

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET

Decision Made: 9 July 2008

ESTABLISHMENT OF A MID KENT IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

Issue for Decision

To consider the establishment of a Mid Kent Improvement Partnership involving Ashford Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Decision Made

1. That a revenue contribution to the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership of £42,840 per annum, to be funded as an invest to save proposal, be agreed.
2. That the recommendations as set out in the Reference from the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be agreed.
3. That Council be recommended to agree: -
 - i. That Maidstone Borough Council enter into the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership with Maidstone Borough Council also acting as the accountable body;
 - ii. That the draft governance arrangements set out in Appendix A of the Report of the Chief Executive be agreed.

Reasons for decision

Following discussions during the past few months between the Leaders and Chief Executives from Ashford, Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells borough councils, it is proposed that these authorities work together as a formal 'cluster' of local authorities – a Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership – to deliver the following aims and objectives:

- To improve the quality of service to communities;
- To improve the resilience of service delivery;
- To deliver efficiency saving in the procurement, management and delivery of services;
- To explore opportunities for trading in the medium to long-term; and
- To share best practice.

The detailed governance proposals are set out in Appendix A of the Report of the Chief Executive. A copy of the Statement of Intent which was agreed by the

Leaders and Chief Executives on the 28 May can be seen at Annex 2, together with a copy of the Report to the Chiefs and Leaders (Annex 1) and the possible areas of service collaboration (Annex 3).

The partnership will potentially affect both Executive and non Executive functions. Therefore a decision is sought from both Cabinet and the Council.

Improved services for the public will be the main focus for the partnership. The councils will also seek to learn from best practice and each other to ensure enhanced outcomes for our communities.

These arrangements will not be exclusive as it is accepted that some councils already have partnership arrangements in place with other local authorities. For example, Swale's involvement in the Thames Gateway and some other established partnerships are already in place such as the Licensing Partnership between Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. In time the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) will also be looking to gain a better understanding of the opportunities to work with Kent County Council and explore areas of mutual interest.

It is recognised that all the boroughs have some different local priorities and are at different stages of organisational development. Where there is overlap or synergies these will be explored and opportunities to develop and share best practice will need to be taken.

The MKIP will also provide opportunities for staff as well as the potential to make managerial and other staff savings. Accordingly, it is also proposed that the councils will not make any appointments to the first, second or third tiers (and managers reporting in to Heads of Service) without first exploring the potential for joint management or joint service provision. Similarly, the authorities will talk to one another prior to restructures to examine potential synergies.

Three councils of the four (Maidstone, Ashford and Tunbridge Wells) are already collaborating in a joint 'Business Transformation' project to improve customer service, reduce cost and identify opportunities for shared or part-shared services. The aim will be to extend and expand this programme.

There is also significant potential for closer collaboration on ICT platforms and as a result it is proposed that members of the partnership will not introduce any new ICT systems without prior consultation, wherever possible new platforms will ensure they bring such significant new benefits that there is a solid business case to all partners.

Following the earlier work resulting from the Kent-wide 'Kent Commitment' all the boroughs are reviewing and reconfiguring services and there are opportunities to learn from each other and potentially to draw on external funding for example the Kent and Medway Improvement Partnership, which now benefits from government funding, nevertheless this new partnership needs to be pump primed to achieve its maximum potential. This will be done on a fair and equitable basis with contributions from each council.

Although Maidstone's overall performance is very strong it is expected that as a result of clustering over time there will be further improvement in:

- the services and outcomes for local people;
- value for money;
- Public satisfaction ratings;
- Resilience;

- Use of resources and direction of travel statements;
- Performance and cost measures;
- CPA/CAA assessments; and
- Annual Efficiency Statements.

In developing the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership significant work has been undertaken to ensure that robust governance arrangements are established and that these are not overly burdensome. These are set out in draft at Appendix A of the Report of the Chief Executive.

Background

All district councils and the county council in Kent have signed the Kent Commitment. This clearly recognises that Kent is a large and diverse county and therefore invites groups of councils to come together to tackle issues of common concern as well as collaborating with Kent County Council. Individual councils are expected to explore with potential partners how shared services might benefit them, testing out the assumptions through a rigorous business case process.

Significant work has taken place to progress the principles outlined in the Kent Commitment albeit this has primarily been limited to ad-hoc opportunities between district councils as and when they have presented themselves. Work has been undertaken in relation to waste management, the value for money price book and with Kent County Council on the next Local Area Agreement and contact centre development.

Councils in East Kent (Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet) have already developed a cluster model and are currently working together to consider opportunities for greater integration of policy and delivery.

There is already a strong framework upon which to build in Mid Kent with existing partnerships including:

- An Internal Audit Partnership between Maidstone and Ashford borough councils;
- A Business Transformation Partnership between Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford borough councils;
- Overview and Scrutiny, Learning and Development, and Revenues and Benefits partnerships between Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells borough councils;
- The involvement of Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford borough councils in the county 'Gateway' programme;
- Exploration of joint procurement opportunities between Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford borough councils; and
- Development of a joint asset management approach between Ashford and Swale borough councils.

Therefore establishing the Mid Kent Partnership is seen as a logical next step whilst maintaining sovereignty and the decision making processes within each of the authorities.

Each borough will make a per head of population revenue contribution to the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership. This equates to £42,840 per annum for Maidstone Borough Council. It is suggested that this is funded initially from an invest to save bid. Off set against this will be the ongoing savings to be identified as a result of the partnership. In addition it was suggested at the meeting between the Leaders and Chief Executives that Maidstone Borough Council also acts as the accountable body for the partnership.

The deadline for all four authorities to have agreed their involvement is the first week of September.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 1 July 2008 and recommended to Cabinet:-

"That the recommendations in the report of the Chief Executive be agreed subject to the inclusion of the following:

- i. in view of the differing characters of the authorities involved in the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership, a reasonable timescale for projects should be implemented and adhered to, with this Committee being informed of any slippage;
- ii. assurance be given that in all proposed projects, service is as important as savings; and
- iii. there is a clear understanding of how the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership fund be spent and how that spend is monitored."

These recommendations were agreed.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

The Council could continue to look at service improvement locally and explore partnership opportunities and shared services on an ad-hoc basis. However, this has limitations in terms of the level of service improvement and/or efficiencies as well as the options for improving service delivery.

A wider partnership of authorities could be sought with other boroughs. However, one of the perceived barriers to progressing shared services in the past has been the larger number of authorities that are involved in an initiative and in particular the inability to reach a consensus decision.

However, the proposal is not mutually exclusive and boroughs will still be able to progress initiatives with authorities outside Mid Kent and there is still an aspiration for greater working with Kent County Council as reflected in the Kent Commitment.

Background Papers

None

These documents are available at the Council offices.

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Scrutiny Manager by: **18 July 2008**