

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

13 October 2010

### Report of the Management Team

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### **1 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF CORPORATE SIGNIFICANCE**

##### **Summary**

**A report to inform the Cabinet of recent developments and announcements of significance**

#### **1.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships**

- 1.1.1 The Cabinet will recall that the Coalition Government signalled its intention to abolish Regional Development Agencies, including SEEDA.
- 1.1.2 Its intended replacement for RDAs are Local Enterprise Partnerships. Ministers allowed a great deal of local discretion as to the precise nature of LEP proposals but stated that they should be reflective of natural economic geographies.
- 1.1.3 An invitation to submit LEP proposals was issued on 29 June. Whilst various options were considered in inter authority discussions, the preferred option that emerged was for a LEP based upon Kent and Medway and work began in earnest, led by KCC, to prepare a credible submission. The Leader and I, following internal consultations, indicated that this Council would be likely to support a Kent and Medway LEP subject to safeguards in the governance arrangements to ensure that district councils had a strong voice as well as KCC and Medway Council and business representatives.
- 1.1.4 A draft version of a Kent and Medway LEP submission was circulated shortly before a Kent Leaders' meeting on 31 August. The draft submission was never actually discussed at that meeting, however, as the Leader of KCC Paul Carter, announced that the document was being withdrawn as a result of a conversation he had held with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, and that a new submission based upon Kent and Greater Essex would now be submitted. Mr Carter indicated that this was the option that Mr Pickles favoured.
- 1.1.5 On Monday 6 September a further meeting of Kent Leaders was held and a Kent and Greater Essex LEP proposal had been received only late on Friday 3 September, leaving little time to study the document carefully.

- 1.1.6 The Leaders' meeting on 6 September was attended by Cllr Worrall, with Cllr Aikman and the Chief Executive as observers. From the limited study we had been able to make of the Kent and Greater Essex proposal it was apparent that the focus was almost entirely on coastal regeneration, the Thames Gateway and the Growth Points. West Kent is barely mentioned and would clearly be marginalised in terms of receiving any Government funding channelled through the LEP. The governance arrangements were also significantly disadvantageous to district councils.
- 1.1.7 Accordingly, the Leader declined to support the Kent and Greater Essex LEP proposal and indicated his preference for the original Kent and Medway LEP proposal, subject to modification of the Governance arrangements.
- 1.1.8 The outcome was that Medway Council, with the support of this Council and a number of other districts, submitted a Kent and Medway LEP proposal. KCC, with the support of East Kent districts submitted a Kent and Greater Essex LEP proposal.
- 1.1.9 It is worth noting that the deadline for LEP submissions was actually 6 September - the day of the Leaders' meeting. It is also worth noting that at no stage were there any discussions on the actual content of the two documents which has meant that our ability to influence it has been limited to the governance arrangements for the Kent and Medway submission.
- 1.1.10 At the time of writing the decision on the LEP submissions is unknown. An oral update will be provided if announcements are made in the meantime.
- 1.1.11 Copies of both submissions are appended to this report at Annexes 1-4.

## **1.2 West Kent Local Investment Plan**

- 1.2.1 The Director of Health and Housing and Director Planning Transport and Leisure reported to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board on the 28 July on work underway during the summer months in response to the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) request that a Local Investment Plan (LIP) be produced for the West Kent sub region. This report provides a further update on how that work is progressing.

### **Background**

- 1.2.2 During 2009 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) wrote to district councils signalling that they were seeking a new approach to considering housing and regeneration investment needs for local communities. That process was called "The Single Conversation" and, for the purpose of that exercise, it was proposed to include this Council within a grouping of four Local Authorities made up of Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone; the "West Kent and Maidstone" grouping. The councils would have until March 2011 to formulate their investment plans for the period 2011-14.

- 1.2.3 Earlier this year the HCA announced that they required the submission of the investment plan (now referred to as the Local Investment Plan (LIP)) by the end of September such that it will inform the outcome of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).
- 1.2.4 This required a significant amount of work to be undertaken within a two month period over the summer. The task is almost completed and provides a full account of all the known housing and broader regeneration projects which require either HCA support and/or funding. In seeking this information the HCA has indicated the former arrangements, by which housing associations sought grant funding towards affordable housing schemes, will be replaced with the more planned approach of a LIP. The four LAs are keen to ensure the scale of housing investment needed in West Kent and Maidstone is properly recognised by both the HCA and DCLG. To complete the task, officers have worked closely with local housing associations and housing providers to ensure all potential housing schemes have been identified and assessed in terms of their value for money, planning status, timing of delivery and overall viability.
- 1.2.5 Insofar as T&M is concerned we have an excellent record of working with local housing associations in support of their new housing projects. As a consequence, since 2004, over 1,000 new affordable homes have been funded with the benefit of £61 million of grant assistance. Much of this has been possible due to the robustness both of the Council's housing strategy and its affordable housing policies enshrined within the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Council is heavily reliant upon affordable housing coming forward as a part of wider general housing developments e.g. Kings Hill and Leybourne Grange. The Council has successfully enabled high quality, affordable housing schemes for rent and home ownership on a number of strategic sites which, because of their size, also offer continuity of supply over a number of years. This approach and the two aforementioned schemes, are cited in the draft LIP as examples of good practice.

### **Current Position**

- 1.2.6 Officers have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that the recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board have been factored into the draft LIP. The list of priority affordable housing schemes has been reviewed with scheme phasing and anticipated funding requirements identified both in the short term (2011-14) and longer term (2015 – 20). Our submission includes 15 schemes in the initial 2011-14 period with over 730 affordable homes as summarised in **[Annex 5]**. In addition, the other programme requirements for the borough have been identified including:
- Rural Housing - funding to support the delivery of small rural schemes of affordable housing which may come forward following housing needs studies.

- Private Sector Renewal - funding to assist homeowners carry out repairs, improvements and energy efficiency works to their homes.
- Disabled Facilities Grants - funding to meet the housing needs of persons with physical disabilities.
- Supporting People - funding for a scheme for women fleeing domestic violence.
- Estate Renewal - proposals to invest in existing housing association estates to refurbish/replace homes not meeting the Decent Homes standard.

- 1.2.7 The case is also made for significant other investment in the Tonbridge Town Centre Action Plan Regeneration Project to assist with implementation of the detailed schedule of environmental enhancement and transport improvement projects required to accompany new mixed use redevelopment and employment development on key sites. Additional resources and possibly forward funding are likely to be needed in addition to development contribution.
- 1.2.8 Opportunity is also being taken to give further weight in support of key infrastructure and transport projects of sub-regional significance, including the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling; Colts Hill Bypass, Enhanced Capacity at M20 Junction 4 and pressing the case for much needed Rail Service Improvements (including the line through Maidstone and Malling and Gatwick services through Tonbridge).
- 1.2.9 Your officers are nonetheless realistic, especially in the current economic climate, about our prospects of securing the necessary funding to realise all of the above priority projects. Equally it is important that the case is made for much needed investment in West Kent and T&M in particular. We expect other parts of the region will be submitting convincing and well rehearsed investment plans for much needed large-scale projects. Our aim is to ensure the affordability and regeneration needs of this part of Kent are well articulated, and a strong case made for funding backed by Tonbridge and Malling's reputation for delivery.

### **Next Steps**

- 1.2.10 The HCA has now submitted the identified funding requirements of the LIP to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). At the time of writing this report the final draft version of the LIP is awaited which will be published by the HCA for consultation. It is our intention to report that version to Members via the Advisory Boards in the coming cycle. Deadline for comment is the end of December 2010.

1.2.11 Whilst officers have worked hard to meet the, at times, unrealistic timescale imposed on us by the HCA, it has been made plain from the outset that this work remains subject to Member endorsement.

### **1.3 Proposed reform of standards regime**

1.3.1 On 20 September 2010 the Communities Minister Andrew Stunell announced that the government is to axe the entire Standards regime. The government considers that the existing regime has become a vehicle for malicious and frivolous complaints, most of which are dismissed as worthy of no further action.

1.3.2 The details of the changes will be contained in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill due late this year, but early indications are that the Bill will contain the following proposals -

- (i) Standards for England will be abolished, as will the local standards regimes
- (ii) Councillors will still need to declare certain interests in a publicly available register
- (iii) Failure to register an interest, or deliberately seeking to mislead the public about an interest, will become a criminal offence.
- (iv) It is likely that the Local Government Ombudsman will be given new powers in relation to Councillors

### **1.4 Shared Services**

1.4.1 Members will be aware from reports to various Advisory Boards and Committees, of a number of shared service initiatives that are already in place. These existing arrangements involve shared service / partnership working with a number of local authorities including Sevenoaks District Council (SDC), Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Gravesham Borough Council. It is not the intention of this report to refer to these existing arrangements in any detail, but rather to advise Members of the ongoing dialogue with others, in particular Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), and to note potential areas for shared services and the key principles underpinning such discussions.

1.4.2 Members will be aware that discussions have been held across the "west Kent cluster" of authorities (TMBC, GBC, SDC and Dartford Borough Council (DBC)). Experience has demonstrated that it has been more efficient and effective to work on shared services between two authorities, rather than a grouping of three or four. The use of common IT systems is often the driver to identify natural partners and this combined with other local factors has led us to having closer discussions with GBC where there is perhaps a closer alignment of systems, style and approach.

1.4.3 Our discussions with potential partners are underpinned by key principles that have been shaped Members over a period of time. These can be summarised as

- Working together will be to maximise opportunities to deliver savings, improve service resilience or improve service quality through joint working.
- The focus will be on cost reduction in back office areas, enhanced resilience and improvement in customer facing functions
- Focus is on local service delivery.
- The critical success factors will be based on the core premise that any shared activity must demonstrate a clear business case based on either significant customer improvement or significant efficiency improvements. There must be real benefit in any agreed strands of joint working.

1.4.4 Examples of shared services already in place across TMBC include the following

- Shared Revenues Manager with GBC
- Shared Fraud Manager & Fraud Officer with GBC
- Website Content Management Systems with GBC/SDC/DBC
- Shared CCTV with TWBC
- Shared procurement with GBC /DBC
- Shared GIS with TWBC
- Shared Legal Services with SDC
- Shared out of hours telephony with SDC
- Shared building control with SDC
- The business case for a shared Audit Manager with GBC is at an advanced stage, as referred to at the recent Audit Committee and it is anticipate that this shared service will commence in December 2010.

1.4.5 Further dialogue is taking place, particularly with GBC on the potential of further shared services and joint working. These are very much “work in progress” and will be subject to very open dialogue with staff and others prior to any development of a business case which may conclude there are opportunities for joint working, or not. These work streams include Property & Estates, Revenues & Benefits, Environmental Protection, Value for Money Reviews, Payroll & Personnel systems, Planning and IT. This report aims only to give a flavour of the wide range of activity currently ongoing in relation to joint working and shared

services. Members will be advised, through the appropriate Committees and Boards as discussions progress in any particular area.

**1.5 Legal Implications**

1.5.1 None at this stage.

**1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.6.1 None at this stage.

**1.7 Risk Assessment**

1.7.1 To be undertaken once the LEP announcement is made.

Background papers:

contact: David Hughes

Nil

David Hughes  
Chief Executive