

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

30 November 2010

Report of the Management Team

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 **BOLD STEPS FOR KENT – MEDIUM TERM PLAN TO 2014/15 CONSULTATION DRAFT**

To form a response to the County Council's consultation on its new Medium Term Plan.

1.1 **Background**

1.1.1 Kent County Council has recently published a consultation draft of a new Medium Term Plan, Bold Steps for Kent, which will replace the previous plan entitled 'Towards 2010'. It is intended that the plan will be adopted, subject to consultation, at a meeting of the County Council on 16th December 2010.

1.1.2 Bold Steps for Kent sets out the County Council's ambitions and priorities for the next four years and, in addition, describes how the County Council wishes to transform its working practices and how it engages with local communities and its partners. There are three stated aims:

- To help the Kent economy to grow
- To put the Citizen in control
- To tackle disadvantage

1.1.3 The above aims are to be replicated in the next version the Vision for Kent, the County's sustainable community strategy, due for publication in draft in the near future.

1.1.4 The Bold Steps executive summary is attached as Annex A to this report. A full copy of the document can be accessed at:
http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/priorities,_policies_and_plans/priorities_and_plans/bold_steps_for_kent.aspx

1.2 Reforming Public Services

1.2.1 The County Council is seeking to transform it operates and its working relationship with Government albeit set against a background of increasing financial challenge. The County Council expects to have to make savings of some 25% - 40% over the next four years. Despite this, Bold Steps seeks to:

- Ensure Kent enjoys the same powers and responsibilities that may be awarded to the City Regions
- Promote a radical change in service delivery with greater partnership working and devolved decision making
- Achieve a financially self sufficient Kent, for example, by retaining business rates
- Provide better value services through market testing
- Make full use of the new 'power of competence'
- Maintain an outward looking focus and seek to maximise EU funding opportunities
- Focus on projects that support a high quality of life for residents.

1.3 Commentary on the Themes

1.3.1 A focus on economic growth, tackling disadvantage and promoting greater citizen involvement are all commendable objectives and fit well with the Borough Council's own key priorities. Whilst this is a KCC (not a Kent-wide) document, there is perhaps a need for greater emphasis through Bold Steps on partnership working and engagement at the district level. Such engagement is made more unnecessarily challenging where new service delivery boundaries are made non-contiguous with Borough and District areas. For example, the recent re-organisation of Adult Social Services has split this borough in to two separate delivery areas and this pattern is now being forced on some local voluntary bodies via Kent County Council's commissioning process. There is also a likelihood that revisions to the NHS will result in practice based commissioning areas reverting to the former PCT areas, again not recognising district and borough boundaries. It is therefore suggested that KCC should be promoting better joined up services based on district council areas to achieve a more cohesive and effective approach to localism within the County.

1.3.2 This draft of Bold Steps was written prior to the final decision on the Local Economic Partnership as it refers to the former Kent/Essex proposal. As this obviously needs to be updated, it is suggested that further detail should be offered on how KCC will seek to involve local partners, including the districts, in the future work of the LEP. The inclusion of East Sussex now needs to be addressed in

more detail. What needs to be fully recognised in Bold Steps is that the LEP needs to embrace its wider area of coverage and to take account of the specific economic issues and challenges of all of its constituent parts. With East Sussex now included, it will not be acceptable to focus LEP activity on coastal regeneration and Thames Gateway. Rural economy issues, market town vitality and other specific issues relevant to both West Kent and East Sussex need to be embraced.

- 1.3.3 Proposals to tackle disadvantage are to be particularly supported, including the initiative to focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged families and the potential to pool budgets to secure more targeted outcomes. Pilot work on this agenda in East Malling is already underway locally. There is a need to ensure that any emerging county-wide initiative to address this important objective is not confined just to those wider areas of disadvantage but also extend to smaller pockets of deprivation located in more affluent areas such as those across West Kent.
- 1.3.4 Whilst the proposals to encourage greater integration between the Youth Service and Youth Offending Services and the need to address youth disengagement are to be supported, it is disappointing that little attention is given within Bold Steps to the wider needs of children and younger people in the County, not just those at risk of offending, but also recognising the targeted benefits that can be achieved through enhancing and developing the work of the KCC Youth Service. In many areas, the Youth Service plays a crucial role in helping young people but it is often the case that this role is limited by the lack of resources available to that service on the ground. KCC is invited to consider, within the financial constraints now facing the public sector, what can be done to increase resources to this key, front-line service.
- 1.3.5 Similarly, little is said in Bold Steps about the need to help develop and nurture the role of the Children's Trusts now operational across the County. There is a danger that, without adequate resources available to those Trusts, their influence will remain limited and their ability to address and meet local needs could be reduced. The recent Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked-after children services across Kent identified significant problems which also now need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 1.3.6 Bold Steps includes a number of proposals aimed at supporting and developing the voluntary sector. Whilst most of this is positive and can be supported, there is a danger that some proposals may undermine the local benefits that the sector can generate contrary to the objectives of the localism agenda. For example, the proposal to commission 'larger voluntary organisations' to take on the role of 'prime providers' could threaten the viability of local voluntary sector groups contrary to the objective set out in the document of accommodating a 'whole spectrum' of the Kent voluntary sector. Similarly, commissioning processes which force locally-based community organisations, for example, Age Concerns and Volunteer Centres, to merge may also undermine delivery of services to

individual local communities. Such proposals cannot represent real value for money if the end result is a poorer level of service which is then less responsive to the needs of local residents.

- 1.3.7 Bold Steps makes mention of the need to address transport gridlock and refers specifically to the lower Thames crossing, the Channel Corridor and traffic issues in East Kent. No mention is made of the important transport issues affecting West Kent, including A21 improvements, the A228 Colts Hill Bypass and the pressing need to improve train services from West Kent to London. This needs to be rectified.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 As addressed in the consultation document.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 N/A

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That the comments on the consultation draft of Bold Steps for Kent – Medium Term Plan to 2014/15, as set out in this report, **BE ENDORSED**.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

David Hughes
Chief Executive
On behalf of the Management Team

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This is a response to a consultation document only

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	Our responses focuses on the needs of vulnerable groups where appropriate
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Via this consultation opportunity.

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.