



WILCO

Welfare innovations
at the local level
in favour of cohesion

WORK PACKAGE 5

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN DOVER, UNITED KINGDOM

Dr Lavinia Mitton and the UK WILCO team at the University of
Kent

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
2. SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN DOVER	5
2.1. Family Learning at the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project (ANP)	5
2.1.1. Short description.....	5
2.1.2. The innovation	5
2.1.3. Conceptions and ways of addressing users	6
2.1.4. Internal organization and modes of working	6
2.1.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system	7
2.2. Happy Feet Pre-School	7
2.2.1. Short description.....	7
2.2.2. The innovation	7
2.2.3. Conceptions and ways of addressing users	8
2.2.4. Internal organization and modes of working	8
2.2.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system	9
2.3. East Kent Housing (EKH)	10
2.3.1. Short description.....	10
2.3.2. The innovation	11
2.3.3. Conceptions and ways of addressing users	11
2.3.4. Internal organization and modes of working	12
2.3.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system	13
CONCLUSIONS	13
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	155

INTRODUCTION

Public and professional debates about growth and regeneration

Across all the examples of social innovation presented here, a consensus emerged among officials and policymakers about the importance of economic growth to Dover District Council (DDC) and the importance of the Council to the growth agenda. The key word used by officials and politicians in Dover in describing their general values and policy orientation is regeneration. A drive for regeneration has been the main focus of the local 'welfare system' and is the first strategic priority of the Council's Corporate Plan.¹ The aim is not only to physically regenerate the area, but also to ensure all residents access economic benefits. In the concept of 'regeneration' housing and employment opportunities are intricately linked. Indeed, what characterises the underlying dominant approach in Dover is that plans in both these policy fields need to be addressed together.

Business regulation, street cleaning, community safety and planning are all critical to creating a business-friendly environment, and lie in the hands of local authorities. Councils are well placed to co-ordinate and broker local resources, and bring together residents, businesses and different public sector agencies to work towards a common goal. The Council's response has been to make tackling regeneration "the priority of the Council in terms of major projects, investment and partnership working."² The key orientations and values to note in this statement are major and partnership.

Context for public services

Even before the recession, services for which local authorities are responsible were struggling to respond to changing expectations and demographic shifts. The UK government has perceived the crisis in public finances to be deep and urgent. Public services in England are facing the stark reality of needing to decide what to cut. The current financial climate has increased the pressure on locally organised services and made the demand for new solutions even more pressing.

The conclusion of a recent address given by the Leader of Dover District Council Cllr Paul Watkins to members of the Cabinet was that: "Decisions about the most effective use of resources, targeting the most needed areas and responding to residents' aspirations continues to be a challenging agenda."³ The Council is facing a changing local government environment with new partnerships and alternative ways of working and a shift from councils directly delivering a multitude of services to an environment of enabling others, where appropriate, to deliver services for themselves. Cllr Watkins said:

The government's spending plans require public sector organisations to consider changes to the way that local services are delivered ... Over the next few years, we are facing a changing local government environment

¹ DDC (2012). Corporate Plan 2012-2016. Available from:

<http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/CorporatePlan2012-2016.pdf>

² Dover Pride (2006). Memorandum by Dover Pride (CT 29). House of Commons Select Committee on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Written Evidence. Available from:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmodpm/1023/1023we30.htm>

³ East Kent Mercury, July 12, 2012, No money, so it's over to you...

*with new partnerships and alternative ways of working and a shift from councils directly delivering a multitude of services.*⁴

Many in government at all levels believe that the challenges faced call for a rapid expansion of the role of innovative civil society organisations, social enterprises and other non-traditional providers in a market for public services. Such a radical change is being hastened by the opening up of contracts to provide public services to a greater range of providers and the emergence of new forms of finance, including social finance, philanthropic and commercial investment.

In consequence, the other notable feature of the local welfare system in Dover is the debate about how to deliver the Council's priorities of growth, jobs and investment in an environment of on-going financial constraints, the national government's Big Society agenda and the need for establish alternatives to Council-delivered services. The Council is facing a shift from councils directly delivering a multitude of services to an environment of *enabling* others to deliver services for themselves.

For example the Council's Corporate Plan 2008-2020 stated that role of the Council in respect of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) would seek to deliver services in different ways, including devolving services to the VCS and others.⁵ It stated: "We have been working closely with partners to support, enable and encourage development and enterprise."⁶ 'Partnership working' has more than one definition in the context of the Council's relationship with the VCS The nature of the relationship depends on how the Council works with the organisation, such as whether it was the commissioner of a service or providing support and expertise to another group. This way of working raises a number of issues. One potential risk is that of an alternative provider defaulting on service delivery.

The support the Council offers to the VCS for activities, other than funding the provision of services, is primarily administrative support to organisations using the expertise developed by the authority in delivering its own projects. This can include assisting in the development of constitutions for VCS groups, assisting in the completion of funding applications, and attending meetings. The Council has also taken steps to involve the VCS by being a partner in the Dover and District Compact, which represented local groups and public bodies working together to achieve objectives for the local community.⁷ The Compact provided the Council with a greater understanding of how the VCS worked and provided a focus for corporate strategic awareness in involving the community and voluntary sector.⁸

Approach to social innovation

Inequality, whilst receiving less attention than regeneration, does have some priority. In 2006 the Council identified the general issues facing Dover then as including "high levels of deprivation."⁹ Their diagnosis at that time was that "the town is suffering from lack of

⁴ East Kent Mercury, July 12, 2012, No money, so it's over to you...

⁵ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held on Wednesday 17 November 2010 at the Council Offices, Whitfield at 6.00 pm.

⁶ DDC (2012). Corporate Plan 2012-2016. Available from:

<http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/CorporatePlan2012-2016.pdf>

⁷ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held on Wednesday 17 November 2010 at the Council Offices, Whitfield at 6.00 pm.

⁸ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held on Wednesday 17 November 2010 at the Council Offices, Whitfield on at 6.00 pm.

⁹ Dover Pride (2006). Memorandum by Dover Pride (CT 29). House of Commons Select Committee on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Written Evidence. Available from:

investment that has led to the high levels of deprivation within its urban ward.” The Council’s *Annual Monitoring Report 2010-2011* showed there had been an almost doubling in the number of areas that are within the 20% most disadvantaged in England. It was felt by the Council that: “The cause and impacts of the increase in the number of most disadvantaged areas in the District needs to be investigated further.”¹⁰

Still, the overall direct strategy has been to bring economic growth to Dover, rather than expanding support to individuals with services and financial assistance beyond statutory and national government services. So, whilst a larger council might be able to build on its reach into local communities, particularly through its housing and social care services, which make it well placed to broker links between job seekers and innovative programmes aimed at the unemployed, Dover has not had the capacity to do so in a big way. The overall political focus is to attract business, new residents, and tourists to the area. The underlying values have been summed up as follows:

*Everyone (communities, public services, local businesses and individuals) has been affected by the national economic downturn. It is therefore important to focus on economic recovery and growth and continue attracting and enabling inward investment to the district, to support the creation of local jobs, and aim to keep wealth locally to see our district grow and thrive.*¹¹

Concepts such as ‘reducing inequalities’, ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social inclusion’ have not been recurrent in the public discourse in the last ten years, except in the field of housing, perhaps because of the Council’s limited resources. In housing the Council wants to see delivery of more affordable homes, as well as improving the condition of existing homes, addressing inequality, and enabling vulnerable people access to quality housing to live independently.

However, despite the constraints on direct activities by the Council, it clearly favours social innovations that target ‘social cohesion’ at the ‘local level’, although they are not using that vocabulary in discourse. The social innovations with most high profile and pro-active Council involvement right now outside of housing policy aim to raise aspirations, educational attainment and skills. Thus the Council’s position is that “training and education is linked to economic growth” rather than a direct social cohesion or social mobility agenda.

The approach adopted is one of an “enabling role working with local employers and training providers to identify skills shortages to meet local business needs and improve access to local job opportunities.”¹² These have included working with the Homes and Communities Agency and Hadlow College to develop the Betteshanger Colliery and Fowlmead Country Park sites as a Sustainable Futures Campus (a mixed use educational, employment and tourism facility) to secure the long-term future of the area and working

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmodpm/1023/1023we30.htm>

¹⁰ DDC. Agenda Item No 13. Dover District Annual Monitoring Report. Meeting and Date: Cabinet - 12 February 2012 Report of Mike Dawson, Director of Regeneration and Development.

¹¹ DDC (2012). Corporate Plan 2012-2016. Available from: <http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/CorporatePlan2012-2016.pdf>

¹² DDC (2012). State of the District 2012. Available from: <http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/StateoftheDistrict2012.pdf>

with partners to enable and facilitate a training centre of excellence for the marine skills sector.¹³

Other social concerns have included, and continue to include, health, partly because the long term health problems encountered by former miners are well known and Dover has been no exception to this. In view of such statistics as life expectancy, which is 8 years lower for men and 2.3 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Dover compared to the least deprived areas, and the statistically significant relationship between living in the poorest wards in Dover and the likelihood of having an urgent hospital admission, the Council intends to address health outcomes in the district in future.¹⁴ Local government can have an impact on health through sports, open space, housing, planning, social care and a range of other services. The Council has been working hard to input into planning the right services for the Dover communities by, for example, creating in partnership a local Health and Well-Being Board to identify health and social care needs and improve health outcomes.¹⁵

The social innovations selected in Dover

This document outlines three social innovations from Dover. The first two innovations, Aylesham Neighbourhood Project (ANP) Family Learning and Happy Feet Pre-school, are run by the VCS. The third innovation, East Kent Housing (EKH), is an example of improvement in council services brought about by reorganisation.

ANP and Happy Feet Pre-school offer services in all three policy fields that are the focus of the WILCO project i.e. housing, employment, and childcare. Indeed, the most innovative and successful aspect of their work is precisely that they recognise that improving the circumstances of an individual frequently involves improving the well-being of the whole family. Often this can best be achieved by giving support with a number of inter-related issues ranging from unsatisfactory housing conditions, to low literacy of the adults in the family, to problems managing children's behaviour and delayed child development milestones. The other important component of success that is shared by these two social innovations is that they are seen by their clients as separate from council-run or national government-run services (e.g. social work, JobCentre Plus, or the Work Programme), which the service users may have had bad experiences with.

The descriptions in this document are based on interviews with staff working in the services, local politicians, and district and county council officials. This report presents a preliminary interim analysis, which will be supplemented in the coming weeks with data collected through further individual interviews, feedback from the stakeholders, and focus groups.

In summary, the recurrent patterns and features of the innovations ANP and Happy Feet Pre-School are that they are services that:

- Offer often fragmented forms of support under one roof.
- Personalise support in order to address critical situations affecting the whole family.
- Involve flexible forms of ad hoc support.
- Are perceived by users as welcoming and not part of the 'establishment.'

¹³ DDC (2012). State of the District 2012. Available from:
<http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/StateoftheDistrict2012.pdf>

¹⁴ DDC (2012). State of the District 2012. Available from:
<http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/StateoftheDistrict2012.pdf>

¹⁵ DDC (2012). State of the District 2012. Available from:
<http://www.dover.gov.uk/Corporate-Information/PDF/StateoftheDistrict2012.pdf>

The major innovation of EKH is to work beyond the political boundary of the local authority. This demonstrates that a local council area is not always the most logical geographic area over which to plan services.

2. SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN DOVER

2.1. Family Learning at the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project (ANP)

2.1.1. Short description

Aylesham near Dover was affected by the vacuum left by the colliery closure at Snowdown in 1989. From the community perspective, the problems created by the mine closure were compounded by a succession of further setbacks including the closure of the secondary school in Aylesham, closure of the library, a reduction in local bus services and the withdrawal of other community services. The Aylesham Neighbourhood Project (ANP) is a voluntary sector organisation. It provides a number of different services under one roof: Family Learning; Family Support advice service; Skills Factory employment and skills training; Small Wonders childcare; and a children's centre. This innovative approach can be characterised as holistic services that work together and put clients at ease by being at arm's length from government-run or contracted services.

2.1.2. The innovation

Established in 2008, the ANP Family Learning service offers families with children and young people from 0-12 years short-term early intervention. They aim to work with families who are experiencing a wide range of issues that should not be long term and can be resolved in a maximum of eight sessions. The issues being experienced include:

- Low self-esteem (child or parent / carer)
- Emotional difficulties; Helping a child and family to express their feelings
- Transitions / loss / change / grief
- Relationship difficulties within families
- Social difficulties
- Parent / carer difficulties in connecting emotionally with their child

Support is provided to:

- Build upon families' relationship with their child / children
- Tackle issues that a family is experiencing
- Provide opportunities for families and children to spend quality time together
- Advise on issues with toddlers and pre-school children

ANP Family Learning service exemplifies an innovative approach to building local cohesion that has only emerged in the last ten years. The strapline of ANP Family Learning is "Making a positive change, together." Family learning is based on the core belief that families are not only our first and most important teachers, they also teach us the most important things in life, and on the research finding that parental involvement in a child's learning is more powerful than family background, size of family or level of parental education and, in the primary years, has more impact on attainment than a child's school. Shaping education and social policy to build positively on this insight is innovative.

The progress of families towards their goals (specific changes) is reviewed during their engagement with the service. After sessions are completed a closing meeting is held with the worker, referrer, child and family to evaluate and celebrate progress. An overall formal evaluation of the wider positive impact of ANP Family Learning on social cohesion in the surrounding community would be difficult to do because its outcomes include some that are hard to measure and quantify, such as: helping those the furthest away from

getting into work; raising aspirations; conscious rejection of ‘tick-box’ approaches to delivering services.

2.1.3. *Conceptions and ways of addressing users*

The funding body SEEDA’s community consultation and organisation of public meetings a decade ago uncovered a wide range of views culminating in “total disillusionment with establishment” announcements and processes. It became clear that the biggest challenge was to re-create a framework for engagement and positive community support for future regeneration solutions.¹⁶ Practitioners have told us that ANP’s philosophy has achieved this by being at arm’s length from government-run or contracted services. It is also very important that they take into account the overall immediate setting of users and offering a personalised approach of support with a number of issues that may be presenting an obstacle to entering paid work. For example, problems with family relationships can make work difficult but unlike with ANP, support with this is not typically available on welfare-to-work programmes more narrowly focused on ‘getting a job.’

ANP Family Learning is a bespoke service to meet service users’ specific needs. The activities are child-cantered and include creative activities such as cookery, arts, crafts, painting, drawing, and free play. They often use the “Solihull approach” with a family, which offers guidance on sensitive, effective parenting to help create a better understanding of a child’s behaviour. The support can be delivered at various settings in the community. They do not offer counselling, psychotherapy or therapy.

ANP Family Learning addresses service users by involving every family member. Family learning takes place when family members of all ages are involved together and encourage each other. ANP can help overcome barriers caused by negative associations with traditional or government institutions. This helps to raise aspirations and create a long-term change in the culture of the family and patterns of learning among the service users. However children and their families need to be willing to make changes, with support.

The *combination* of adults and children taking part *together* is crucial in building resilience in families, in creating community well-being, economic prosperity and social cohesion. A basic assumption of family learning programmes is that reaching both generations of service users can simultaneously help break the “cycle of disadvantage.” In this regard, such programmes are an excellent example of “joined-up” policymaking, in which it is understood that children’s cognitive and non-cognitive development cannot be addressed in isolation, by focusing on the child alone, but the *family* needs to be involved.

In the past families interested in participating could refer themselves. However in time there was some perception that the service should target its limited resources on those families most needing extra support. Consequently access to the service is now through referral from other agencies, followed by an assessment by a team member. If appropriate, four sessions are offered initially, with the possibility of another four sessions if goals have not yet been reached. If a family and child require longer term or more specialist support they may be referred to a different agency.

2.1.4. *Internal organization and modes of working*

ANP is a VCS initiative that has come from community development workers rather than the local authority. It is not run by outside professionals. The working of the organisation is

¹⁶ South East England Development Agency (2003). Memorandum by The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) (COA 25). House of Commons Select Committee on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Written Evidence. Available from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmodpm/1169/1169we26.htm>

fairly conventional. Funding originally came from a grant. However grants are now harder to come by and the project has had to become more targeted. It is innovating by generating income from selling services as a social enterprise, such as cooking and sewing workshops.

2.1.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system

Because of the current economic environment for public services DDC do not have resources for new, non-statutory, services. Their support consists of approval, enabling, partnership and facilitation, but not financial support or direct involvement. ANP is very much a bottom-up initiative from the local community. The former miners had a culture and history of trade unionism that meant they were willing to be led by community leaders with a vision, especially when 'up against it'. ANP has a genuine use and role outside of council or government-run services. In addition, ANP is not working by contracts, which they have rejected out of concern about penalties if targets not met.

2.2. Happy Feet Pre-School

2.2.1. Short description

The Happy Feet Pre-school is a registered charity located in one of Dover town's more underprivileged neighbourhoods. The pre-school is in a very deprived area and the surrounding area suffers from social and economic problems. There is a lot of unemployment, drug addiction, alcoholism, and so on. Anti-social behaviour and vandalism are problem in the area.

The Happy Feet Pre-school is based at The Ark, a Christian church-run centre that hosts a number of different activities under one roof. For example there are groups for mums and toddlers, health visitors, and appointments can be made with the local MP. They are on the same site as Tower Hamlets Children's Centre. The pre-school supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of staff have childcare qualifications. The Ark generates some income by hiring out its facilities and by employing business practices. It is led by a committee and the core beliefs and values that underlie the approach of the service and its staff are Christian ones. It offers an approach to improving child development outcomes in a deprived neighbourhood by supporting whole families, delivered by a third sector faith organisation. As well as early years education, support is offered in: adult literacy, child protection, and help with any crisis.

In their own words: "We always go the extra mile, don't get extra money, but to be working here you need to have a real passion for the children here and to support the families." Happy Feet Pre-School has been formally inspection by government body OFSTED although the wider family support it provides has not been formally evaluated (and would in any case be hard to measure).¹⁷

2.2.2. The innovation

The innovative aspect of the pre-school is that the staff work to support the whole family and to form very strong professional working relationships with other agencies that may be involved in supporting the family. The pre-school is trusted by families who are wary of government-run or contracted services. The work of the pre-school is based on evidence about child development. It is now established that if by the time a child starts go to school they have not been adequately stimulated and had full learning opportunities there are parts of the brain that 'shut off'.

¹⁷ OFSTED (2011). Happy Feet Pre-School: Inspection report for early years provision. Available from: http://www.thearkdover.com/happy-feet/images/downloads/Ofsted_Report_2011.pdf

2.2.3. *Conceptions and ways of addressing users*

A large part of the success of Happy Feet can be attributed to the way that the staff can work with the wider needs of the whole family in their social context. The involvement of the staff goes beyond child care and is at a personal level. For example they actively help with the process of getting the children into the better surrounding primary schools, and other types of form-filling if the parents are not able to do this. The help given has even extended to activities such as helping a household to tidy junk from their garden. They do not want a 'tick a box' because they would see it as shallow.

The Happy Feet staff are often the professionals most aware of when families have support needs because the child is in their care for several hours a week. Staff may initiate interventions. Staff of other agencies, on the other hand, may only visit the family for relatively brief periods. Pre-school staff, on the other hand, know how the children behave, what they are like when they are dropped off, when they are picked up, what their lunch box looks like, and how they are presented.

The pre-school is trusted by families who are wary of government-run or contracted services. Happy Feet often find that social services' support is not entirely helpful because they are not doing what they should be doing, or they are not seeing the bigger picture, and can advocate on behalf of a family.

2.2.4. *Internal organization and modes of working*

There are about 55 children aged from two years on the roll. Happy Feet is in receipt of funding for two, three and four year olds. It is also registered on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register to look after children aged over five years. Children attend a variety of sessions each week. The pre-school opens five days a week term time (38-39 weeks of the year). Sessions are from 8.45am to 12pm on Mondays and Fridays, and from 8.45am to 3.30pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. There are 16 staff, including the manager, supervisor, an administrator, cover staff and parent helpers. The majority of staff have childcare qualifications to at least level 2, and several have qualifications to level 3 and 4 and above.

Happy Feet is different from neighbouring business-run nurseries rather. Others provide full day care and are part of a chain of businesses. Working class parents from that area, which is a deprived area, cannot afford to pay for that type of full day care. Whilst other nearby nurseries do provide spaces for three and four year olds on the government voucher scheme, they are tighter in what they offer. In consequence a lot of parents prefer to come to Happy Feet. At Happy Feet some parents do pay for a few extra sessions, but the majority of the families stick to the funded sessions.

The working culture at Happy Feet is influenced by Christian faith. Happy Feet is part of a church, although it is government funded and is inspected by OFSTED as other pre-schools are. In understanding the help that Happy Feet gives to the community it is important to appreciate that it is in essence a church. The managers are Christians. Whilst they exercise equal opportunities in employing people, it is at heart a faith community. One of the Ministers said:

part of our belief in God and the world is that we want God to be explained to people. We in this group of believers we believe that if you do it forcefully, people don't listen and it's not our style. So our style is to be amongst the community, whether it's the pre-school, whether it's the coffee morning, whether it's business hire. So ... the whole way we run is about meshing with the community, we would use a bible phrase like trying to be salt and light. So the pre-school is a department of the church, just as we have a youth department and

another department. So in our thinking the whole time is just about working in that way.

The Ark has different groups where people come, and a lot of its root energy is about making stepping stones that lead towards God. It is not about 'bible bashing', but there is a motivation about touching a community. Many times people enjoy the pre-school and they have no idea it is connected to a church.

The personal qualities of the staff are critical. The extra services are not just an overflow of the pre-school but depend on *who* the Operations Manager is. She has invested her life into the pre-school: it is like a vocation for her,

And so part of our motivation and our belief in life is actually about linking and sharing with others, and so when Sharon talks about like helping parents it's because she's lovely and kind and skilful ... it's hard enough for Sharon running the pre-school, but when people ask questions about their primary school I'm really proud that parents have bothered to ask Sharon about that.

The organisational structure has been quite flexible according to the skills and ambitions that the Operations Manager has, and the skills and ambitions that the Business Manager has, because the organisation is able to be a bit malleable. The leadership structure is committee-led, and in that committee are five or six people. That committee is then answerable to the leadership team of the church but because of the number of people, and a shared interest, they are able to make sometimes quite big changes in a relatively short period of time. The pre-school is owned by the church and so all of the people on the committee are stakeholders in the church, for example Minsters, Vicars and attenders of the congregation. Their thinking is the pre-school is a very significant part of the church and needs to be managed by people who have an awareness of the church and the pre-school. Their business health is because they are able to make changes quickly. Part of their success is being able to respond to growth e.g. new equipment has been bought.

2.2.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system

Childcare providers (including Happy Feet) are funded by the local authority to provide free places. In England the government funds free part-time early education for children aged three or four, and in some cases if they are aged two. It is intended to prepare children for school. The places are available for 15 hours per week, for 38 weeks per year. The government has gradually been introducing free early education to some two-year-olds based on the child's circumstances or on the family income.

Last year Happy Feet decided that the pre-school was so successful that they wanted to expand it. It was doubled and used another room, which was a major decision because it meant it could not use that room for business hires. So, the pre-school has recently moved into two separate rooms for children at different stages of development because they felt the need. They were taking more and more very young two year olds who were more like 18 month olds in their development in the same room as children who go to school. The staff working with such a broad range of children found it hard to ensure that every child was catered for because the little ones are very needy, but the older ones have not got enough patience.

However whilst the government made funding available for two year old children, the support in making changes to provision to cater for such young children has not been in place. Consequently Happy Feet had to set up the new room 'off their own back' with its own money, and had to make its own adaptations. Whereas previously under the Labour government grants were available, such as one that was provided in 2010 for a sum of £25,000 to completely recreate the outside play area, there is no such money available at

the moment. Instead Sure Start paid for Happy Feet to join an organisation called Treasure Chest for a year and this enabled them to borrow a lot of equipment and furniture for the new room. Happy Feet will have to apply for a grant for furniture at the end of the year. Further, funding for staff to professionally develop themselves has been cut too, so staff will have to fund more themselves.

Because of the current economic environment for public services the Council does not have resources for new, non-statutory, services. There is no local government involvement other than funding available to all childcare settings. Happy Feet is an initiative by a local faith community, and such initiatives are generally being encouraged by the national government. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has urged faith groups to make use of new powers in the government's Localism Bill to strengthen their arm in playing an active and visible role in society.¹⁸ He is committed to giving faith groups new freedoms to act in their communities, including the running of public services. Happy Feet is a good example of the expertise and enthusiasm that can be found in this sector, which has inspired his approach.

Happy Feet also benefit from being in a building next to a Sure Start Children's Centre. Happy Feet work closely with council services, such as the Sure Start Children's Centre, and VCS organisations such as Home Start. They feel this is necessary because they feel they have to as they have moved away from just providing child education. They are working on the principle that in order to support the child you actually have to do things to support the families:

it's very helpful having Sure Start and Home Start here, which I find more beneficial than maybe other pre-schools that don't have them right on their doorstep. Often I can walk straight out of my office straight into another office, make a referral straight away and by the end of that day it's gone off and within a week that person has contacted the parent and they've managed to get help with the rent arrears on their housing and something sorted out for them. So yeah, I mean it's not meant to be my role but I do.

The Happy Feet staff attend a lot of social services meetings involving statutory agencies, because there are several children known to social services, three children in local authority care, several children with additional speech and language support needs, and children with disabilities including a blind child and a deaf child. However social workers are overloaded, which can make it hard to have a productive relationship with the statutory social services.

2.3. East Kent Housing (EKH)

2.3.1. Short description

In 2002 Inspectors classed the Housing Management Service provided by DDC as poor, with poor prospects for improvement. The inspection team gave the service no stars. The rating may be from 0-3, where 0 is poor and 3 is excellent. Action was needed to do more to make the Council's homes meet the Decent Homes Standard set by the government. In 2005, the four neighbouring councils of Dover, Canterbury, Shepway and Thanet each carried out an appraisal of the long-term viability of their council housing. While all four authorities could achieve and sustain the Decent Homes Standard and had viable business plans, concerns remained that the relatively small stock holding of each authority would

¹⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government. (2011). New powers will put faith groups at the centre of their communities. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-powers-will-put-faith-groups-at-the-centre-of-their-communities>

limit any ambitions to improve services and to improve opportunities for council tenants and leaseholders.

Not-for-profit companies set up by a local authority to manage its housing stock known as 'arms-length management organisations' (ALMOs) have demonstrated that they offer a better service to tenants than any other form of council housing management. The ALMO programme started in 2001 and there are around 68 ALMOs in the UK, which manage more than one million council homes across 64 local authorities. ALMOs manage over 700,000 council homes. They achieve higher inspection ratings than local authority managed housing or housing associations. There were only 26 'three star' housing authorities in the country, of which the majority were ALMO's and none were councils.¹⁹ East Kent Housing (EKH) came into being on 1 April 2011. It is an ALMO owned by the four councils of Dover, Canterbury, Shepway and Thanet.

EKH is aimed at saving money while improving services to tenants. EKH is responsible for the management and maintenance of 18,000 homes owned by the four councils. EKH does not: decide who is allocated housing, make homelessness decisions, set the housing strategy, manage the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), or decide what improvements are made to the housing stock. These functions all remain with DDC.

2.3.2. The innovation

The innovation behind EKH is that it aims to achieve economies of scale by operating cross local authority boundary working, and was the first instance in the country of four authorities sharing a single housing company, or 'super ALMO.' EKH differs from other ALMOs in that it is the first that serves more than one local authority. As such it is seen as being particularly innovative and has attracted national attention as a potential model for future shared services.

Although there were initial set-up costs, with Dover's share estimated at £237,000, it was hoped the second year would make modest savings of £44,000 for DDC and the first five years would save the four councils £1.5 million in overall housing costs between them. The ALMO should begin to deliver its most significant savings from year 5, when the longer term maintenance and service contracts could be harmonised between the four authorities.²⁰ To date EKH has reduced running costs across the whole of East Kent by about £300,000 a year (about £86,000 in Dover), has made procurement savings by about £900,000 a year (£340,000 in Dover), and has increased rental income to the councils through improved performance. That is to say it has been re-letting empty properties faster, bringing in revenue of around £122,000 a year (£34,000 in Dover).

Its claims to success are based on statistically robust annual surveys of tenants' satisfaction. Statistics place EKH in the top quartile overall when compared to other ALMOs. Its performance in other business areas is also measured e.g. rent arrears. Hoped-for savings have been made. So far these have mainly been on payroll, but there are future prospects for economies of scale in maintenance and administration.

2.3.3. Conceptions and ways of addressing users

Improving the way EKH communicates with tenants and learns about what they really think about the service is a key element of its work. Tenants have been involved in a number of ways. For example DDC took into consideration that of the 51% of tenants who voted on the issue of the transfer of housing management functions to EKH, 72% voted in favour of

¹⁹ Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday 14 December 2011 at 6.00 pm.

²⁰ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday 23 February 2011 at 6.00 pm.

the transfer.²¹ Tenant groups were sceptical at first, but that officers had won them over by listening and taking on board their suggestions, although it might take some time to deliver the improvements.²² Neighbourhood managers are expected to play a significant role in working with tenants to identify and deliver environmental improvements. A Dover editorial panel was set up to review all EKH communications with tenants to ensure they were as clear and tenant-friendly as possible. The 'You said, we did' section newsletter was cited as one way in which EKH communicated how it responded to tenant concerns.²³

EKH is run by its own Board. The main function of the Board is to oversee the strategic development of the organisation, ensure effective financial management and ensure that the organisation delivers its obligations to the four councils and their tenants. The Board has 12 members, four councillors (one nominated from each council) four tenants (selected by the tenant representative bodies in each local authority area) and four independent members, selected through an open recruitment process involving councillor and tenant board members. The Board initially meets bi-monthly. Board meetings are open to the public and agendas, papers, minutes and the forward plan are published on the EKH website.

Area Boards are a critical part of the EKH governance structure and are designed to ensure that there remains local accountability to tenants, leaseholders and councillors. There are 4 local area boards, one for each authority, and these provide scrutiny of EKH based on the tenants' priorities. Within Dover these comprise the Dover/Deal and Sandwich/Rural tenants' groups. Each group elects six tenant representatives and one leaseholder representative who form the Area Board, together with two councillor nominees and a nominee from the main EKH Board. Area Board meetings are open to all tenants and councillors to attend. Details of meetings, venues, agendas and minutes are on the EKH website. As well as an Area Board structure, EKH has developed other ways in which tenants can hold the organisation accountable and has introduced Tenant Inspectors and a Tenant Scrutiny panel in line with the current regulatory requirements for social landlords.

2.3.4. Internal organization and modes of working

DDC remains the owner and legal landlord of the council housing stock in the district and continues to set rents. Tenants' and leaseholders' rights and responsibilities are unchanged as they remain tenants and leaseholders of DDC. Councils have kept responsibility for all strategic housing functions such as housing strategy, homelessness, housing advice, the management of the housing register including Choice Based Lettings, private sector housing, and the management of the Housing Revenue Account. DDC retains responsibility for the policy, which determines how council homes are allocated and for determining the terms and conditions of its tenancy agreement which EKH undertakes to enforce.

EKH, on the other hand, manages and maintains council homes across the four councils involved in areas including: repairing and improving tenants' homes, managing grass cutting, gardening contracts, cleaning and maintenance of communal areas, collecting rent, and helping tenants who are having difficulty in paying, and ensuring tenants stick to their tenancy agreements. EKH supports DDC with regard to the delivery of its strategic housing objectives.

The configuration of staffing was critical in delivering both an effective and improved service and reducing costs in line with expectations of the councils. 230 posts transferred

²¹ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday 23 February 2011 at 6.00 pm.

²² KCC. Minutes of a meeting of the East Kent (Joint Scrutiny) Committee held in the Council Chamber, Dover District Council on Tuesday, 22 March 2011.

²³ DDC. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday 11 April 2012 at 6.00 pm.

from the four councils to EKH in April 2011. The Board appointed a Chief Executive and other senior management posts within the organisation. Two members of the management team, the Head of Corporate Services and the Head of Asset Management were both former employees of DDC.

Certain principles underpin the innovative restructuring, the most important being that core frontline services like housing management and repairs will remain locally based. Other functions have potential for being centralised, e.g. debt recovery, leasehold management etc.

2.3.5. Impact on the governance of local welfare system

EKH aims to achieve economies of scale by operating cross district boundary working, and was the first instance in the country of four authorities sharing a single housing company, or 'super ALMO'. It follows a wider trend in smaller councils to explore sharing other management staff roles within the council and services such as the collection of council tax, the administration of housing benefit, ICT technical support and customer services, with other district councils.

EKH works closely with DDC. A comprehensive performance-reporting framework has been developed by EKH. Formal quarterly monitoring meetings take place involving the portfolio holders for Housing and Community and Finance and senior officers in the council including the Housing and Community Manager. Within DDC performance is monitored through the Housing Improvement Board (HIB), which includes the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing, Community and Youth and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Performance. HIB scrutinises performance reports produced by EKH and meets with the Chief Executive of EKH and senior managers on a quarterly basis. In addition, there are regular meetings between senior managers of the two organisations including meetings between the Head of Finance at EKH and finance staff at DDC. The Chief executive of EKH also attends quarterly meetings with the Council's Corporate Management Team. The Management team of EKH and the client officers from the four councils meet quarterly. Key areas of the monitoring include: Performance plan (e.g. rent arrears, re-lets, repairs targets); Delivery Plan; and Managed Budgets (repairs budgets).

CONCLUSIONS

Sustainability

For the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project sustainability is potentially difficult. The relatively large grants from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust that ANP benefited from in the past are no longer available. Instead loans are being offered, but projects such as ANP are wary of entering into these types of obligations. Similarly they feel that operating by contracts to deliver employment services entail too much risk. Instead ANP are constantly applying for uncertain grants e.g. Big Lottery. As grants are now harder to come by and the project has had to become more targeted on certain users. It is innovating by generating income from selling services as a social enterprise, such as cooking and sewing workshops.

For Happy Feet Pre-School sustainability prospects are good. There is local demand for paid-for childcare services. The organisation generates income by hiring premises out to other groups, conferences etc. However there is some uncertainty about whether there may be less national government funding of childcare in the future. This could lead to loss of workforce skills in the sector. East Kent Housing can be expected to be sustainable as long as savings and improved service can be demonstrated.

Diffusion

The ANP 'Family Learning' lifelong learning aspect of their work is very clearly the product of diffusion of an idea. It is a concept based on evidence of research in 1990s

demonstrating the intergenerational effects of poor literacy and numeracy. For example A Fresh Start - Improving Literacy and Numeracy highlighted the effectiveness of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes in engaging parents and tackling poor skills in families.²⁴ This was one contributory factor which led to the government identifying parents as a priority group and promoted the expansion of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes.²⁵ Family Literacy and Family Numeracy demonstration programmes were expanded with funding from the Standards Fund in the late 1990s which came from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to local authorities with support from the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). In 2000, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was set up to fund Adult and Community Learning. The DfES sent Standards Fund money through the LSC and funding for family learning commenced in 2002.²⁶

EKH aims to achieve economies of scale and improve services to tenants by operating cross district boundary working, and was the first instance in the country of four authorities sharing a single housing company, or 'super ALMO'. As the first example of local authorities sharing a housing company in UK, it is not itself a product of diffusion. As such it is seen as being particularly innovative and has attracted national attention as a potential model for future shared services. Similar arrangements have been developed in Cornwall and other councils in Shropshire and Co. Durham have shown an interest in what the East Kent councils have achieved. However, the principles underlying EKH are influenced by the diffusion of the present national government's nudge towards local authorities to collaborate more such as in purchasing supplies, in sharing senior officials, and in sharing administrative functions (e.g. the collection of council tax, the administration of housing benefit, ICT technical support and customer services).

²⁴ DfEE (1999). A Fresh Start - Improving Literacy and Numeracy.

²⁵ DfEE (2001). Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.

²⁶ NIACE (2006). Briefing sheet 74: Family Learning in Children's Centres, Schools and the Community: literacy, language and numeracy and the broader offer for families.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the participation of the following people in the compilation of this report. Nevertheless, any errors remain the responsibility of the authors.

- Cllr Linda Keen, District Councillor (Lab)
- Brian Horton, Reseacher, Kent County Council
- Nigel Bainbridge, Business Manager, Happy Feet Pre-school
- Sharon Lucas, Operations Manager, Happy Feet Pre-school
- Professor Steve Fothergill, Sheffield Hallam University and Industrial Communities Alliance
- Tim Ingleton, Head of Regeneration, Dover District Council
- Cllr Sue Chandler, District Councillor (Con)
- Brinley Hill, Alternative Service Delivery Manager, Dover District Council
- Brendan Ryan, EKH
- Angela Doggett, Aylesham Neighbourhood Project Family Learning
- Richard Collins, Aylesham Neighbourhood Project
- Cllr Frederick Scales, District Councillor (Con)