

**West Kent Partnership Meeting
19 July 2007, Kings Hill Conference Centre**

Minutes

Present:

Angela Painter; Tony Bartlett; Merle Bigden; Cllr Roy Bullock; Penny Chatfield; David Coleman; Cllr Peter Fleming; Bill Fearon; Anne-Marie Hannam; Nicolas Heslop; Margaret Howard; Nazeya Hussain; Alan Mckendrick; Tom Phillips; Jon Rosser; Mark Salisbury; Sheila Wheeler; Wendy Wilton; Cllr Mark Worrall; Peter York; Wendy Wood

Apologies:

Keith Austin; Cllr Nick Chard; Michael Cooke; Clair Fisher; Kate Greenaway; Robin Hales; David Hughes; Brendan O'Connor; Mark Raymond; Rosie Serpis; Caroline Shaw; Malcolm Staunton; Simon Wilshaw; Mandy Wynne

Chairman's Opening Remarks

Cllr Peter Fleming took the Chair, explaining that Cllr Roy Bullock had asked him to Chair for a period while Cllr Bullock becomes more familiar with the work of the Partnership.

The Chair welcomed new members of the Partnership:

Cllr Roy Bullock, Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Nicolas Heslop, Cabinet Member for Community Development, TMBC
Margaret Howard, KCC, Director - Commissioning and Provision, West Kent Adult Social Services, who takes over from Stephen Leidecker

And guests:

Charlie Fox, VAWK attending in place of Caroline Shaw
And Mandy Bearne, Marketing Director of Locate in Kent, attending the latter part of the meeting to present her Commercial Property report.

1. Minutes/Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

**2. West Kent Police – the voyage of transition and beyond –
Presentation by Mark Salisbury, West Kent Police Area Commander**

The powerpoint presentation is attached. Mark endorsed his support for the partnership as a high level strategic forum now that the policing area is organised co-terminus with the 3 District/Borough areas.

There was some discussion surrounding the issues raised. Mark explained that West Kent is one of the safest places to live but despite that the public perception is that there are higher levels of crime and tackling that perception

is a priority. He was asked if there was consistency in reporting crimes across the regions and explained that in Kent all violent crime is recorded as a single incident whether it is a minor or major incident. Whereas in some areas discretion is used particularly regarding minor issues which could be dealt with effectively within a school, for example, and would not be included in the statistics. This is currently being reviewed

When asked about gang culture and the perception that the public have when confronted by young people in groups at stations/shopping malls etc, Mark explained that the West Kent Police are keen to explore ways where young people can meet in similarly lit and covered facilities perhaps with an outreach worker so that communities do not feel threatened.

Young people are accessing websites which lead to an e-gang culture. This presents new challenges to the police and communities.

There was some discussion around how much West Kent Police can determine its own priorities and how much is dictated by the home office. Mark explained that the priorities for West Kent are identified in the current control strategy. Communities are consulted on putting together this strategy. The Home Office has recently reduced funding for CDRPs and yet still expect the same level of performance. Mark's priority is to listen to the communities.

A question was asked about how the West Kent Partnership can help. Mark's response was that the WKP has huge strategic significance and is the envy of other policing areas. In respect to helping with direct policing issues, the WKP is in a position to influence wide ranging issues such as health and youth diversion. Mark re-confirmed the very real value of the district/Borough CDRPs and the role they can play in building safer and stronger communities and in direct delivery on the ground. He felt that there is a need for more community development workers to further address community involvement.. Within our communities the police and partners are working hard on addressing triggers for fear such as graffiti and signs of vandalism and replacing these with comfort factors – neighbourhood watch schemes, CCTV and a police presence.

3. LSP Peer Challenge – Outcomes and Next Steps

Sheila Wheeler briefly introduced the paper putting it into context. She wanted to clearly understand the relationship between the community planning partnership and the West Kent LSP and wished to identify duplication and synergy and accountability and responsibility from the point of view of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. It was therefore important to complete this gap analysis. It has also been viewed as a coming of age review for this partnership. It takes a long time to build relationships across a large and disparate group. What has emerged from the review are further challenges. The WKP is involved in much very good work especially around relationships, value added input (particularly in understanding the different perspectives around the table) and has been effective as a lobbying group – greater strength working together.

There are however, still some challenges ahead, around the consistency and focus of some of the sub groups and whether they are used appropriately to deliver on issues.

Sheila flagged that on 17 July a sub national review of economic development and regeneration had been announced in Parliament. This is one area that the partnership has worked very well together through the AIF. There is a possibility of a statutory obligation for councils to produce an economic development strategy to look at how to build capacity. The review of sub-national economic development and regeneration will give councils and regions new powers and incentives to drive local prosperity, economic growth and regeneration.

It was agreed that over the last few years the partnership has become more mature. The seniority of partners themselves and the contribution all make has made the partnership stronger and we have made better progress for the people of West Kent than without the partnership. The review had been realistic in identifying strengths and weaknesses.

It was suggested that one of the things that the WKP has not perhaps handled as well as it could at a West Kent level is the relationship to the community strategies and this may be something better handled at a local level in the light of some recent funding decisions, for example on the Choosing Health money where West Kent risks being seriously disadvantaged by being viewed as just one LSP when in fact the money should be distributed at a district LSP level. Cllr Worrall stated that the West Kent Partnership as a title is established in local communities and does give a voice which across the whole of the area people understand and much can be achieved by the Partnership and is not restricted to economic activity.

The report has not been made available to all partners as it was commissioned by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and not the West Kent Partnership and focused on the relationship between the Tunbridge Wells community plan and the WKP and not the WKP itself. However, what did come out of that review is the conclusion that the WKP is not an LSP but still has significant value as a strategic partnership.

A question was asked as to the relationship between the WKP in the future and the Local Area Agreement. Sheila explained that government directs funding in return for achieving targets. Kent is currently in round 2 and setting targets, some of which are locally set and some centrally. KCC is proposing district chapters to set local targets.

Mark Worrall added that LAAs are likely to be even more important going forwards. The methodology and final detail is still being discussed by government. If the WKP can come to joint understandings on priorities then that is a strength. However, even more strength would be achieved on joint West Kent objectives if the 3 districts each had a seat at the table and 3 votes on any ballot for funding but were also able to reinforce joint West Kent views.

Action: Each partner is asked to begin discussions in their respective organisations and feed in what they would wish to see the WKP focus on, in the future.

Report to be presented on recommendation at next meeting.

4. Potential West Kent Leader

Tony Bartlett highlighted that without the existence of the West Kent Partnership the process of applying for Leader funding for the rural communities in West Kent would not have happened. The fact is that because of the WKP a group of officers were able to identify the opportunity in the first instance, were used to working together and could write and submit an expression of interest in a very short time scale. This is a substantive bid. It is the first time West Kent has applied for this level of funding and underlines the value of the partnership and its move to a new level of maturity.

Leader funding is new funding being made available through RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England 2007-13). The EU and DEFRA are jointly funding and the programme is being managed in the South East by SEEDA. It will deliver against axes 1 and 3 identified in the programme and the Expression of Interest is the first stage to accessing funding. The total programme in the South East could be worth as much as £30million over 5 years and SEEDA are seeking at least one Leader in each county. Kent has, to our knowledge, submitted 4 Expressions of Interest. The West Kent EOI is contiguous geographically with the Kent Downs and Marshes EOI in mid Kent. Between them they cover the whole of the North Downs AONB and have been put together to complement each other. The proposed Leader area has to have a rural population of less than 150,000 residents but can be designed on a swiss cheese principle of cutting out the urban settlements. If the EOI is successful SEEDA will work with West Kent in putting together a full bid for January 2008 which would be assessed in the April with successful bids receiving funding for the financial year 2008/9.

Partners were very positive about the EOI and it was suggested that Bedgebury Forest could be approached as potential joint funding partner on projects. It was noted that there are exciting opportunities around enterprise culture and both West Kent College and Hadlow are significant training providers in the area. There was some discussion around the assessment criteria for the EOI and it was explained that although a standard set of assessment criteria are to be used by SEEDA, what these are has not been shared with applicants. However, West Kent have been able to put forward a strong case based on the AIF which had already identified that the rural economy was essential to us and needed support.

Action: The Partnership agreed that it was essential that a high quality bid should be submitted and agreed funding of £10K to facilitate this process.

Post Meeting: The EOI has been accepted by SEEDA and the West Kent Leader will now proceed to full application.

5. Co-ordinator's Report

Conference

The conference is now confirmed for Tuesday 27 November, 10-1 including buffet lunch at the East Malling conference centre, with capacity for up to 200 delegates. Farming plays a significant part in maintaining the quality of life for people in the West Kent area and profitable agriculture is essential to the management of the countryside. The challenge for the future of farming in WK is how to continue to survive, with the changing emphasis on sustainability and the withdrawal of the single farm payment subsidy. The conference has a focus on farm diversification and sustainability and accessing advice, expertise and funding.

If we are invited to progress to a full Leader bid the conference will be a very useful tool in stakeholder consultation and in identifying potential early Leader projects. However, Leader accounts for only 5% of the new RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) 2007-13 and WK rural businesses will be eligible to apply direct for funding. Terry Bradfield's session will provide information on this and the timing of the conference is linked to this information being available.

We are securing sponsorship towards the cost of event – notably from SEEDA and Kent County Council rural regeneration team and we are also in discussions with Lloyds bank agricultural division. Promotion for the event has already begun with flyers available at the Kent Show last week.

Action: CPRE (Kent) (Campaign to Protect Rural England) to be invited to support conference and Leader bid with publicity and funding. **WW**

Action: Jonathan Shaw, the local MP for Chatham who is also the Minister for the South East, Minister for Marine, Landscape and Rural Affairs and is responsible for the Single Farm Payment to be invited to speak. **WW**

Financial Report

Headline figures show £35,780 available for projects for the remainder of this financial year. Funding for ongoing projects has been already allocated in the budget figures. The total amount available however is now reduced by £10K as funding for Leader bid development has been agreed.

Marketing expenditure may be less dependent on final costings of conference and sponsorship levels secured.

Action An update report to be provided to the next WKP meeting together with considerations regarding the budget for 2008/09 **WW**

6. Local Area Agreement (LAA) – Future Funding

Peter Fleming outlined the funding difficulties faced by all three West Kent local authorities by one of the hardest ever grant rounds. A 5% reduction in funding is probable and no uplift for inflation means that the local authorities will be under extreme pressure on funding. There was concern regarding the possibility that LAA 2 will allocate money on the basis of following the problems. However, the concept of performance reward is important and West Kent is performing well. If West Kent loses money then performance is likely to drop and the communities will lose out. Funding for LAA 2 will be significantly more than for LAA1 and will be pooled. This could have a serious impact on funding available to West Kent. It is essential that West Kent puts itself in the strongest possible position to access all available funding .

7. Projects

VAWK – application for a further year’s funding

The application for a further year of funding for the VAWK development officer post of £12,500 from October 2007-September 2008 was considered.

The work of VAWK is much appreciated by the Partnership, but the bid for funding needed to be considered in the context of available budget.

As the budget for 2008/09 has not yet been confirmed, 6 months funding of £6,250 was approved. This does not preclude VAWK from re-applying when the budget for 08/09 is confirmed. However it was noted that WKP project money was for one off projects rather than ongoing staff costs.

Action: Six months funding of £6250 from October 07-March 08 to be granted to VAWK. Any future application to the WKP should demonstrate achievements to date outside of core activity and will have to be viewed in the light of WKP’s own available funding.

8. Sub Group Updates

AIF/Economy

Tony Bartlett advised the WKP that the Voice for Business website is now available. Some work still needs to be completed on this but he asked partners to check the website including any content on their organisation for accuracy. www.westkentforbusiness.co.uk

A meeting has taken place between planning officers in West Kent to identify areas of commonality and identify how the 3 local authorities can work together to address the shared joint planning issues identified in the AIF. This will be progressed and monitored through the AIF group.

Tony introduced Mandy Bearne, Marketing Director of Locate in Kent attending to present the study recently produced on the supply and demand

for commercial property in West Kent. A copy of the study is attached to these notes and the powerpoint presentation is also attached.

Mandy explained that Locate in Kent is an inward investment agency, not only helping companies to move into Kent but also working with local companies who want to grow and expand. Locate in Kent maintains a property portal which contains up to date information on commercial property across the county, acting as a one-stop shop for anyone wanting to see what property is available. A record is kept of all searches which enables Locate in Kent to establish what kind of property is most in demand. Locate in Kent work closely with local authorities and property developers in assessing land and property available.

The report highlights that there is a shortfall in West Kent of properties to meet demand – there are adequate properties but many of those available do not satisfy the criteria for those searching for property. There is also a continual trend towards loss of employment land to housing.

Action: The WKP endorsed the report and agreed that the findings should be actioned through the Economy sub group. TB

Learning and Skills

Wendy summarised the Adult Skills paper and commented that although the sub group had not been able to meet there was significant activity in this area.

There is very little funding for adult learners in West Kent and what is available needs to be carefully targeted where there is the most need. The report contains a summary on future funding opportunities for adult learning.

Tonbridge & Malling BC hear the planning application for the new West Kent College campus next week.

There was some discussion around the paper submitted by Malcolm for the 14-19 skills group. The paper suggests that there are only 150 NEETS (young people not in education or employment) in West Kent. This figure seems extraordinarily low and would indicate that there are some young people who do not feature in the statistics. Under-reporting of this statistic is a barrier to attracting funding to address the needs of this group. Paradoxically, the WKP learnt that funding to Connexions would be adversely affected if the reported NEET figure was higher.

Action: Mark Gorringe of Connexions to be invited to give a presentation to a future WKP meeting specifically on the NEET group in West Kent WW

Housing

Jon Rosser explained that the Housing Group would meet again in September. In the meantime he sought clarification from the Partnership on what action it sought from the sub group in respect of the disposal of public

sector land at market value. It had been suggested at the last meeting that the WKP could lobby the regional assembly on this issue and Jon pointed out that if public sector employers want to proceed on this then there were a number sitting around the table who could potentially lead on the issue.

Action: Jon to liaise with Barbara on implementing recommendations from Employer Engagement Report JR

Action: Housing sub group to produce a précis on the issues surrounding affordable housing identified in the sub national economic development and regeneration review JR

Transport

Mark Salisbury advised the meeting that WK police officers now receive free travel on all buses and negotiations are underway to extend this to rail travel. Police officers put themselves on duty should a problem occur on the bus/train and this is proving most successful.

Sheila raised concerns over the Colts Hill Link. She has recently discussed this with KCC, particularly in the context of the new hospital at Pembury. It is important that the pressure is maintained as this is a crucial link between Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells.

Action: The Transport sub group to keep the Colts Hill Link on their Agenda and advise WKP on a regular basis on how the pressure can be maintained. The WKP should continue to express concern and lobby on this issue. A-MH

Action: Transport sub group to report back to next meeting on the KCC free school transport pilot scheme A-MH

Action: Efforts to be maintained by Transport sub group to engage fully with Network Rail A-MH

Health

Angela Painter suggested that it might be useful for the Partnership to receive a presentation to the next meeting. This will cover the annual public health report and explain the new PCT structure and developments with the community hospitals.

The community hospital review has been completed and has identified the overall number of beds needed. All community hospitals will remain open. Sevenoaks Hospital is putting in a bid for redesign and upgrading worth £6M. The renal dialysis unit of St. Thomas' Hospital is not now to be relocated to Tonbridge Hospital. Fifteen beds will remain at the hospital and a decision to be taken on how to use the remaining space.

Choosing Health funding for this year has been set at £1.9M. A large proportion of this funding will be used to support the modernisation of sexual health support services across West Kent. The remaining £380K will be

divided across the districts/borough localities in West Kent PCT area (which includes Maidstone and Dartford & Gravesham) on a population and deprivation basis. The community health agenda is about reducing inequalities.

Action: Angela to report back to PCT that pockets of deprivation require higher resources to address but because of their size are often overlooked in identifying deprived areas **AP**

Action: Health Policy Board will comment on the Kent Public Health Strategy consultation. **AP**

Action: Julia Ross, Director of Community Engagement at West Kent PCT to be invited to present to the next WKP meeting **WW**

Action: Many sub group papers contain acronyms. In future report writers should take care to spell out acronyms to enable the information to be more meaningful as these minutes have a very wide distribution. **All s-groups**

9. Any Other Business

No issues were raised.

10. Dates of Next Meetings

(note change of date) Thursday 1 November, 2007, 10am, Kings Hill Conference Centre

Thursday 24 January, 2008

Thursday 24 April, 2008

Thursday 17 July, 2008

Thursday 16 October, 2008