

# SSO LE

## Kent Gateway Programme

case study

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Kent is a two-tier area comprising Kent County Council, 12 District Councils and Medway Unitary Council. Located to the south east of London, Kent is a mix of rural communities and urban areas, with no dominant centre of population but a network of 18 towns, the largest of which is Maidstone. It has the longest coastline of any English county. It is widely known for the quality of its countryside, landscape and historic buildings.

The Thames and Medway estuaries have significant areas of post-industrial decline, though they are ecologically important. Seaside towns have also suffered long-term economic decline.

Population growth is creating pressures. Kent contains two of the government's major growth areas, with over 120,000 new households planned over the next 20 years. Three districts - Dartford, Gravesham and Swale - are part of the Thames Gateway, and Ashford has been designated because of its fast rail connection to London and mainland Europe. Housing growth presents challenges for planners and causes concern for residents. Demand for affordable housing, transport infrastructure, waste management, social, recreational and educational services and water supply are all challenging, and urbanisation is increasing flood risk.

Transport is a major strategic challenge. Kent provides the main link between the UK and mainland Europe, with two international rail stations, the world's busiest freight and passenger ferry port, two growing airports, the Channel Tunnel and the newly-constructed international high-speed rail link. HGV traffic through Kent is growing at 8% each year, placing a strain on infrastructure. Proximity to London results in large commuter volumes.

The Kent Gateway programme, a Kent County Council initiative and joint venture between the County Council and the 12 District Councils, was featured in FOSS 2007 as an innovative example of enhanced two-tier working. The Kent Gateway operates on the principle that customer needs determines both the location and mix of services provided in an area. There are now five Gateways across Kent, with a total of 15 planned, including three mobile Gateways to be in place by 2011/12.

Each Gateway offers customers a mix of services, delivered by a range of partners including county and district councils, the NHS and the voluntary sector.

At the time of the first FOSS case study in May 2007 the initial gateway situated in Park Mall, Ashford had been open for 18 months and a broader vision was in place to open Gateways in each of the 12 districts of Kent. Gateways have since opened in Thanet, Tenterden, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. There is also a mobile Gateway covering urban and rural communities in the south of the county. This case study will show how the Gateway concept has evolved and how the experience and lessons learnt from the first Gateway in Ashford have informed subsequent Gateways.

The participating organisations agreed 12 principles on which the Gateway programme is based.

As part of these 12 principles, the partners agreed:

- The partnership structure and governance arrangements of the programme
- The provision of a common IT infrastructure for Internet, WiFi, email, file sharing, customer case management and customer and PI statistics.



“The aim is to build services around customer needs rather than how the services are traditionally organised.”

*Tanya Oliver, Director of Strategic Development and Public Access*

The partners also agreed that:

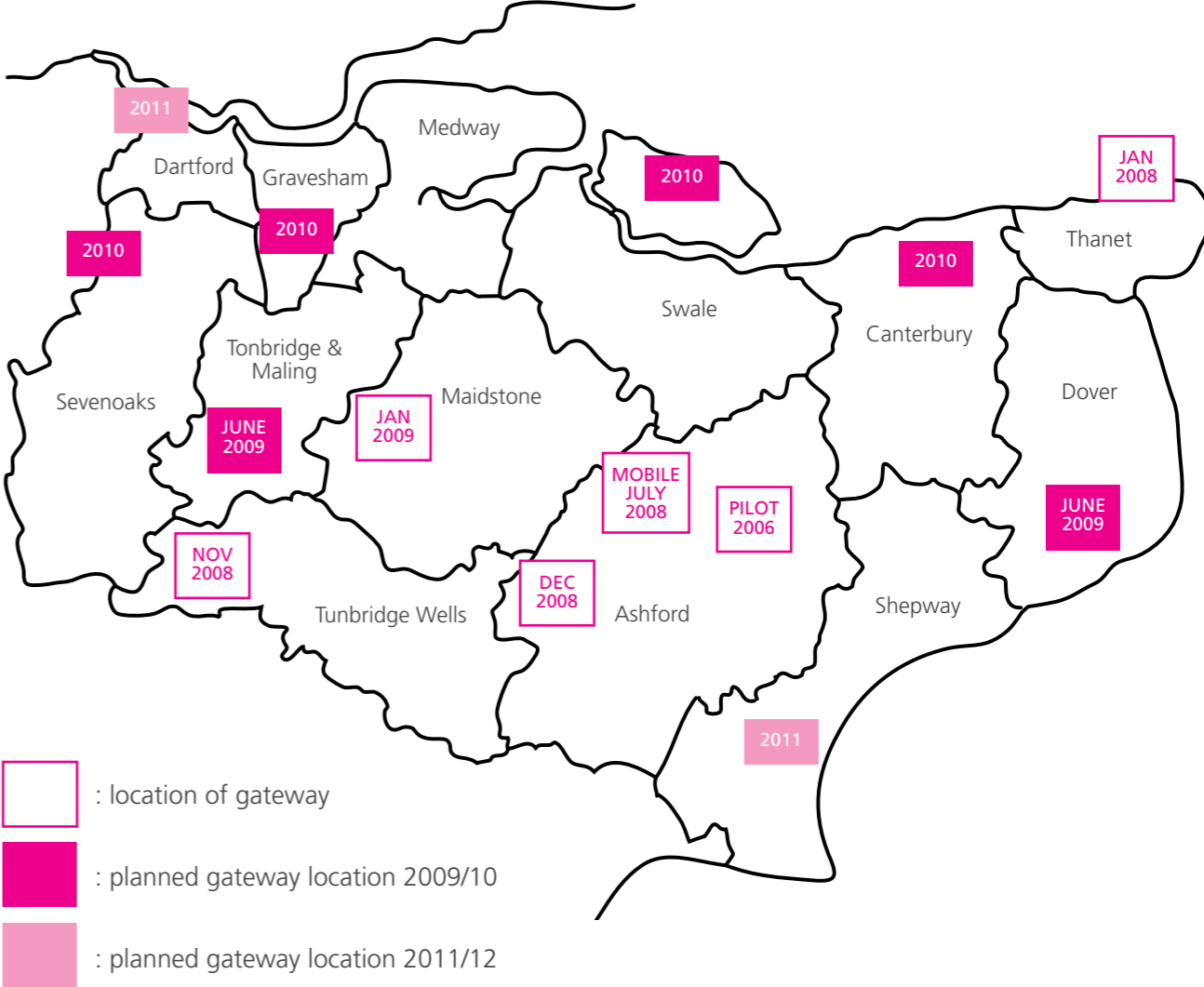
- The Gateway brand would be owned by all Kent partners and represents a common front-of-house operation
- By agreement the relevant district council would deliver the operational management of each Gateway
- The service offer would be based on a model of service hubs commonly available from all Gateways plus wider services to reflect the local conditions
- The Gateway's own training would be geared towards modern customer care, quantitative analysis of customer trends, cross-agency team building, and management and personal development
- The Gateway would subscribe to a common set of performance indicators.

The Gateway programme has evolved and developed in many ways since the original Gateway was launched in Ashford in 2005. All frontline district council services are now delivered via each Gateway, and each district council now funds the Gateway equally with the County. Partners are involved early in the development of each new Gateway, and services are introduced through a business process re-engineering approach.

Existing assets are being used where possible, with Gateways being co-located with libraries in Thanet, Tenterden and soon Ashford (called "Gateway Plus"). A Social Return on Investment analysis is being undertaken to measure the impact that Gateways have on people's life chances and social mobility. The programme is also developing a tool to build on the invaluable customer insight that Customer Service Advisors (CSAs) accumulate (see "Customer Experience").

The councils are sharing knowledge and learning through monthly management meetings and are uploading lessons learnt to a shared implementation of Microsoft's SharePoint.

The graphic below depicts the roll-out of Gateways across Kent over time.



**Ashford Gateway - original pilot**

Services at Ashford continue to evolve. Most recently Ashford Borough Council made a bid for Enhanced Housing Options funding. The proposal was supported by Gateway, and Ashford was delighted to be awarded significant funds to further develop outreach and more integrated services.

Skill Plus continues to go from strength to strength, providing level 2 and 3 training to individuals and responding to local businesses who have recognised the social return of bringing training to their workforce. The new Kent Contact and Assessment team has evolved from concepts that have their roots in Gateway where the model has been developing since 2005.

The Tell Us Once pilot has been fully embraced by staff at Ashford, and their commitment has extended the original part-time availability of this service to full-time, providing the empathetic support people really appreciate. The TUDO process has been incorporated into mainstream service delivery from the outset and is both cost effective and efficient for the customer.

### Thanet Gateway Plus

Thanet Gateway Plus is jointly funded by Kent County Council and Thanet District and is co-located in a refurbished library, offering most county and district services plus:

- An art gallery
- NHS “stop-smoking” sessions and health training
- Councillor surgeries
- Credit Union
- Adult Social Care.

The Gateway is open Monday to Saturday, with late night opening on Thursdays, and currently attracts between 8,000 and 9,000 visitors a week. Moreover, 80 per cent of face-to-face enquiries are resolved at first contact, and waiting times have reduced by 15 per cent. Customer satisfaction has risen to 98 per cent, from 75 per cent for the district’s previous front-of-house service.

The footfall for the library service has increased dramatically to 452,776 for the year commencing January 2008 to January 2009. The number of new library members has jumped by 3,715 bringing the number to 8,114.

Unsurprisingly, Thanet DC has been nominated for the Efficiency and Modernisation LGC award 2009 for their work on the Gateway.

### Tunbridge Wells Gateway

The Tunbridge Wells Gateway, which replaced McDonalds in the centre of Tunbridge Wells, offers most county and district services plus:

- Free internet access
- NHS sessions
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Pathways to work - RBLI.

The Gateway is open Monday to Saturday, with late night opening on Thursdays, and currently attracts in the region of 4,500 visitors a month.

### Tenterden Gateway

The first rural Gateway opened in Tenterden in the borough of Ashford. In an innovative approach the Gateway has combined public and voluntary services with the remaining town Post Office. The counters and decor have been updated and the building made DDA compliant, incorporating Changing Place, to maximise social inclusion.

Tenterden Gateway brings together a wide range of Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council services and offers a modern and accessible library and post office. The Gateway also runs a tourist information desk. Registrar Services have been reintroduced to the town alongside other specialist services. A software payment system has been written by Ashford Borough Council to manage small cash transactions on behalf of all services and partners in the Gateway.

The Gateway is open from Monday to Saturday.

### Maidstone Gateway

The Maidstone Gateway is located in the heart of the town’s shopping centre on King Street. The Gateway offers frontline county and district services as well as:

- PCT - smoking cessation clinics, sexual health clinics and advice to disabled drivers
- Advice sessions from agencies such as Age Concern, Kent’s Registration service, Business Link
- Free internet, with seven self-serve PCs.

The Gateway is open Monday to Saturday, with late night opening on Thursdays.

The Gateway now sees twice as many customers during traditional office lunch hours as the Maidstone BC reception points did previously. This is due to the town centre location and proximity to the Chequers Mall where many office workers are located.

Footfall is on average 300 a day.



The customer experience of accessing council services has been dramatically improved as a result of Gateway. Before the Gateway, if a customer wanted to access housing benefit they would have gone to the District or Borough Council office, and perhaps to Jobcentre or other agencies to validate their claim. If the situation was complex and needing more support, Citizens Advice may be required. This would have involved journeys to multiple offices in different parts of the town costing the customer time and money. As an added irritation the customer would have had to provide their personal details at each reception point.

Now, through Gateway, with its town centre location and retail opening hours, the customers can access the housing benefit service at a time that is convenient for them, perhaps fitting in with another journey into town, (for example for the weekly food shop on a Thursday night). The Citizens Advice Bureau is co-located with the housing benefits service amongst others, and so the customers only need to visit one office to complete their business. This is far more efficient in terms of time and money for the customer. Co-location also means that the customer only needs to provide his or her personal information once to a member of staff who is trained to answer housing benefit queries rather than a receptionist with less specialised knowledge who would have had to refer the matter to the back office.

The Gateway also enables the customers to access additional services or benefits that they may be unaware they are entitled to, for example the Go Card which provides customers in receipt of housing benefit with discounts on leisure activities.

Customers have also made a major contribution to shaping the nature and location of services offered by each Gateway. Each Gateway has responded to data gathered through the District Council's annual customer survey and regular satisfaction surveys to inform the type and location of services offered. For example, Maidstone DC's annual

survey stated a clear customer preference for council services to be provided from a town centre location with extended opening hours and extended service provision. Hence, the council decided to locate their Gateway in the heart of its town's shopping centre on King Street.

### Staff view

Staff working in the Gateway feel more empowered to help customers with enquiries across a multitude of services than previously in the District Council. CSA's undergo an intensive training to equip them with the knowledge to answer the majority of frontline queries across all services. Staff have become multi-skilled and enjoy the variety of their work. For example in Tenderten all CSA's are fully trained to issue and renew library books and collect fines. Staff report enjoying working in the modern environment of the Gateway as well as the human interaction of delivering face-to-face services and feel that they have more time to dedicate to fulfilling all of the customer's needs.

### Partner perspectives

The major benefit for partner organisations in having a presence in Gateway is the greater exposure that they get to a wider range of customers who would not usually access their services. For example in Maidstone the Citizens Advice Bureau has two venues - one just outside of the town centre and one within the Gateway. This more central, convenient location of the Gateway has provided the CAB with far greater visibility to clients and they are seeing 35% more customers than in their other centre.

The Gateway is also fully DDA-compliant and is therefore more accessible than traditional office settings. The CAB has a presence in the Gateway 5 days a week with 3-4 staff working in there daily.

The other key partner perspectives are those of Kent County Council and the district council within whose boundaries the Gateway is situated. The main benefits for the county include the opportunity to increase access to information and preventative services to the high numbers of customers for district council services. Providing

services through Gateway will result in efficiencies by allowing the county to rationalise its stand-alone offices across Kent. Gateway also reduces levels of avoidable contact and duplication of work for both the district and the county as customer queries can be dealt with through one visit to the Gateway rather than through the district referring the customer to the county or vice versa. This good practice will transfer to telephone and web access during 2009/10.

*Bonny Malhotra of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is clear that the main benefit of Gateway is*

*"it has given our customers far greater opportunities to access our services."*

Overall governance of the Gateway programme is derived from the Gateway Strategic Advisory Board (GAB). This board is chaired by the Chief Executive of Kent County Council and has representatives from Kent Fire and Rescue, the Police, NHS, Business Link, Districts, and voluntary sector. The board provides the strategic direction for the Gateway Programme and reflects on the 12 principles ensuring that they are still current.

Reporting to the Board, is the Advisory sub-group, drawn from each Phase 1 Gateway, with director-level representatives and the Gateway project team. The role of the sub-group is to tackle and aim to resolve the knotty issues that mark the transformation from co-location to integration. The GAB does not direct the operational boards but performs an advisory role. This collaborative approach to governance demonstrates the true partnership approach that has been fundamental to the success of the Gateway programme.



*“The CSA’s insight of our customers is the closest that we can get to a representative understanding of our customers and their service needs.”*

*Jane Kendal, Delivery Manager, Kent Gateway Programme*

Moving frontline service delivery to the Gateway was a big culture change for the frontline staff from the county and district councils. Therefore communicating the need for change to staff was vitally important. In Tunbridge Wells staff focus groups met on a weekly basis in the lead-up to the Gateway opening. Updates on progress were provided by the project manager at weekly open house sessions that staff could attend to air their concerns.

Once the Gateway was up and running it was then important to ensure that staff from different public sector organisations were able to work together. In Thanet joint management team meetings, training sessions and development sessions are held to encourage team working.

The partners are also building on the ‘Insight to Innovation’ tool that a combined group of Customer Service Advisors (CSAs) developed. The Itol tool has been developed to capture the customer intelligence from CSAs and following validation during 2009, will be formally launched in 2010. The aim of the tool is to encourage frontline staff to see customers from the perspective of different services, and to recognize the customer holistically. This is fundamental

to delivering a person-centred service experience.

For example, a mother who brings her children into the library to read is viewed in one way by library staff. However, the individual may also be the recipient of housing benefit and will be viewed in a different way by this team. Workshop sessions have been held with CSA to develop the tool and encourage the CSA to share their perspectives of types of customers and challenge their assumptions.

In terms of customer engagement and consultation each Gateway has involved local people to determine the services offered in each Gateway in different ways. In Tenterden the mobile Gateway was used to enable staff to go out and speak to customers in the local area and gain their input. Well attended open consultation sessions were also held at Tenterden Town council and with local groups such as mother toddler groups, local history groups and BME groups.

Tunbridge Wells DC publicised its Gateway in the local shopping centre and encouraged feedback from local residents by giving out questionnaires to ensure that local people shaped the service provision. Interestingly Tunbridge Wells is also using the Gateway to involve customers in wider council consultations. For example, once customers have completed their business in the Gateway the CSA offers them a

free swim voucher in exchange for their time in commenting on the current council budget.

In Maidstone, presentations have been made to specific service-user or community fora, where local people have been very open in describing the kind of services they want to be able to access. These groups have become more accessible to the community by being an active partners in Gateway themselves. The local disability group will conduct a regular surgery to encourage more carers and individuals to engage with the unique support this group can provide through developing volunteers and mentors.

Customer feedback is gathered by each Gateway through exit surveys as customers leave the premises and through customer focus groups as well as each district council’s annual customer survey.

The Gateway Programme is managed from within Kent County Council by the Director of Access Kent and Strategic Development. The team comprises of the Delivery Manager who is responsible for the overall activity within the project and key areas such as legal, property developments and finish, branding and marketing, and a Project Development Officer who is responsible for the development of the service hubs and partnerships across Kent.

A Configuration Officer recently joined the team. A Gateway Manager, based in Ashford District leads on operational aspects such as training and recruitment and a PA/Administration officer completes the team. The programme team have made excellent use of Kent County Council's property services, legal, media and communications teams to deliver the Gateway Programme. PRINCE2™ is the underpinning methodology used to manage the project.

## Financial benefits

The main financial benefits of Gateway arise from the office rationalisation that each district council has been able to make as a result of moving frontline customer services into the Gateway.

- Thanet DC forecast a £250,000 revenue saving per year as a result of reducing back office space and remodelling an existing office. This was only possible once frontline services had moved into the Gateway
- Tunbridge Wells has been able to close five separate customer-facing reception points in the town hall and rationalised other council offices as a result of Gateway

- Maidstone had a modernisation and relocation plan. Through partnership with Kent County Council, customer services have been relocated to brand new accommodation, and a number of tired council offices have been sold off for development
- Due to increasing budget pressures, Ashford Borough Council had had to consider further reductions to rural services in Tenterden. Both Borough and Tourist Information services were run on a part-week basis and were not cost effective. The existing library service was faced with significant costs in order to meet DDA access requirements, and the town's Post Office was under threat following the closure of the local mini-market. Gateway has brought all of these services together.

By jointly investing in one, more suitable property, the hours of business for all services have increased, and access is now state-of-the-art. This is clear evidence that the Gateway concept is enabling the county and district councils to fulfil their long-term efficiency needs. The collaboration with Post Office Ltd, has given this particular Gateway a commercial aspect, which shaped the partnership in a different way to previous Gateway projects. Each partner made a direct financial and service commitment, which contributed to a very successful delivery.



**Organisational benefits**

The key partners involved in Gateway are benefiting from increased exposure to a new range of customers. The Gateway is a much more efficient and effective use of resources, space and staff. This new way of arranging staff and services has also led to increased capacity to deal with the recent economic crisis as evidenced by Tunbridge Wells which has seen a 30% increase in the number of new benefit applications since the opening of the Gateway.

Gateways are seeing the profile of their demand changing as people who have recently been made unemployed are applying for benefits for the first time. The Gateway approach means that customers can be directed immediately to other related services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. Under the old ways of working the system would have struggled to cope with this sudden surge in demand.

Another organisational benefit has been that the CSA have been able to deal with a far higher volume of frontline queries and to much greater depth than anticipated, which is freeing up the back office staff who can then deal with the more complex enquiries relating to housing, business rates and council tax.

**Political benefits**

An important political benefit to arise as a result of Gateway is the increased levels of customer satisfaction amongst local residents. County members are holding surgeries in Gateway, which has greatly increased the access to and visibility of councillors to the local electorate, as the retail location of Gateway and the style and accessibility of the space, is proving more attractive than the previous council offices.

Longer term there will be social capital benefits as by joining up service provision and letting customers know of services and benefits that they were unaware of the intention is that the Gateway concept will positively affect the life chances of local residents. Work is currently being undertaken to measure the Social Return on Investment (SROI) of the Gateway programme, focusing on the impact that service hubs can have for individuals with complex needs.

**Benefits realisation**

The Gateways are currently funded equally between Kent County Council and the relevant District Council. Each individual Gateway is currently looking at charging larger public sector or commercial partners such as pharmacies for the space and services provided by Gateway. It is anticipated that voluntary sector partners will not be charged.

**Performance management**

Performance information is captured by each Gateway individually and reported into the local Operational Board. Footfall, access to service areas, services requested but not available, partners' availability, depth of cross-referral are all fundamental to the performance monitoring. The combined statistics are shared with the Gateway Strategic Advisory Board (GAB).

Having the Ashford Gateway up and running has been a key enabler for the development of the strategy and delivery of the subsequent Gateways. The Ashford Gateway has acted as an advocate for the programme. Rather than have to visualise how the concept will work, partners can visit Ashford and see for themselves. Since Ashford opened, the Gateway team now finds it far easier to describe and promote the benefits of being part of the Gateway to new or sceptical partners. The strong partnership relationships forged through the Ashford Gateway have been a vital component in delivering the next phase of the Gateway development. The adaptability of frontline staff to the new way of working has been fundamental to its success.

A major development since Ashford is the greater use of business process engineering for services entering the Gateway. In Tunbridge Wells BPR has a dedicated project stream and team allocated to it. Its job is to look at the services from the customer's perspective and see if steps or duplications could be taken out of the customer journey.

For example, to get an allotment customers first had to write into the council to request a plot and provide proof of their address. The allotments team would then write back with suggested plots near their address and customers would then write back to accept one and then receive a confirmation letter from the council. The whole process could take 7 weeks! After BPR and assimilation into the Gateway the available allotments have been transferred onto a G.I.S overlay. Customers now come into the Gateway with proof of their address, home in on the area on the G.I.S nearest to their house, then the agreement is printed off there and then and they have their allotment.

Having strong political and managerial leadership behind the programme has been a key enabler. There is full cross-party support for the Gateway programme and this is evidenced by the fact that the Gateway budget has been agreed annually without any opposition, and with proposals to increase base funding. Each Gateway has been opened by either an elected member, the local Mayor or the Lord Lieutenant for Kent.

*“It’s gone from the art of the possible to the reality...the enthusiasm and drive of staff is now driving the Gateway concept forward.”*

*Jane Kendal ,  
Delivery Manager,  
Kent Gateway Programme*

*“Easier access to services is the key.”*

*Cllr Alex King, Deputy Leader,  
Kent County Council*

## A key challenge at the start of the programme was the staff concerns about moving into the Gateway to deliver services.

This was a totally new way of working and the impact on staff could not be underestimated. To deal with this challenge the Gateway managers have held staff focus groups and open surgery sessions to listen to and address the concerns of staff. Managers also provide encouragement by articulating the benefits of working in the Gateway and more importantly the benefits to the customers that they serve. Staff feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with many staff preferring to work in the Gateway rather than in the telephone contact centre.

Getting external partners around the table was a potential challenge to the project. It was difficult for partners to see how the idea would work while it was a virtual concept. To overcome this challenge the project communicated the vision of the benefits of the Gateway and took time to build trust between the partners. Once the first Gateway was open in Ashford it could act as an advocate for the concept to be rolled out in other areas of the county.

Similarly getting internal service partners at both the County and District level to agree to transfer their frontline services into the Gateway has been challenging. Each service has a different culture and a distinct way of working. This has been overcome by the Gateway team promoting the vision and the flexibility of the approach, helping different services to see how they could deliver an even better service by joining up around the customer rather than forcing the customer to navigate a course around the different public and voluntary sector partners.

The sovereignty of branding of the Gateway programme was a potential barrier to the project. With so many organisations involved it is understandable that they would all like the customer to be aware that they are providing the excellent service that the Gateway is known for. It was agreed that the generic G brand would be used for every Gateway and this has been put into the 12 Principles.



The customer cares least about 'who is providing' the service, moreover, that the service is of a high quality, and leads to an outcome or solution. This is at the heart of the Gateway concept.

## Lessons learned

Keep the vision at the forefront of what you are trying to achieve. Reiterate the vision in every piece of communication with staff, partners and customers.

Leadership support for the Gateway programme from the very top both politically and managerially has been vital to the success of the programme thus far. Leadership has provided the direction and identified resources as required. It has also helped to deal with the issues of branding and sovereignty.

Building trust and good relationships with all partners is essential. Regular communication with partners is necessary to ensure that services being delivered from Gateway complement the service hubs, and that equipment, desks and storage meet their operational requirements.

It is key for the districts to have a dedicated project manager for the development of their Gateway. This is to ensure that the project is well-managed at the delivery end, and that links are constantly made back to the Advisory sub-group and the wider Gateway Strategic Advisory board.

An effective communications strategy is required to address staff and customer concerns about the change in moving to the Gateway approach. You need to communicate clearly and often and continue to publicise the benefits of joining the services up around the customer. It is important to make sure that staff at all levels are involved in the programme and to

understand the current customer journey and how it could be improved and use this to underpin the proposed changes in working.

A comprehensive training programme is required for staff so that they feel confident and empowered to deliver the multitude of services required of them in the Gateway. This must include the technical skills required for the key responsibilities but it must also include the time and space for agents from different agencies to grasp and respect the perspectives of other colleagues. Working through the 'ItoI' (Insight to Innovation) has become a catalyst for building ownership and mutual respect.

## Next steps

### The vision is:

To have 15 fixed Gateways, including three mobile Gateways, in place by 2011/2012.

To continue to improve and develop the service offering in each of the current Gateway locations.

To develop the mobile Gateway so that the services on board target the 'hard-to-reach' in locations - whether urban or rural - where there are unmet needs. A route plan is currently being developed and there are plans to use supermarket car parks, village greens, schools, colleges, Town/ Parish Council car parks, the local church etc.

To explore the option of having a benefits hub in each Gateway to help the customer to navigate a benefits system this is currently

very challenging for customers.

An immediate and long-term aim of the Gateway programme is to move the focus from the face-to-face channel to a multi-channel approach covering telephone and web. The opportunities include transferring calls 'internally' between partner organisations, and having one telephone number and one website portal for all public sector partners in Kent.

Work on the Access Kent strategy has begun, and is building on the success and momentum that is taking Gateway forward into Phase 2 delivery.



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The Local Government Association is a national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and four partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.

