

28 Feb. 2011

Dear Peter,

Surrey Alliance – Next steps – Response

I refer to your letter of 25 January setting out the proposed governance arrangements for the C&YP Alliance following the changes made by the Government.

I was privy to these proposals at an early stage as a former member of the commissioning executive, and in summary they are:

- to create a small Partnership Board of officers from the commissioning bodies, and broadly reflecting the five themes of ECM,
- to give up the former Area partnerships and leave District/ Borough partnerships – LSPs to assimilate the C&YP agenda into their thinking
- to involve young people through an annual Assembly
- similarly to involve the VCFS through an annual assembly
- to bring both the VCFS and children and young people together in a third annual assembly.

The tests I would apply to this are:

- whether or not these arrangements will enable the commissioners to make informed choices and to hear and take account of the voices of young people, and of the VCFS who are major providers of youth services?

Mrs Sarah Goad JP
Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey

The Rt Rev The Bishop of Guildford
Representing Faith Communities

Patrons:
Robert Douglas CBE
High Sheriff of Surrey 2010/11

Professor Christopher Snowden
Vice-Chancellor of University of Surrey

Geoff Marlow
Chairman Surrey County Council

Mark Rowley
Chief Constable of Surrey



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- whether a right balance is likely to be achieved between a small number of key strategic county wide services/ initiatives, and sufficient local autonomy and flexibility to meet local needs?

I have some doubts on both scores.

The Fit for the Future/Transformation Project Board has finished its work as the stage is now one of implementation, and so a means of obtaining information and inputting our thinking is no longer available. I am concerned at the lack of regular, structured contact between the VCFS and SCC at a time of such instability.

The proposed structure does not ease my concerns for it is what I call a "managerialist approach", concentrating a great deal of power with the managers. I can understand the arguments for so doing, but its success depends on the commissioners having all the fast time/ real time data to hand to be able to address issues. I don't see them having this. For example the anecdotal information we have is that youth homelessness is already spiralling upwards, and this on the ground experience will eventually will be reflected in district/ borough housing figures, and increased demand for CAMHS services. Youth unemployment is still going down (Surrey Economic Prospects, January), but how quickly will commissioners respond when it starts to go up, remembering the "Youth and employability "objective?

This brings me to a further doubt – the ability to work in partnership with the VCFS as a major provider to address these issues as a "co-producer". I suggest it is important to have this close linkage in view of the continued public expenditure cuts and a greater role for the VCFS in consequence, with a growing emphasis on social enterprises and social finance. This need not mean endless unproductive partnership meetings, but I do suggest you need what I have previously called a "reference group" to the VCFS through whom ideas can be tested, and equally from whom propositions might come. The flow needs to be two-way. This could be done virtually and/or by meeting.

My final point is that this model seems to have inbuilt tensions between the district/ borough LSPs to whom you are assigning the local needs/ integrative role, and SCC Local Committees to whom a substantial £2.5 mill devolved budget is to be assigned for the local commissioning of youth preventative services. I am sure it is a great idea to enable local county councillors to commission the additional youth services required to meet local need. However surely the logic of the model should be to pool this in the local LSP, and if not, does this not betray a lack of confidence in the ability of LSPs to achieve the local integration you are describing as their role?

I think the three annual meetings proposed are reasonable, but my principal point is to commend the inclusion of a reference group from the VCFS as a two way sounding board.

I hope these comments are of interest.

Best wishes,

Mike

Mike Abbott, Chief Executive.