

Vision for Kent – Informal Consultation

Key Points

Delivering the County-wide ambitions in the localities

The main concern within this section is the implied and unnecessary level of prescription both in respect of how the ambitions are to be delivered at the local level and the way in which such local delivery activity is to be monitored.

The emphasis on this part of the Vision for Kent should be on the need to recognise local diversity both in terms of the specific priorities local residents might have (some of which could well differ from those contained within Vision for Kent) and the local partnerships which are in place to address both these priorities and those for Kent as a whole.

Vision for Kent needs to acknowledge that district councils themselves have a statutory duty to prepare their own sustainable community strategy which needs to reflect local circumstances. Such strategies need to take account of the Vision for Kent but such strategies are not there purely to provide the delivery of its ambitions at the local level. The absence in this draft version of Vision for Kent of the drafted sections on localities is regrettable as their inclusion would accurately reflect the need to take account of such local diversity in addition to the ambitions of Vision for Kent.

The Kent Forum has acknowledged that there is to be some flexibility in how the locality boards may be configured at the local level with a number of pilot arrangements being tested and an acknowledged need to avoid a 'one size fits all approach'. The Vision for Kent, however, avoids any reference to differing approaches and appears to assume that one solution, the locality board, will be suitable for all areas.

There is a diverse range of Local Strategic Partnerships across the county in place to deliver actions within locally driven sustainable community strategies. The Tonbridge and Malling LSP is a good example of a partnership which is both well supported by partners and is action-orientated in its approach. This partnership is best placed to take on the role of a locality board. In other areas where LSPs are less active and/or effective, a locality board may need to be created. Similarly, other local partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnership and the Local Children's Trust Board, need to be retained as independent bodies and not subsumed into other wider (non statutory) partnerships.

On this basis, it is suggested that the 'Delivery' part of Vision for Kent should indicate that each district council and its local partners should be invited to incorporate the ambitions of Vision for Kent within the next review of their own sustainable community strategies and invite those bodies with local responsibility for the delivery of those strategies to contribute to the monitoring of any actions relevant to Vision for Kent. In addition, it should be for the localities to determine how such delivery is to be undertaken and in what form any local delivery plan is constructed.

Ambition 1 - To grow the economy

The section on delivery plans needs to acknowledge the role of other sub regional partnerships in addition to the Thames Gateway. Significant work in West Kent to deliver this ambition will be led by the West Kent Partnership in addition to district level partnerships and/or boards.

The section of going further needs to acknowledge the emphasis that must be placed on supporting and fostering new and growing SMEs across the County in order to deliver this ambition. The statement in Section 4 which refers to 98% of businesses having fewer than 100 employees does not accurately capture the issue. 71.8% of Kent businesses employ less than 5 people.

Vision for Kent also needs to recognise that significant parts of Kent are rural and that many Kent businesses are located in such areas. To support the Kent economy as a whole, therefore, specific support for rural based businesses is required, for example, the improvement of broadband services to such areas.

To improve both the economy and tackle disadvantage (as noted under Ambition 2), more provision is required to offer alternative curricula to young people from the age of 14 for whom a more academic educational pathway is not suitable. Such provision must be accessible to all schools across the County. Too many young people become NEET due to the lack of such provision local to their school.

Ambition 2 - To Tackle Disadvantage

This particular ambition has the Borough Council's strong support and the references to disadvantage not being confined to the areas of more severe deprivation, and that pockets of need exist within otherwise affluent areas, are particularly welcome.

Whilst references to improving the health of those within more deprived areas if to be supported, there needs to be greater recognition of the part that poor mental health plays in both creating and prolonging disadvantage. More emphasis needs to be placed on improving preventative mental health services at Tiers 1 and 2 in order to achieve better outcomes. Mental health services for young people are particularly under resourced. For example, in Tonbridge, there is currently a 1 year wait for young people referred to local counselling services. In consequence, many mental problems are left to escalate into more serious problems linked to alcohol and substance misuse, ASB, self harm and hospital admissions due to overdoses.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed generally on the provision of support services which are preventative and aimed at breaking inter-generational cycles of entrenched deprivation. Whilst it is equally important to address the needs of families already suffering from disadvantage and bring about improvements, intervention with families at a young age and at prenatal can bring about longer term improvements both for those families and the wider community.

More innovative approaches are required to tackle entrenched deprivation. A multi-agency focus on families which create the most need within specific communities is one means by which positive change could be achieved. Whilst this may more easily identify the linked problems affecting such families, sufficient resources will be needed to ensure those needs are then adequately addressed.

Ambition 3 – To put people in control

The Borough Council supports generally this ambition. However, it is not clear how the ambition will be delivered across Kent at a time when public finances are severely constrained. A reality check may therefore be required on some of the aspirational statements contained under this specific ambition.

The Borough Council believes that greater emphasis could be placed on supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector across the County as the main means by which this ambition could be fulfilled.

Other Comments

There is a danger that much of the language used in this version of Vision for Kent would not make it readily accessible and understood by all residents of Kent. It would assist if future versions of the document were more action-orientated and better focused on the delivery of actions on the ground which could be readily appreciated by our residents. Many of the current actions appear to be too vague to achieve this objective and collectively do not appear to 'add value' to work already underway across the County.