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Dear Cath

DEVELOPING A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH EAST – PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND ADVICE

I am writing a little belatedly in response to the letter from Councillor Moira Gibson concerning the provision of information and advice in connection with the proposed work on the new Strategy for the South East. My delay in responding is largely due to wishing to take soundings from colleagues across Kent to gauge the likely response of others. As I imagined this has demonstrated a mix of views.

I would like to make a number of observations and comments. Firstly, it seems to me that the relevant evidence that is broadly referred to in the letter is largely available from technical information that has formed part of the evidence base for Local Development Frameworks and other key documents prepared by Local Authorities. Much of this information will be available from District Councils and I am not sure of the benefit of forming groupings to obtain this evidence. However, I appreciate that some evidence is already collected in local partnerships. Two examples locally would be work behind the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for West Kent and information on economic development and community safety matters generally covered by the West Kent Partnership. Other information, on housing and employment land availability for example, is traditionally collated at a County level. I think it is probably best that the brief for evidence is made available and then the best way of assisting can be found locally.

I am bound, however, to express more concern about groupings to cover "advice" to the Partnership Board throughout the intended preparation of a new South East Strategy. At this very early stage in the process it is not clear what the most appropriate avenue and geographical area on which to provide and base such advice will be. Certainly, bearing in mind the diverse nature of Kent it would not appear to be appropriate for the county area to be utilised for this purpose. One possible local solution, for example, would be to utilise the area based on the West Kent Partnership covering the district areas of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. Another might be to add Maidstone Borough to this to reflect the "Single Conversation" area identified by the Homes and Communities Agency. However, I am not in a position to commit my Council

to such a way forward without consultation with members of the Council and to do that I will require further information on the extent of advice that is likely to be required and the arrangements for its subsequent use.

I am aware that there are a number of different views emerging on the response to the definition of areas for various purposes and whilst this might appear unhelpful I think it reflects a degree of ambiguity in the original request.

Yours sincerely

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning, Transport & Leisure