial impact on the council, careful thought will need to be given on how data will be published and used.