

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

12 AUGUST 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND REGNERATION

Report prepared by Ryan O'Connell

1. COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL – IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider Council's approach to improving Community Engagement as a result of the Communities in Control White Paper and the work of the Communities in Control Group. The report considers what actions to take in order to improve the engagement of the public with the Council and its services, respond to the Communities in Control White Paper and strengthen the Council's discharge of its Duty to Involve.

1.2 Recommendation of the Director of Prosperity and Regeneration

That the action plan (Appendix A) be agreed, including the significant Neighbourhood Forums element.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Background

1.3.2 The Communities in Control: Real people, Real power White Paper was published on 9 July 2008. Its stated aims were to:

"...pass power into the hands of local communities. We want to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country and to give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens".

The white paper put forward a number of approaches to try to achieve its aims. These have been broadly categorised as:

- Local Councils – Duty to Involve
- Support for becoming a more active citizen or volunteer
- Providing more access to information
- Making sure petitions are acted upon
- Increasing influence on council budgets and policies
- Having more say in your neighbourhood
- Giving older and young people a stronger voice

- Enabling those with power to be held to account
- Providing redress when things go wrong
- Making it easier to stand for office
- Community ownership and control

1.3.3 Arguably the most important outcome from the White Paper for Councils is the introduction of a 'Duty to Promote Democracy' and extension of the 'Duty to Involve'. However, the recommendations in this report seek to address all the above topics in order to ensure that the Council discharges its duty effectively and improves Community engagement across the Borough.

1.3.4 The Duty to Involve applies to all best value organisations, including local authorities, and came into effect from 1 April 2009. The stated purpose of the duty is to: *'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment. This means that authorities consider, as a matter of course, the possibilities for provision of information to, consultation with and involvement of representatives of local persons across all authority functions'*

1.3.5 What do we do now?

1.3.6 Provision of Information – Examples of methods the Council currently uses are its website, the Borough Update, electronic notice boards and provision of information on elections and registration through its poll cards.

1.3.7 Consultations - Examples of consultations are on specific service changes and how the authority spends its money, e.g. through focus groups and on-line interactive exercises.

1.3.8 Involvement - A large amount of work has been undertaken on youth engagement through initiatives such as Youth Scrutiny, the Youth Forum and Voting Days and activities held with local schools to engage the students in the political process and increase awareness of decision making. In addition, events such as the Big Debate have been held in the past to invite public opinion and involvement.

1.3.9 Where does this put us?

1.3.10 For all the individual actions on engagement and empowerment the introduction of the Duty to Involve prompts us to re-examine our approach on a corporate level. The evidence and research undertaken by officers to date suggests that performance needs to be improved if Maidstone is to achieve a top quartile position. In turn this means that our current approach to informing, consulting and engaging needs to be critically examined and that options for change considered (subject to the usual parameters of affordability and value for money).

1.3.11 Analysis of the place survey indicators in a Kent context, that are relevant to the Communities in Control White Paper, are listed in the table Table A - Place Survey 2008 below. Of the National Indicators NI4 is of particular concern with the Council ranked 9th of the Kent districts. The Council ranks well in NIs 1, 5 and 6 but poor to average in the direct questions asked in the survey.

1.3.12 Table B – National Context provides the wider picture of the Council’s performance against other authorities nationally and sets out the upper quartiles.

TABLE A - PLACE SURVEY 2008

LOCAL AUTHORITY	Authority Type	strongly or tend to agree local council provides value for money?	very or fairly satisfied with how council runs things	Generally speaking would you like to be more involved in the decisions that affect your local area	% who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (NI 1)	% who feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood (NI 2)	% who have been involved in decisions that affect the local area in the past 12 months (NI 3)	% who agree that they can influence decisions in their local area (NI 4)	% who are satisfied with their local area as a place to live (NI 5)	% who have given unpaid help at least once per month over the last 12 months (NI 6)
Medway Council	UA	27.4	39.5	31.5	70.4	55.0	14.7	23.4	67.8	20.6
Ashford Borough Council	DC	35.0	44.2	25.3	77.6	56.1	13.2	28.7	84.3	24.0
Canterbury City Council	DC	34.6	49.4	26.3	81.7	56.1	12.2	28.2	84.6	22.4
Dartford Borough Council	DC	34.9	49.1	29.9	71.2	52.8	9.1	27.6	71.8	18.3
Dover District Council	DC	31.9	43.1	25.7	74.6	61.8	13.7	27.8	80.8	23.0
Gravesham Borough Council	DC	34.0	49.8	27.6	74.3	57.2	15.7	30.4	72.3	23.8
Maidstone Borough Council	DC	32.0	44.0	27.3	80.5	59.3	12.7	25.4	85.2	24.6
Sevenoaks District Council	DC	34.6	48.8	27.8	78.1	66.3	14.6	30.2	87.0	27.7
Shepway District Council	DC	25.5	34.6	27.5	76.6	59.0	11.8	22.1	79.3	22.9
Swale Borough Council	DC	26.5	36.2	24.4	73.0	58.5	10.7	24.4	73.2	21.6
Thanet District Council	DC	25.3	33.6	29.8	65.8	55.4	10.1	21.1	70.2	20.7
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	DC	36.7	50.8	23.9	77.0	61.7	11.2	29.4	83.8	23.5
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	DC	30.3	42.4	25.9	77.3	59.4	15.8	26.4	85.6	26.8
Kent County Council	CC	31.6	43.7	26.7	75.8	58.7	12.5	26.7	80.2	23.3
Maidstone Borough Council	DC	32.0	44.0	27.3	80.5	59.3	12.7	25.4	85.2	24.6
Kent District Average (Excl KCC, Med)		31.8	43.8	26.8	75.6	58.6	12.6	26.8	79.8	23.3
Maidstone Kent Rank (Excl KCC, Med)		7	7	7	2	5	6	9	3	3

TABLE B – NATIONAL CONTEXT**Overall Perception**

Indicator	Maidstone	Best in Kent	Top Quartile England	Top Quartile Districts
Strongly or tend to agree local council provides value for money?	32%	T& M 36.7%	37.5%	39.1%
Very or fairly satisfied with how council runs things	44.0%	T&M 50.8%	50.1%	51.4%
Would you like to be more involved in the decisions that affect your local area	27.3%	Dartford 29.9%	27.5%	26.7%

18 National Indicators

Indicator	Maidstone	Best in Kent	Top Quartile England	Top Quartile Districts
their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (NI 1)	80.5%	Canterbury 81.7%	81.7%	82.9%
they belong to their immediate neighbourhood (NI 2)	59.3%	Sevenoaks 66.3%	63.9%	66.2%
% who have been involved in decisions that affect the local area in the past 12 months (NI 3)	12.7%	Tunbridge Wells 15.8%	15.9%	16.0%
% who agree that they can influence decisions in their local area (NI 4)	25.4%	Gravesham 30.4%	30.8%	30.6%
% who are satisfied with their local area as a place to live (NI 5)	85.2%	Sevenoaks 87.0%	86.5%	88.2%
% who have given unpaid help at least once per month over the last 12 months (NI 6)	24.6%	Sevenoaks 27.7%	27.0%	28.9%
% who think that anti-social behaviour is a problem in their local area (NI 17)	14.1%	Ashford 10.9%	13.2%	11.3%
% who agree that the police and other local public services are successfully dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime in their local area (NI 21)	25.7%	Dover 27.7%	29.1%	29.5%
% who agree that in their local area parents take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children (NI 22)	30.1%	Sevenoaks 35.1%	34.5%	36.5%
% who think there is a problem with people not treating each other with respect and consideration in their local area (NI 23)	27.7%	Sevenoaks 25.2%	23.4%	21.2%

% who agree that the police and other local public services seek people's views about anti-social behaviour and crime in their local area (NI 27)	25.8%	Dover 27.2%	26.9%	26.5%
% who feel informed about what to do in the event of a large-scale emergency (NI 37)	15.0%	Dover 23.0%	17.3%	18.7%
% who think that drunk and rowdy behaviour is a problem in their local area (NI 41)	22.7%	Ashford 14.3%	22.6%	20.8%
% who think that drug use or drug dealing is a problem in their local area (NI 42)	20.8%	Ashford 14.0%	21.8%	19.8%
% who say their health is good or very good (NI 119)	78.1%	Sevenoaks 82.5%	79.8%	80.1%
% people aged 65 and over who are satisfied with both home and neighbourhood (NI 138)	87.0%	Dover 87.9%	88.2%	89.4%
% who think that older people in their local area get the help and support they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to (NI 139)	28.5%	Shepway 33.5%	33.4%	34.1%
% who would say that they have been treated with respect and consideration by their local public services in the last year (NI 140)	75.6%	Sevenoaks 79.4%	77.5%	78.8%

Percentage of residents very or fairly well satisfied with the following service

	Maidstone	Highest in Kent	Top Quartile All England	Top Quartile Districts
Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse	59.5%	Sevenoaks 66.3%	62.7%	64.0%
Refuse collection	85.5%	Sevenoaks 90.0%	83.4%	84.7%
Doorstep recycling	51.3%	Dartford 81.2%	75.5%	76.1%
Local tips / household waste recycling centres	67.0%	Dartford 78.5%	77.5%	78.6%
Local transport information	40.7%	Canterbury 49.1%	51.0%	48.1%
Local bus services	42.6%	Thanet 65.3%	59.4%	54.1%
Sport / leisure facilities	42.5%	Gravesham 56.9%	51.2%	51.7%
Libraries	69.3%	Tonbridge & Malling 70.8%	72.5%	73.1%
Museums / galleries	58.0%	Maidstone	47.4%	46.5%
Theatres / Concert halls	43.8%	Tunbridge Wells 63.2%	50.3%	50.4%
Parks and open spaces	73.0%	Tunbridge Wells 81.9%	73.7%	74.6%

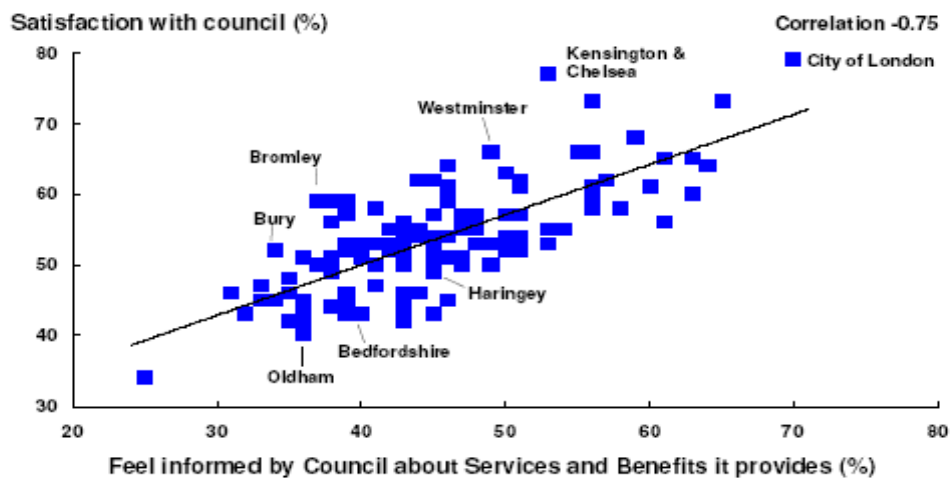
1.3.13 Clearly, there is room for improvement across all areas of the survey.

The Council is best in Kent for only one of the measures (Museums/galleries) and does not fair well against the District top quartile figures nationally, which we clearly, as an Excellent Council, should be aiming for. Of particular relevance to community engagement; for NI 3 we are lower median quartile, for NI 4 we are bottom quartile for all England.

1.3.14 Why is this Important?

1.3.15 From the BVPI 2006 survey data a correlation was drawn between two important areas – feeling informed and opportunities for participation – and levels of satisfaction with Councils:

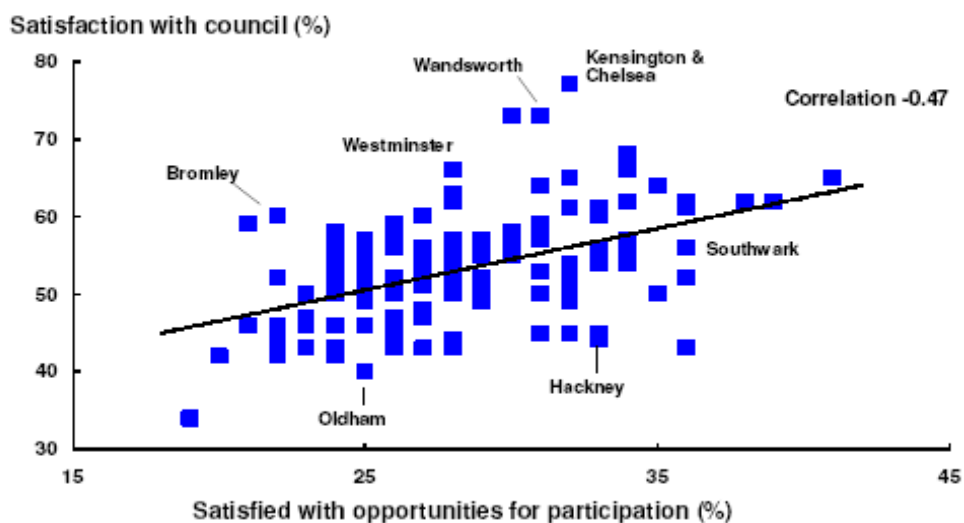
Satisfaction and Feeling Informed



Base: BVPI 2006 (130 Single, Upper Tier and District Ipsos MORI client authorities)

Source: Ipsos MORI

Opportunities for Participation and Satisfaction with the Council



Base: BVPI 2006 (129 Single, Upper Tier and District Ipsos MORI client authorities)

Source: Ipsos MORI

1.3.16 The outcome of the Place Survey will form an important part of the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment increasing the importance of getting community engagement, including providing opportunities for participation and informing residents, right.

1.3.17 It is important to not only consider the Council's duty to involve the community but also the ethos behind the White Paper, which is not just about finding out what the Community thinks, but also transferring 'real power' to them. In practical terms this means where appropriate, passing decision making, financial control and assets to the community.

1.3.18 How do we address this?

1.3.19 In response to the Communities in Control White Paper, and utilising work already done on the Councillors Commission recommendations (which the White Paper was in part a response to) a project approach was taken to consider the implications of the White Paper and how the Council could implement its aims for community engagement and involvement (and the subsequent Duty to Involve).

1.3.20 Two workshops were held involving senior managers and Members with the objective of identifying and prioritising areas of work to improve information and involvement. Once the priority list of topics was established the Group split into workstreams to concentrate on the different areas.

1. Parishes, Neighbourhoods and Communities

Topics: Devolution of power to parishes, parish/urban councils, define and identify communities, neighbourhood management – improvement and engagement

2. Partnerships

Topics: LSP (incl. governance), community scrutiny of partnerships, partnership decision making with local people

3. Finance and Assets

Topics: Devolved budgets, community ownership of assets, participatory budgeting

4. Quality of Service

Topics: Informed staff, standards of service, access to information and communication, customer service and complaints, role of councillors

5. Engagement

Topics: Youth engagement, encouraging voting, community engagement in planning, incentivised participation

1.3.21 In addition to the work undertaken by the Group a number of initiatives that had an impact on Community Involvement and Engagement were started elsewhere in the Council these have been considered and brought into the work done by the Group. For example Community Asset Transfer is a strong idea in the White Paper and a priority topic from the focus days; this work was already underway at the Council. Another major example is the work on Neighbourhood Forums that has been undertaken with Kent County Council.

1.3.22 The three main objectives covered by the actions have been classified as:

1. Customer Service and Information
2. Improving Engagement
3. Community Ownership

1.3.23 Each of the actions in the action plan relates to one or more of the priority topics and each has had a recommendation template completed for it. The purpose of the templates is to explain the recommendations, their objective, how they relate to the white paper, options appraisals, costings and an estimate of the time and work involved. These templates are attached to the action plan as Appendix B.

1.3.24 Three significant areas of change proposed are Neighbourhood Forums, Community Neighbourhood Engagement and Community Asset Transfer.

1.3.25 Neighbourhood Forums

The introduction of Neighbourhood Forums is a major step towards the objective of improving engagement. The options and considerations outlined under Neighbourhoods and Communities in Appendix B are still under discussion with Kent County Council and are the specifics of the proposal are therefore subject to change. The principle of moving ahead with the forums is still recommended regardless of any changes made to the specifics.

1.3.26 Community/Neighbourhood Engagement

As part of the Communities in Control work MAPs and PACTs were looked at to see if any lessons could be learned from them. Evaluations of MAPs and PACTs formed background documents to this report and informed the action plan. From the lessons learned it is proposed to produce an

Engagement Charter that will form part of the Council's Customer Service Charter.

1.3.27 Appendix C sets out the evaluation of the effectiveness of Multi-Agency Partnerships (MAPs) and Partners and Communities Together (PACT). The evaluation sets out a number of recommendations arising from the work. Not all of these have been included in the action plan but will inform the content of the Engagement Charter that is proposed.

1.3.28 The Planning for Real initiative is of particular interest and will be explored as part of the work on Community/Neighbourhood Engagement.

1.3.29 Community Asset Transfer

Work is underway on Community Asset Transfer and the expected products are:

- A Community Asset Transfer Strategy
- A Community Asset Audit

This topic will be covered by a separate report at a later date in the Autumn.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 Other actions and options could be considered in order to improve the Council's engagement with its community and steps towards improving community involvement in decision making. However, this is not recommended as the options in this report are the result of prioritization by Members and senior officers of the Council.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 Community engagement impacts on everything the Council does and the proposals seek to embed engagement in all the Council's activities. The proposals will therefore have an impact on all corporate objectives.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 Ineffective Engagement

There is a risk that the methods of engagement recommended by the group will be ineffective and therefore represent a waste of time and resources. Aside from the direct impact this could have it could also lead to reputational damage. In order to manage this risk a number of the recommendations relate to ensuring that our information is sound and a consultation on engagement is proposed.

1.6.2 Inability to meet our duty to involve

The Council's Duty to Involve is a requirement by government, the risk of us not meeting this requirement is reduced by the recommendations in this report.

1.6.3 Low CAA rating due to engagement

The recommendations in this report are aimed at reducing this risk directly.

1.6.4 Project failure

A number of projects are proposed within the recommendations. These would all be implemented following the Council's project management principles.

1.6.5 Financial and Legal Issues Arising from Devolution of Power

No Powers (financial or decision making) will be devolved to any other body without the necessary controls (agreements, contracts, requirements etc.) being put in place. In order to ensure this the Council will involve its finance and legal sections and seek external advice where necessary.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

1.7.2 Financial – A number of the proposals have financial implications which are considered in the report and appendices

1.7.3 Staffing – Staffing changes are proposed within the report the implications of which will need to be fully considered should the recommendations be approved.

1.7.4 Legal – There are legal implications on the devolution of work to parishes and the transfer of any finances or powers the Council has to another group or organisation. These will be considered as part of the formation of any groups or undertaking of the work (such as the Neighbourhood Forums or devolution of power to parishes).

1.8 Conclusions

1.8.1 This report summarises and makes recommendations based on the work of the Communities in Control Group in response to the Communities in Control White paper and the Council's duty to involve.

1.9 Background Documents

1.9.1 Communities in Control White Paper

NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED

Is this a Key Decision? Yes No

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan? ___June 2009_____

Is this an Urgent Key Decision? Yes No

APPENDIX A

	Action (incl. topic)	Completion Date	Funds	Staff	Responsible	Objective
1	A multi-disciplinary project team be set up to further explore the application of the Circles of Need model. [Customer Service/Informed Staff]	Jan-10	Not yet identified	The project team should include: • Public Relations • Performance & Review • BTP • The Contact Centre • Finance • Appropriate Heads of Service	PT	Customer Service
2	The Council implement online complaints tracking as per authorities below: http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/complaints/ http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4975 [Access to information/communication]	Q3 2009	£5k	Existing web team - 20 days	PT	Customer Service
3	Implement a "you said we did" to feed back to residents as per the authorities below: http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Housing/Community+Involvement/You+Saidthe+We+Did.htm http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/content.php?page=complain_yswd [Customer service/communication/standards of service]	Q3 2009	None	Existing web team 10 days and 1 day per month ongoing	PT	Customer Service
4	Crystal Mark the Council's web site see: http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/internet_crystal_mark/ [Access to information/communication]	Q3 2009	£1500 +VAT for first year and an annual cost of £750 +VAT	Minimal staff resource	PT	Customer Service
5	Develop enhanced web 2.0 capabilities on the council's website. [Access to information/communication]	Q4 2009	approx. £10k	Existing web team - 20 days	PT	Customer Service
6	That a report on the Mosaic project be presented to CMT [Customer service/communication/standards of service/Define and Identify Communities]	End of July 2009.	To be set out in project plan	To be set out in project plan	GH/RA	Customer Service
7	Use CRM data as part of Customer Insight. [Customer service/communication/standards of service/Define and Identify Communities]	Dependant on Mosaic project	The use of CRM data should be included within the Mosaic project	The use of CRM data should be included within the Mosaic project	PT	Customer Service
8	Develop an Asset Transfer process to enable Community groups to bid for their desired community assets [Community ownership of assets]	Separate report	Separate report	Separate report	PT	Community Ownership
9	Put forward a suggestion to scrutiny that as part of their work programme for 2009/10 they review the governance and engagement arrangements of the LSP. [LSP and community scrutiny of partnerships]	Completed (the Committee opted not to include this in its work programme)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Improving Engagement
10	Identify with the LSP how sub-groups will engage with neighbourhoods and communities. MBC to take the lead on developing action plans and these plans and actions should be monitored by the External Scrutiny Committee as part of the work programme. [LSP and community scrutiny of partnerships]	Covered in work on Neighbourhood Forums	None	None	PT	Improving Engagement

APPENDIX A

	Action (incl. topic)	Completion Date	Resourcing		Responsible	Objective
			Funds	Staff		
11	As part of the Overview and Scrutiny Function Review, Scrutiny team to work with members on considering new structures for scrutiny that could improve Community Engagement e.g. area based scrutiny. [Community scrutiny of partnerships]	Jan-10	None	Existing	LS	Improving Engagement
12	Work with KCC to establish a joint committee with other districts to scrutinise Kent Area Agreement 2. [Community scrutiny of partnerships]	Post 2009/10 (6 monthly updates)	Financial contribution split across participating authorities. Level of contribution will depend on final structure of the committee.	Existing – Scrutiny Manager already working with KCC on this.	LS	Improving Engagement
13	Appoint co-optees for the External OSC for scrutiny of the Maidstone LSP and CDRP, this scrutiny to include performance management and reviewing the outcomes of projects. [LSP and Community scrutiny of partnerships]	Consideration following the External OSC meeting 07/09/09	None	Existing	LS	Improving Engagement
14	As part of the Overview and Scrutiny Function Review, consider advertising petitions to the public as a mechanism to hold neighbourhood/scrutiny committee meetings	Jan-10	No immediate costs – if Members decide this is an appropriate option for Scrutiny, costs likely to be incurred in hiring venues, publicity etc	None immediately, however if proves successful, increased staffing could be required.	LS	Improving Engagement
15	That we go ahead with Neighbourhood Forums on the basis of the principles and terms of reference in 'Appendix B - Maidstone Neighbourhood Forums' and authority be given to the Director of Prosperity and Regeneration to take the necessary steps to implement the Neighbourhood Forums with KCC. [Neighbourhood Management – Improvement and Engagement/Participatory Budgeting/Partnership Decision Making with Local People/Devolved budgets/Define and Identify Communities]	Dependant on talks with KCC, desired start of November 2009 to achieve funding for 2010/2011	See attached document	See attached document	NH	Improving Engagement

APPENDIX A

	Action (incl. topic)	Completion Date	Resourcing		Responsible	Objective
			Funds	Staff		
16	That all of the current work on Youth Engagement is scoped and that it is determined which of the two approaches of co-ordination or amalgamation should be supported [Youth engagement]	Decision to be taken by Dec 2009	Dependant on choice of approach (see attached document)	Dependant on choice of approach (see attached document)	NH	Improving Engagement
17	That the Democratic Services Manager identify all powers that could be devolved by the Borough Council to Parish Councils. [Devolution of power to Parishes]	Dec-09	None	None	NH	Community Ownership
18	That the Parish Councils are asked if they are interested in taking on any other powers identified in the exercise. [Devolution of power to Parishes]	Dec-09	None	None	NH	Community Ownership
19	That the issue of Devolution of Powers to Parishes is reconsidered in the light of Parish Councils responses and if an interest is shown in devolving powers consideration is then given to discussing the ideas with the relevant department to see whether any ideas could be moved forward and powers transferred. [Devolution of power to Parishes]	Dependant on outcome of consultation	Dependant on outcome of consultation	Dependant on outcome of consultation	NH	Community Ownership
20	Produce a charter on community engagement, to be included in the Customer Service Charter [Customer service/communication/standards of service]	Nov-09	None	None	RA/PT	Improving Engagement
21	Devolved budgets to be covered by Scrutiny work programme 2009/10 (agreed - included in Corporate Services OSC work programme)	Apr-10	None	None	LS	Improving Engagement
22	Value for money and representativeness of concurrent functions be examined	Dec-09	None	None	NH	Community Ownership
23	Strengthen the role of Councillors as a means of communicating and identifying community issues - using inductions and for newer Members - Communications from the Front Lines - Feedback and evidence required for CAA	Ongoing	None	None	NH	Improving Engagement
24	That a report on Planning for Real as part of Neighbourhood Planning (Appendix C) go to the Cabinet Member for Community Services.	Aug-09	Separate report	Separate report	JB	Community Ownership

Communities in Control Action Plan

Improving Customer Services through the Council Website – www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk

Introduction

The Government's white paper "Communities in Control : Real people, real power" published in July sets itself the aim of passing power into the hands of local communities, giving real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens. Specifically the paper attempts to:

1. Make Councils more accountable
2. Provide redress when things go wrong
3. Empowering local people to have influence over how budgets are spent and how services are provided.

Objective

This document examines a number of practical reasons to support the objectives of the White Paper focused specifically around access to information (accountability), employs people to actively shape services by making services more accessible and responding to suggestions for improvement, tailoring the service by using new technologies.

Current Situation

The Council has a well developed website, however more needs to be done to develop the transactional capabilities of the site and to offer functionality that gives the user a more personalised/tailored service. Although the website is used for consultation, delivering online services such as Planning, Council Tax and Housing benefits by further developing systems such as complaints the Council could make more information available to citizens which ultimately should make them better able to influence the Council's service provision.

White Paper Impact

The key themes of the White Paper are set out above.

Scope

Our current systems could be enhanced as set out in the options below.

Options

Communities in Control Action Plan: 1 – Improving Customer Service through the Council's website www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk

APPENDIX B

Option 1 – to allow online tracking of complaints through use of the generated complaints reference number on digitalmaidstone.

The Council currently operates a Corporate Complaints procedure which utilises an in-house developed back office system to register, track and administer Customer complaints.

The existing complaints system utilises a SQL database in which all complaints data is stored. The tracking system would need to be able to interrogate this data, and return relevant information to the web page.

Online tracking is something that should be considered for all customer transactions. For example, the ability to track the progress of a planning application, of any interaction channelled through the Contact Centre. It would be desirable to maintain a consistent corporate 'look & feel' to all tracking mechanisms on Digitalmaidstone.

Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

3rd party supplier costs £5k.
Staff resources 20 days.

Timescales

Q3 2009.

Communities in Control Action Plan: 2 – "You said we did"

Option 2 – to publish Council actions & initiatives in the form of a "you said, we did" concept on Digitalmaidstone.

Publishing space needs to be made available on Digitalmaidstone to cater for this important new initiative – this can be incorporated into the new design of Digitalmaidstone.

This initiative offers significant benefits and the initial cost is low. There will, however, be an ongoing commitment to keep the information current and relevant.

Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

3rd party supplier costs none.
Staff resources: 10 days for development.
Staff resources: 1 day per month to refresh data.

Timescales

Q3 2009.

Communities in Control Action Plan: 3 – “Crystal Mark”

The Internet Crystal Mark logo is a way to show that the Council is committed to plain English throughout our website. By joining the scheme, we will prove to the public that we are willing to do everything practical to make the site crystal clear by a thorough examination of the content, design and layout of the site.

Options – outline possible actions and recommend a particular option (considering costs/ resources/ time/benefits) – is the outcome worth the effort we would have to put in?

That the Council attains the Crystal Mark accreditation.

This initiative offers significant benefits to the customer (and ultimately to the Council) and the cost is relatively low. There will, however, be an ongoing commitment to maintain the standards. The website can be badged with a unique crystal mark logo.

Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

To join the scheme, costs £1,500 + VAT for the first year and £750 + VAT for each year after that.

Staff resources for implementation : minimal.

Timescales

Q3 2009.

Communities in Control Action Plan: 4 – Web 2.0

Option 4 – Provide personalisation of Council’s website using Web2 technology.

“Web 2.0” refers to what is perceived as a second generation of web development and design. It is characterised as facilitating enhanced communication, information sharing, interoperability, user-centred design and collaboration on the Web.

Web 2.0 websites encourage customers to do more than just retrieve information:

- Much more interactivity, encouraging customers to ‘own’ their data, and exercise control over it;
- An “architecture of participation” that encourages visitors to add value to transactions as they use them;
- A rich, user-friendly interface.

To incorporate web 2.0 features into Digitalmaidstone to enhance the user experience, add value to the transactions which occur, and use these features to shape future Council web transactions with our customers. Possible features to be developed include –

- RSS for Council jobs, Planning applications, Council minutes, News releases, changes to recycling rounds;
- My Maidstone allowing the customer to tailor their web browsing experience.

Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

Costs for 3rd party services approx £10k.
Internal IT resources 20 days.

Timescales

Q4 2009.

Recommendation

That options 1-4 are agreed and progressed.

Mosaic Kent and Medway**Introduction**

Different groups of citizens require different services and will respond through different channels and to different messages. With customer insight we can maximise resources by targeting the right services and communications to the right communities and households.

Objective

To improve targeting and take up of Council services, to increase efficiency, and to meet the needs of citizens.

Current situation

We have limited customer insight as data sources are disparate and are not necessarily available at community or householder level.

White Paper Impact

By using MOSAIC and the Council's CRM data the Council will be better able to understand customer needs and tender our services to meet the expectations of different customer groups:

- Mosaic is available at household level.
- It will provide a greater understanding of customer needs.
- It will enable us to tailor public services to meet the needs and expectations of different customer groups.
- It will improve the effectiveness of public service delivery.
- The partners will share good practice to build a model of the most efficient and effective way to deliver services to each customer group, especially the socially less well off and hard to reach customers,
- It will target investment (the most effective location of service outlets and the appropriate customer access strategy) to ensure that customer expectations and satisfaction are fulfilled and that most efficient delivery of services is achieved.
- Ensure that all customers have equal access to services and that no groups are marginalised in any way.
- It is important to involve the community more in the way local government is run and by involving customers in the way public services are developed and delivered, it is planned to improve the quality of services and their delivery, thus leading to increased take-up.

Scope

In order to take a holistic view of customers it is necessary to access many different data sources. Mosaic Public Sector links data sources from health, education, criminal justice, and local and central government to provide an insight into every citizen in terms of their requirements of these services. Mosaic Kent and Medway builds on Mosaic public sector with data sources including benefits and Council tax information supplied by Kent County Council and district authorities.

Options

The Council has already signed up to the Interreg funded Mosaic Kent and Medway project.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council implements Mosaic Kent and Medway and links into the Council's CRM data to:

1. Encourage channel migration to more cost effective channels
2. Target services for sales take up e.g. Theatre and recycling
3. Improve communications with residents and target resources

Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

Mosaic Kent and Medway can be implemented for an investment of £14,000 over three years. This is 50% of the cost. The other 50% is funded by Interreg.

Timescales

The project can be implemented within three months (check) and fully developed after the following nine months (check).

Neighbourhoods and Communities

Introduction

To consider the introduction of Neighbourhood Management within the Borough Council area and in particular to respond to a proposal from the Kent County Council for the establishment of Neighbourhood Forums involving the County Council, Borough Council and Parish Councils / Community Groups.

Objective

To determine whether Neighbourhood Management is right for Maidstone, and if so, what form.

Current situation

Currently the Council does not have any formal Neighbourhood Management scheme operating within the Council area. However the Council does need to respond to the proposal from the County Council to establish Neighbourhood Forums in the Maidstone area.

White Paper Impact

The White Paper supports the introduction of local decision making and as such different forms of neighbourhood management. It particularly supports the principle of getting more people involved in the decisions being made about their locality and within the community and seeks to involve them in that decision making process. The idea of introducing neighbourhood forums as detailed below follows the principles within the White Paper and particularly the elements that would seek to promote community involvement within the actual decision making process including the duty to involve their local citizens on decisions within their area.

Scope

With no existing proposals in place and with the white paper seeking to increase more devolved decision making at the local level the Council needs to find a way to follow its principles. This can be done by the introduction of neighbourhood forums but in a different format to that originally envisaged but which introduces localised decision making. Therefore the option set out below for the introduction of Neighbourhood Forums with the Kent County Council takes forward how the Council can develop greater involvement of the community in the decision making process within a new exciting and vibrant neighbourhood management structure.

Options

As indicated previously the Kent County Council proposed to the Borough Council the introduction of Neighbourhood Forums within the Borough Council

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area which would include both the County Council, Borough Council and Parish Councils / Community Group representatives serving on these Forums. The Council received a proposal from the Kent County Council seeking three such Forums based on a number of Ward and County division boundaries and in considering these proposals the Council suggested an alternative proposal which involves a different style and structure for the establishment of these Forums which would introduce greater community involvement and would form a more thematic approach to the actual structure of the Forum.

Set out below is the details of the Borough Councils proposals for the establishment of Neighbourhood Forum with the Kent County Council

MAIDSTONE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS –PRINCIPLES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose and Aims

1. To encourage community involvement and ownership in local areas by providing a forum for community initiatives to be considered and where appropriate supported by the councils (Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council) and their partners (as members of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)).
2. To enable locally elected representatives, as leaders of their communities, to engage with and respond to local communities needs.
3. To create opportunities for residents to gain a greater voice and influence over local services, to improve the quality of their lives, their neighbourhoods and the Borough.

Terms of Reference

The Neighbourhood Forums will:-

1. Examine the provision and performance for the services provided by the councils and their partners which impact upon local communities and ensure that those services are what the local community require.
2. Act as a forum for consultation between the councils and their partners and the community on all policies, plans and strategies relevant to their community, including the sustainable community strategy and ensuring community interests are reflected in this strategy.
3. Consider community initiatives that meet the objectives of the LSP and where appropriate agree to support the initiatives directly or escalate them to the appropriate decision making authority for them to be implemented (be that the LSP, the Councils, or their partners).
4. Be responsible for the allocation of funding within their community area for those budgets allocated to them with a view to the community determining directly how these individual funds should be allocated within their local community.
5. Take up community concerns and issues with the relevant body(ies) either through lobbying for external bodies or through references to the Councils and their partners.
6. Consider any decisions made by each of the respective councils and their partners and where necessary undertake an appropriate review on service performance and service providers and how it impacts on their local

community.

Representation

County Council Representation – All County Councillors who have a division covered by the forum will be members of the forum. Except where such a small part of their division is covered that it is impractical, though they could still attend as non-voting members.

Borough Council Representation – The number of Borough Council Representatives is determined by the number of wards in each area. Each ward will appoint a representative to serve on the forum all other members of the ward would still be able to attend the meeting.

Community and Parish Representation – In urban areas the community representation would be from those bodies which are recognised by the councils and their partners. For this purpose criteria for recognition would be introduced. Where areas have parish councils one parish representative would be appointed for each Borough councillor on the forum. Where there are more parish councils/community groups than places, the same process as for ward members. Other recognised community bodies would not be precluded from attending but only those appointed will be the voting representatives.

Partner representation –The Police and Primary Care Trust could have membership on each forum with an additional slot held free to rotate partners according to the items being considered at any given meeting.

Youth representation – Two membership slots on each forum would be set aside for youth representatives. These would be advertised in the area covered by each forum for volunteers to come forward. The slots would be for 16 – 24 year olds and would be advertised in schools, youth clubs, the youth forum and through local advertising.

Youth Engagement

Introduction

To consider proposals for developing youth engagement within the Democratic process within the Borough Council.

Objective

To develop proposals for youth engagement in the Borough to ensure that young people have an influence in the Council's decision making process.

Current situation – where are we now? What do we do currently? What existing activities/structures are in place? What other groups are involved?

The Council currently has three major projects for involving young people in its work namely the Youth Forum, the Youth Scrutiny Committee and the Democratic Engagement process within schools.

The Youth Forum is open to young people aged 11-21 from all over the Borough and is supported by the Sports, Play and Youth Development Team.

The Youth Forum is involved in the Council's budget consultation each year. The Council attends a meeting of the Youth Forum to discuss what services they would like to see, what they think the Council does well (and not so well), and what services they would cut to make savings. However, there is within the Youth Forum terms of reference a desire for it to be involved within the decision making process of the authority to a much greater extent than it does at present. In the past there have been joint Cabinet meetings as well as an opportunity to attend Council meetings putting forward their views. However currently the position is that the Youth Forum has changed its focus and is principally concentrating on the introduction of the Youth Cafe but once this has been completed it is hoped that they would then get more involved again within the Councils decision making process.

The Youth Scrutiny Committee (YSC) is made up of young people from the Youth Forum and is supported by the Scrutiny Section.

The YSC carries out reviews in the same way that formal Overview and Scrutiny Committees do i.e. interviewing witnesses, reviewing evidence and producing reports for consideration by the appropriate organisations. The YSC recently presented its first report, on Sex and Relationships Education, to Full Council and received the full support of Members. The report has now been sent to all secondary schools in the Borough, as well as Local Children's Services Partnerships and other relevant partners.

Members and Officers have expressed the desire for the YSC to be continued. The YSC is effective at engaging young people in the Borough and ensuring that

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they can put forward strong, logical arguments to make changes to services that affect them. The YSC allows young people to be involved in developing policies, rather than just consulting them on existing ones, ensuring engagement rather than what is sometimes seen as a 'tick box' exercise.

Democratic Services has started to introduce a Democratic Engagement Strategy with local schools. This has recently been done by holding voting focus days in conjunction with Invicta Grammar School. This covers all elements of the electoral process including nominations of individuals, hustings and an election and results service. This has been held for the last two years and it is felt that these were very successful in bringing to the attention of students in Year 12 the democratic and voting process.

White Paper Impact

The White Paper specifically talks about citizenship helping to develop skills in young people and adults. It has indicated that citizenship is important to schools and would encourage and support innovative ideas which help young people to become effective leaders of the community. Therefore, the White Paper is encouraging the Council to take an active approach in supporting young people by understanding the democratic process. Council also now have a duty to promote democracy.

Scope

The Council is doing very good work in relation to engaging youth, but what is required is better co-ordination of the programme as each element is run by different sections. In addition the scheme for providing democracy in schools could be developed further and expanded to go into other schools within the Maidstone area thereby taking this message to a much wider audience.

Options

It is considered that the work the Council currently undertakes on Youth engagement should continue to be supported by the Council. However the Council needs to do some work on identifying exactly all the work currently undertaken with the Youth within the Borough Council and to scope that out with the intention of finding the best means of pursuing its Youth Engagement policy within the Borough Council in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

Youth Forum

Seek to improve communication with the Youth Forum with greater involvement from Cabinet Members attending the forum including more Joint Cabinet meetings on Youth issues. Further work could be done with the Youth Forum through election of officers as a means of educating participants about democracy and an understanding of the voting process which could lead to greater voter participation once they achieve voting age.

Youth Scrutiny Committee

It is generally felt that the Youth Scrutiny Committee has partly replaced the Youth Forum in terms of work that it undertakes. Previously such work would have been done through the Forum but with the loss of focus in the Forum in terms of its concentration on the Youth Café , has allowed this off-shoot to develop which had previously been undertaken by the Forum itself. It is important that this work continues and is supported but it may be more appropriately dealt with through the Forum rather than the Youth Scrutiny Committee or through a combination of the two but it needs to be fully supported by the Borough Council.

Democratic Engagement of Schools

The current voting focus day project at Invicta Grammar School has been a success, but needs to be expanded and taken to schools with the intention of promoting democracy within these schools.

Co-ordination

From this exercise it clearly shows that there is the need for better co-ordination of these projects as currently the work on Youth Engagement is undertaken by three different sections. Each of those sections pushes on with its own ideas and does not communicate with each other effectively. It is therefore suggested that to make delivery of the service more efficient and better co-ordinated one of the two following approaches is adopted:

- 1) Co-ordination – all of those activities are co-ordinated by an Officer Group led by a member of the Senior Management Team
- 2) Amalgamation – that all the resources required to move forward all of the above Youth Engagement projects are amalgamated into one section which allows the opportunity of greater flexibility within these areas.

Recommendation:

That all the current work on Youth Engagement and is scoped and that it is determined which of the two approaches of co-ordination or amalgamation should be supported.

Costs – Staffing and other resources

Two options are being suggested namely either better co-ordination or amalgamation as a means to introduce a more efficient approach to the Youth Engagement Strategy for the authority. With either of these options it is expected that additional resources within the existing service provision could be identified which would allow for all the current streams within the strategy to continue and scope for further improvements to be made which could be funded from within these existing resources. This would be possible due to the bringing together of what is currently a fragmented service which could be more efficiently run through better co-ordination or amalgamation of the service.

Time Scales

The initial scoping element on Youth Engagement could be done in about a month and then decisions relating to whether to co-ordinate or amalgamate should be made as soon as possible. This would then enable the steps for the introduction of a co-ordinated Youth Engagement Strategy to be introduced as soon as possible and ensure that the authority can move forward rather than going backwards as is currently perceived to be the position. It is suggested a decision will need to be made by the end of the calendar year at the latest.

Devolution of Powers to Parishes

Introduction

To consider whether the Council should devolve some of its existing powers to Parish Councils and how this could be moved forward and potentially powers transferred to parish Councils if an interest is shown

Objective

To give an opportunity to Parish Councils to determine whether they wish to take on additional powers currently undertaken by the Borough Council.

Current situation

The current situation is that the Borough Council has not recently taken any action with regard to ascertaining from Parishes whether they wish to take on additional devolved powers. However the Council has a Parish Charter and it has been possible through the commitment in this document for quality parishes to open discussions about taking on responsibilities currently undertaken by the Borough Council. At this point in time, no Parish Council has come forward seeking any additional powers. However, recently it was agreed that the Parish Charter should be changed to enable all Parish Councils to be able to discuss with the Borough Council about taking on devolved powers from the authority but this has only recently been introduced and currently no other Parish Council has taken the opportunity to open such discussions.

White Paper impact

The White Paper has talked about devolving decision making to the local community and decision making being made at the lowest practical level. The White Paper clearly supports the principles of devolving powers to Parishes and actively encourages the establishment of Parish Councils particularly within existing urban areas where they are less prevalent.

Scope

The Borough Council has always encouraged through the Parish Charter the opportunity to devolve powers to Parish Councils. It has also supported Parish Councils through concurrent functions funding whereby finance has been available to them for undertaking those functions which both authorities can undertake thereby passing the Councils authority to determine these issues to the Parish Council. All of these options have worked well in the past and will continue to serve the Council well in the future. However, the question the Council needs to ask itself is whether it should be taking a more active role in seeking potential devolution of powers from the Borough Council to Parish Councils.

Options

When the Council has in the past invited Parish Councils to open discussions with it about devolving powers to them there has been little interest in pursuing these discussions. However, in view of what is indicated within the White Paper of the need to encourage decision making at the lowest local level it would still seem appropriate for the Council to give further consideration to this matter. The option that could be pursued is for the Borough Council having first identified all of the powers that could potentially be devolved to Parish Councils to then ask Parish Councils whether they would wish to take on such powers. If there is a positive response to that question, then the Borough Council could determine how it wishes to move it forward in terms of opening discussions on the particular proposals though this would depend on the response of the Parish Councils.

Recommendation:

1. That all powers that could be devolved by the Borough Council to Parish Councils are identified.
2. That the Parish Councils are asked if they are interested in taking on any other powers identified in the exercise in 1) above.
3. That the issue of Devolution of Powers to Parishes is reconsidered in the light of Parish Councils responses and if an interest is shown in devolving powers consideration is then given to discussing the ideas with the relevant department to see whether any ideas could be moved forward and powers transferred.

Costs - Staffing and other resources

These are just the first steps along this process and as such there are no significant costs or staffing implications arising from this particular proposal.

Time Scales

The information is gathered and submitted to Parish Councils by the end of the calendar year.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Multi-Agency Partnerships (Maps) and Partners and Communities Together (Pact)

Introduction

Two ward level initiatives have been undertaken by the public agencies in Maidstone Borough in the last few years. Multi-Agency Partnerships (MAPs) were designed to bring together the agencies working in the areas of highest need/deprivation in the borough with the principle focus being on Park Wood; Shepway, Senacre and Mangravet and High Street and latterly Fant and Heath and Ringlestone in North Ward. These are now called Action for Communities Together (ACT).

In a more recent initiative led by Kent Police, as part of its shift to neighbourhood policing, Partners and Communities Together (PACT) have been introduced across the whole district, operating either at the ward or parish level.

While there is an acknowledged potential for both processes to clash or duplicate each other, efforts have been made by the agencies working on the ground to avoid this and run the two processes in a complementary way.

Due to the time constraints, this evaluation can only be a limited desk study based on a small number of documents and anecdotal information from those involved. The main documents considered include:

- Shepway Community Development Worker Evaluation, Sept 2006
- High Street MAPS Evaluation (self assessment), September 2007
- PACT Handbook, A "How to guide" to improving the local area by forming a PACT and getting things done, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Kent Police, Kent Partnership, and Kent, County Council¹
- Evaluating Partners and Communities Together (PACT) Surgeries, Corporate Development, Kent Police, June 2008
- Maidstone Borough Council minutes of the Extraordinary External Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 17 March 2009

Objective

Due to the time constraints, this evaluation can only be a limited desk study summarising existing evaluations of the effectiveness of the two approaches where these are available, utilising limited anecdotal evidence and making recommendations based on these that will assist in improving community engagement approaches in future. The main documents considered include:

- Shepway Community Development Worker Evaluation, Sept 2006
- High Street MAPS Evaluation (self assessment), September 2007

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<http://www.kent.police.uk/About%20Kent%20Police/Neighbourhood%20policing/PACTHandbook.pdf>

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- PACT Handbook, A "How to guide" to improving the local area by forming a PACT and getting things done, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Kent Police, Kent Partnership, and Kent, County Council²
- Evaluating Partners and Communities Together (PACT) Surgeries, Corporate Development, Kent Police, June 2008
- Maidstone Borough Council minutes of the Extraordinary External Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 17 March 2009

Current situation – where are we now? What do we do currently? What existing activities/structures are in place? What other groups are involved?

MAPs

MAPs groups have been established in the priority areas of Maidstone for a number of years. The initial aims for the groups were to act as a forum to bring together the agencies working in an area to encourage more joined up working, avoid duplication and where possible pool limited resources. Membership of the groups included front-line workers from the statutory agencies, MBC and KCC councillors, registered social landlords (RSLs ie Hyde Housing and latterly Maidstone Housing Trust), and local representatives of voluntary, community and faith bodies. MBC's Cabinet Member for Community Services chairs the umbrella body ACT Plus (formerly Mega-MAPs) where representatives of the groups come together on a thrice yearly basis. The groups have been run by community development workers (CDWs), employed by the PCT but funded principally by the Kent Children's Fund (no longer in existence), Safer Maidstone Partnership/Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (SMP/CDRP), MBC and Primary Care Trust (PCT) with small contributions from the Beacon Church and RSLs. The CDWs serviced and chaired the groups initially, but latterly in some cases ward councillors have taken on the chairing role. Two evaluations have been undertaken relevant to this report. The first is a very detailed evaluation of the role of the Shepway CDW undertaken by a local social researcher Dr Jenny Watts on behalf of the funding agencies. This included an evaluation including interviews with participants of the MAPs Group and a small number of local residents. A range of views are reported:

'12.11 There were mixed views about the success or otherwise of the MAPS Group amongst the interviewees. Some considered it had worked well, others that it could be improved and some had mixed views individually. For example, one interviewee commented 'MAPS has been successful. It provides a means of two way communication and is good for networking. It can be a talking shop sometimes... it goes through phases...other times it delivers and gets things achieved.' Some interviewees were very positive, for example one said, 'the MAPS Group works well...It's quite structured: relaxed but structured.' and another commented 'MAPS does well' However, another interviewee considered 'the MAPS meetings are not useful because nothing is relevant [to her

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<http://www.kent.police.uk/About%20Kent%20Police/Neighbourhood%20policing/PACTHandbook.pdf>

organisation], the meetings are too informal and 'chummy', I prefer a more structured meeting with an agenda. Monthly may be too often'. Another had mixed views, 'MAPS meetings are good for information sharing and identifying issues. The really good thing is that it provides an opportunity for agencies to share, but it's a difficult forum for residents'. Another interviewee, the only one to express this view, considered the MAPS Group 'an expensive talking shop. Nothing has been achieved...we don't need MAPS. Ward councillors and MBC officers can handle it all'. But another commented 'MAPS Group works well, you can tell by the people who turn up, like the police and fire service, everyone listens'.

This mixed view, particularly on the role of residents, is further explored in the next section:

12.12 There appears to be an issue about the inclusivity of MAPS with different view points from interviewees. One interviewee said 'MAPS has been very inclusive. Although [the CDW] set the agenda, it was always open and others were able to raise issues if they wanted to. It has worked in the spirit of partnership'. There were differing views on the inclusion of residents in the MAPS Group. One interviewee claimed that 'residents are not allowed to attend MAPS meetings'. This statement is clearly incorrect as residents are recorded (in the minutes) as being present at the meetings, but it does indicate a need for there to be publicity about who can attend MAPS Group meetings. The same interviewee also stated that 'it needs to be residents leading – bottom up, not top down'. Another interviewee, a resident, did state that '[the CDW] even told me not to bother coming to one meeting because there was nothing really relevant to me'. However, another interviewee pointed out that residents also attend the Group and, whilst 'they may not be too familiar with how meetings work, they speak from the heart - theirs are important issues and the reason the Group exists'.

Despite there being an understanding that residents need to be involved, there appears to have been difficulty in making this a reality. Was there an irreconcilable gap between a group led by professionals trying to involve residents – meeting during the working day – and the justifiable aim of encouraging joined up working between the agencies working in the area?

12.13 There were also mixed views on what type of person should Chair the MAPS Group meetings and the extent to which local politicians should be involved. For example, one interviewee commented 'It's good that politicians attend MAPS, but they shouldn't Chair it. It is important that the Chair is independent and doesn't have a particular axe to grind'. Similar views were also expressed by other interviewees. However, one interviewee did indicate that the MAPS Group being Chaired by a ward member should be considered.'

Recommendations:

- 1. Explore a means/mechanism whereby local residents in priority areas are engaged, empowered and given their own voice.*
- 2. Explore and agree with councillors, in both the executive and on the back bench, their role in relation to community empowerment agenda and resident led programmes.*

A self-assessment by members of the High Street MAPs group was undertaken in September 2007. This identified a number of successful outputs; 'Dissemination of information ... Awareness (raising) of the work of the partners ... Joint working on problems ... Involvement of volunteers from the "hard to reach" in the community work ... Engagement with people from ethnic minorities ... Co-ordinated approach to development ... Walk-about successes.' Specific outcomes under these headings included; 'Referrals [of clients] to Infozone [youth centre], Kenward [alcohol and drugs recovery] etc ... The Mews, High Street [resolving access, fly tipping, environmental health and anti-social behaviour affecting/afflicted by vulnerable young residents] ... Venues for "Blingin" [music and dance workshops for young residents of ie Trinity Foyer] ... [supporting set-up of] Teenage parents support group (Little Rascals) ... ESOL (English as a Second Language) family learning course running at Southborough ... [and latterly at] ... Archbishop Courtenay ... Children's Hut – KCC have now increased the amount of land available for the "Y" [YMCA] to buy from 0.42 acres to 0.5 acres ... Joint working on the Coombe Road area, including boarding of 154 Old Tovil Road, and solution to the sewage problem ... Reduction in deliberate rubbish and vehicle fires'.

Set-backs were also included such as 'Sunningdale Court Community Flat. Agencies worked together on the proposed flat but project was dropped when MHT withdrew their offer.'

Anecdotally this is/was a very well attended group that has continued to meet despite the departure of the CDW. A successful feature of the MAPs groups, when followed up, has been the use of walk-about to identify and tackle environmental and other local issues such as litter, fly tipping, broken fences and damage to properties including graffiti and derelict properties. The role of the community development workers has been a critical success factor for the MAPs groups. Ringlestone and FAnt/Heath MAPs groups struggled without CDWs and the other MAPs groups struggled when there was no CDW in post. There have been tensions between CDWs and ward members.

However, where they have been in post, they have often been largely responsible for the outputs and outcomes achieved by the groups. It is arguable that their role has been hampered by limited funding that meant they were employed part-time, had to cover for vacancies and this has affected staff retention. More controversially there has been a lack of clarity about their roles is it to carry out community work (directly acting to support local residents and undertake activities), community development work (building the capacity of the local community to resolve its own problems or outreach work (taking the role of the statutory agencies into local communities. An example of the community worker role has been organising summer fetes in Park Wood and

Shepway. An example of the community development role has been the support given to young teenage parents to establish the Maidstone Young Families Group with Voluntary Action Maidstone. An example of the outreach role has been organising and holding smoking cessation clinics.

Recommendation:

3. Examine the best features of the MAPs groups and decide on one of three options: Continue to develop MAPs groups based on the existing model; Develop vehicles for residents to be empowered complementary to the MAPs groups and other community engagement models (PACT); Abandon MAPs altogether and focus on developing resident led models/vehicles.

4. Revisit the role and funding of community development workers utilising the Community Development Foundation's model and decide whether these should be fully resourced ie through a multi-agency bid for external funding led by the voluntary sector partner (enabling funding to be secured that isn't available to the public sector).

Partners and Communities Together (PACT)

According to the on-line good practice guide³: 'PACT stands for Partners and Community Together – giving a focus for identifying community concerns and getting something done about them. PACT processes have been established within every ward across Kent and Medway following the implementation of Neighbourhood Policing.' MBC's Community Safety Co-ordinator and police representatives were interviewed by the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee about PACT in Maidstone Borough in March 2009. Here is an extract from the minutes of that meeting⁴:

'Mr Hewetson [MBC Community Safety Co-ordinator] informed the committee that PACT groups provided local residents with the opportunity to identify, to the local partners, their three key priority concerns for the local area. PACT groups then aimed to address these three concerns. The Committee was told that PACTs continued to receive support and enthusiasm and had assisted in achieving a decrease in crime of 8.2% within the last year. PACTs had adopted a less formal approach to ensure feasibility of adequate public engagement.

Sergeant Mick Hayes identified that PACTs receive more direct support within rural than urban areas of the borough. Within the rural areas the number of PACTs and the resources available for each had increased. There were 33 PACTs established within the 16 rural wards of Maidstone as opposed to only 1 within each of the borough's urban wards. Within the rural areas of Maidstone PACT surgeries had been held, within each ward, monthly and letter drops were carried out regularly. Urban areas tended to rely more heavily on the support of local PCSOs to encourage community engagement.

³ PACT Handbook, A "How to guide" to improving the local area by forming a PACT and getting things done, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Kent Police, Kent Partnership, and Kent, County Council

⁴ Maidstone Borough Council minutes of the Extraordinary External Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 17 March 2009

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The PACTs identify three priorities for the local area. Kent Police assisted in a number of campaigns which had involved the local media as a result of priorities identified through PACT meetings. Recently, "Operation Reconsider" was publicised with the aim of discouraging heavy goods vehicles from using roads which they may easily damage. Kent Police had also recently assisted the local PACT at Grove Green to carry out a litter pick. In answer to a question concerning the decline in attendance at PACT meetings, Mr Hewetson suggested that this may reflect resident's increased satisfaction with their local area.

The Committee were informed by Mr Knowle[r], that PACTs had been less successful in urban areas. PCSOs however encouraged community engagement, within urban areas, without the requirement of attending monthly PACT meetings. The Committee were in agreement that within rural areas, fear of crime had decreased and satisfaction of policing had improved. The Committee requested that they be provided with figures which enabled a comparison of crime figures between the urban and rural areas. In response to a question Mr Knowle[r] confirmed that PCSOs were able to monitor more than one ward, ensuring regular PCSO presence. The Committee was informed that Kent Police had liaised with Parish Councils and attended community events such as tea and coffee mornings.

Mr Hewetson recognised that young people may be more difficult to engage with, however the Safer Maidstone Partnership had worked with the Multi-Agency Youth Development Action Group (MAYDAG) in order to ensure the involvement of younger people. The Committee was also informed that MAYDAG provided funding for a number of outreach workers. A Member questioned whether enough work had been carried out with regard to the area surrounding Shepway South shops, which had a bad reputation with regard to anti social behaviour. The Cabinet Member for Community Services requested that these concerns be raised at the next Safer Maidstone Partnership, partnership and tasking group, and a response be given directly to the relevant Councillor.

David Hewetson presented the Committee with statistical data relating to PACT and crime issues. It was identified that speeding featured most frequently as a priority for the PACTs, during 2008/09. The CDRP performance report was presented and it was indicated that perception of crime within the borough had fallen suggesting that the work of PACTs was beneficial. It was requested that the Committee be informed as to why crime associated with the night time economy had increased.

Members congratulated Kent Police on the success of the PACT scheme.'

An evaluation of PACT Surgeries was completed by Kent Police in June 2008⁵, but has not been published. Amongst its key findings are:

- *'PACT surgeries that boast the highest public attendance are those that run with previously established community events. A well attended community event (eg a Farmers' Market) is more likely to give neighbourhood officers access to members of the public who are representative of the community and is of benefit in increasing police visibility. (P3)*

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- *It is suggested that neighbourhood officers consider holding a surgery within a community event specifically for young people (eg youth club etc) or consider using other methods to interact with this demographic group (such as schools) or through the rail surveys already conducted in Maidstone.*
- *Overall, public attendance at PACT surgeries appears to be low. Views from practitioners and members of the public ascertained that PACT surgeries often duplicate other community meetings where the public have an opportunity to interact with the police and partner agencies as well as highlight issues. As such PACT surgeries were considered as unnecessary. (P5)*
- *There was a general feeling among practitioners that PACT surgeries do not benefit local community and as such are not an effective use of officer time and resources. (P6)*
- *Practitioners felt that members of the public who attended surgeries are not representative of the local community. (P 11)*
- *... practitioners felt that PACT surgeries are not effective in identifying issues and problems in the community and are not of particular benefit to members of the public. (P13)*
- *The public generally feel that there are too many meetings that duplicate each other. (P17)*
- *As practitioners find it difficult to get partners involved, it would be beneficial for neighbourhood police officers to attend an already established community event where partners are also likely to attend. (P17)*
- *Whilst over ¾ of practitioners felt that Senior Management Teams believed that PACT surgeries are a useful element in neighbourhood policing, only half (51% Force and 43% Mid Kent) felt supported in their delivery of PACT surgeries. (P21)*
- *... visits to surgeries indicated a consistent lack of guidance and knowledge of good practice in organising and running PACT surgeries. (P21)*
- *Members of the public who reported having attended a PACT surgery viewed the experience positively and felt surgeries could increase feelings of safety, reassurance as well as help to resolve community issues. (P21)*
- *There was clearly a feeling that PACT surgeries were police events and it was not necessary to involve other partners. (P17)*

Recommendations:

- 5. Utilise the positive and negative experiences of PACT to develop more robust community engagement models in future.**
- 6. Avoid creating more public meetings where attendance will frequently be limited and unrepresentative of communities and**

duplicating what is already in existence – better to attend and utilise existing opportunities to engage with residents.

7. *Provide on-going high quality training, resourcing and senior management support for staff undertaking community engagement activities.*

8. *Build in time and resources to community engagement projects to fully evaluate their success or otherwise and utilise the findings improve community engagement in the future.*

9. *When developing and delivering new community engagement activity, do so in such a way that it supports and complements existing activity rather than duplicating it.*

White Paper Impact - What will change with the White Paper? What is it suggesting we do?

The beginning of the summary of Communities in Control⁶ makes a series of statements. The first of these (P1) states:

'Communities in control: real people, real power aims to pass power into the hands of local communities. We want to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country, and to give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens.'

The second states:

'We want to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens. This is because we believe that they can take difficult decisions and solve complex problems for themselves. The state's role should be to set national priorities and minimum standards, while providing support and a fair distribution of resources.'

While it would be fair to say that both MAPs and PACT have gone some way to shifting the focus of delivery of public services down to the neighbourhood level, control is still maintained by the agencies and professionals employed by them, as is evidenced by who organises, chairs, and certainly in the case of MAPs, largely attends meeting.

Table 1: Extract from 'Public attendance at PACT surgeries – by BCU'

	Mid Kent	Force
Never had any public attendees	10%	9%
1-5 members of the public	41%	55%
6-10 members of the public	24%	21%
11 + members of the public	24%	14%

⁶ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/summarycommunities>

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The PACT Evaluation (Table 1) shows that attendance by the public in Mid Kent while higher than the Kent average (Force) is still quite limited and that the 'power, influence and responsibility' is still held by the professional agencies. While the PACT Guidance suggests: 'Experience has shown that ... [the Chair and Vice Chair of PACT Panels] should not be representatives from statutory organisations such as the police or local authority ... and 'Preference would be a private individual,' the mainstay of PACT in Mid Kent, the surgeries, are generally led by neighbourhood police officers or police community support officers (PCSOs).

The Communities in Control summary continues at point 3 (P1):

'A vibrant participatory democracy should strengthen our representative democracy. The third sector – through charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises – has much to offer from its traditions of purposeful altruism and selfless volunteering. Equally, we believe that political activity is a worthwhile and essential part of British life, and we want to restore people's faith in politics.'

The evidence of MAPs minutes is that voluntary, community and faith organisations were well represented and active on the MAPs groups. Also, that councillors, while not always content with the MAPs process, also attended frequently and latterly have begun to chair meetings. It would be more difficult to prove their positive impact on the democratic process but it is salutary to consider the turn out in the most recent borough council elections, particularly in the priority areas in Maidstone which were all below 30% (see Table 2):

Table 2: Election results 2008

<i>High Street</i>	28.62%
<i>Park Wood</i>	24.9%
<i>Shepway North</i>	28.71%
<i>Shepway South</i>	23.67%

Turn-out in the other wards was all above 30%, with the exception of North Ward (29.25%) which contains Ringlestone, and as high as 54.15% in Barming. That the same wards should appear at the most 'deprived' according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (Table 3) suggests there is a correlation between the disadvantage and electoral turn-out and that programmes such as MAPs have not yet created 'A vibrant participatory democracy [that] should strengthen our representative democracy.'

Table 3: Priority Neighbourhoods based on IMD 2007

Neighbourhood	Ward	Lower Super Output Area	England and Wales Rank	IMD overall (32,482)	Direction of travel 2004-7
Park Wood (West)	Park Wood	E01024389	6.52%	2,117	↓

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Coombe Farm	High Street	E01024374	12.26%	3,982	↓
Shepway South (Central)	Shepway South	E01024397	16.90%	5,490	↓
Town Centre (North)	High Street	E01024370	19.67%	6,388	↑
Park Wood (East)	Park Wood	E01024390	20.23%	6,570	↓
Northumberland Road (South)	Shepway South	E01024398	21.28%	6,913	↓
Mangravet	Shepway North	E01024391	24.62%	7,996	↑
Senacre	Shepway South	E01024399	30.10%	9,777	↓
Ringlestone	North Ward	E01024384	32.17%	10,450	↓

Scope – Do we need to change as a result? Are our current options fit for purpose?

The limited evidence presented in this report suggests that the two main community engagement tools MAPs and PACT need significant further development if they are to achieve the goals set out in Communities in Control, and now set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone 2009-20⁷:

- 'Tackle health, education and employment inequalities in areas of disadvantage.'
- 'Public agencies and their partners to undertake a programme of continuous community engagement and work with communities to resolve their issues at the community level.'

Options – outline possible actions and recommend a particular option (considering costs/resources/time/benefits) – is the outcome worth the effort we would have to put in?

The new Sustainable Community Strategy identifies (P25 & 26) that: 'Approximately 11% of Maidstone's population live within areas which are amongst the most disadvantaged 20% in the country. The issues faced by the people living in these areas are manifested in a number of different ways and the economic downturn is likely to exacerbate these. For this reason it is necessary to bring together an Inequalities Task Group (now called

⁷ http://www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk/community/community_strategy.aspx

Neighbourhood Planning Project Board) to examine and tackle the problems and opportunities that exist in these areas. The council is therefore looking at an approach of neighbourhood planning in conjunction with the residents for these areas of high need (hereafter called priority areas) including parts of: Park Wood, Shepway North and South and High Street Wards.'

Recommendations:

10. In advance of embarking on this neighbourhood planning approach, it was proposed at the Neighbourhood Planning Project Board meeting on 10th June to undertake a scoping study to evaluate the significant projects recently/currently undertaken by agencies (from the public, voluntary, community and faith sectors) to address deprivation issues, over and above their normal service provision.

11. The council, with its partners, is therefore looking at an approach of neighbourhood planning in conjunction with the residents for these areas of high need (hereafter called priority areas) including parts of: Park Wood, Shepway North and South and High Street Wards.

Recommendations

1. *Explore a means/mechanism whereby local residents in priority areas are engaged, empowered and given their own voice.*
2. *Explore and agree with councillors, in both the executive and on the back bench, their role in relation to community empowerment agenda and resident led programmes.*
3. **Examine the best features of the MAPs groups and decide on one of three options: Continue to develop MAPs groups based on the existing model; Develop vehicles for residents to be empowered complementary to the MAPs groups and other community engagement models (PACT); Abandon MAPs altogether and focus on developing resident led models/vehicles.**
4. **Revisit the role and funding of community development workers utilising the Community Development Foundation's model and decide whether these should be fully resourced ie through a multi-agency bid for external funding led by the voluntary sector partner (enabling funding to be secured that isn't available to the public sector).**
5. **Utilise the positive and negative experiences of PACT to develop more robust community engagement models in future.**
6. **Avoid creating more public meetings where attendance will frequently be limited and unrepresentative of communities and duplicating what is already in existence – better to attend and utilise existing opportunities to engage with residents.**
7. **Provide on-going high quality training, resourcing and senior management support for staff undertaking community engagement activities.**

8. Build in time and resources to community engagement projects to fully evaluate their success or otherwise and utilise the findings improve community engagement in the future.

9. When developing and delivering new community engagement activity, do so in such a way that it supports and complements existing activity rather than duplicating it.

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Costs/Staffing/Other Resources

The study into interventions in disadvantaged areas (Recommendation 10) in Maidstone needs to be completed before the next board meeting which will take place in the last week in August. The project manager will need to utilise approximately 12 days to complete the study with a gap of three weeks in the middle for partners to complete a proforma and return this to the project manager. Each project proforma will take between 0.5 and 1 day to complete. It is expected that the project will be completed using existing staff resources.

Timescales

The recommendations on the development of MAPs and PACT would need to be made to the main statutory partners in Maidstone. The route for the former would be through ACT Plus via the Cabinet Member for Community Services and the next meeting of this group is on ... The recommendations on the development of PACT would have to be made either directly to the police area commander or through the Safer Maidstone Partnership at the next convenient meeting. Informal approaches in the first instance would seem the most appropriate.

The Neighbourhood Planning Project is likely to take upwards from 12 to 18 months before the first plans are published and this is dependent on securing substantial financial resource ie from the Performance Reward Grant.