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Subject: Access & Assessment Update

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<p>Summary: This report updates Members on progress to date on the cross-cutting Access and Assessment programme, which aims to improve the customer experience and deliver significant savings. The Access and Assessment programme builds on and brings together a range of existing activity across Kent County Council and links strongly with our partner agencies.</p>

1. Introduction

1.1 The recently launched “Bold Steps for Kent” outlines a new approach to access and assessment. The extracts from this vision that link to Access and Assessment have been brought together into one document (Appendix A) but in summary, they encompass:

- Expanding the Gateway principles to other access points and linking them more strongly to the physical Gateway network
- Ensuring residents can increasingly choose how they access services
- Remove the need for individuals or families to undergo different assessments from different agencies
- The development of a single Gateway website and telephone number to complement the face-to-face Gateways
- A single initial assessment model to speed up access to specialist assessments if required

1.2 This approach builds on existing work but is much bolder in setting out how we will move forward. The Gateway programme has been ongoing since 2005 and there is a range of other activity that supports the vision in Bold Steps, such as the Personalisation agenda in Kent Adult Social Services (KASS), the modernisation of libraries, the Common Assessment Framework in Children, Families and Education, the enhancement of the online “fault reporting” ability in Kent Highways Services and the investment in IT. These are just a few examples.

1.3 Whilst one of the significant motivations for this work is to improve the customer experience and to build on the principles of the Government's "Big Society" initiative, a further motivation is to contribute towards the significant savings KCC and the Kent public sector will be making over the coming years. A saving of £14 million has been identified for Access and Assessment. This will be split across services and a significant proportion of this will be through partnership working.

2. Background

2.1 It is clear that in the current financial climate, we will no longer be able to afford to deliver services in the way we have always done. We know that this is the time for a radical re-think about the way that KCC does business, and for making better use of existing resources. "The First Bold Step" consultation with staff, launched in September this year makes this point, clearly stating that this is "the opportunity to fundamentally reshape ourselves, to create a new organisation fit for the changing times".

2.2 The First Bold Step" also sets out a vision for, and a number of clear principles that have particular relevance to, Access & Assessment: putting the customer first at all times; understanding the process a customer has to go through to get access to our services; and ensuring that the process is clear and simple to follow.

2.3 To make this a reality "The First Bold Step" proposes the introduction of an integrated assessment framework across all KCC services for individuals and families delivered by "a single front line - the Gateway programme which will offer face to face, web and telephone access to people who need any of our services. The Gateway, in short, becomes our front line to public services."

2.4 In order to streamline our processes to both improve the customer experience and make savings, our key aims, therefore, could be summarised as achieving satisfactory resolution at the earliest possible point of contact and enabling people to take as much ownership and control as possible, thereby allowing expensive interventions to be targeted where they are really needed. This will help us to:

- Improve customer experience and confidence in the organisation
- Achieve consistency and high quality outcomes, regardless of the access channel
- Provide responsive and complete 'right first time' services, to published standards
- Shorten resolution time from the citizen's perspective
- Reduce avoidable contacts
- Reduce transactional and process costs
- Increase capacity and flexibility to respond to changing customer needs

2.5 As part of this we should be aiming, wherever it is sensible to do so, to migrate transactions from the more costly face-to-face contact to phone and wherever possible online. This in turn will free up capacity in Contact Kent to enable more complex assessment-based transactions to be carried out by the service helping to reduce the time between contact and resolution.

2.6 When considering the access strategy for the organisation it is important not to consider any form of customer contact in isolation. Access channels should complement one another, making the most of opportunities to

generate cost savings and synergies. There are significant opportunities, particularly for demand-led services, to make better use of online functions, reducing the demand for telephone access channels which are more costly.

2.7 Moving customer contact towards online service transactions undoubtedly has the potential to save significant amounts of money. Contact Kent is able to provide costs for telephone access; SOCITM research conducted in 2008 has been used for the costs of face-to-face and online and shows that by far the lowest cost access channel is online:

- Face to face: £4.83 to £9.62
- Telephone: Average call cost via Contact Kent is £2.50
- Online: £0.22 to £0.56

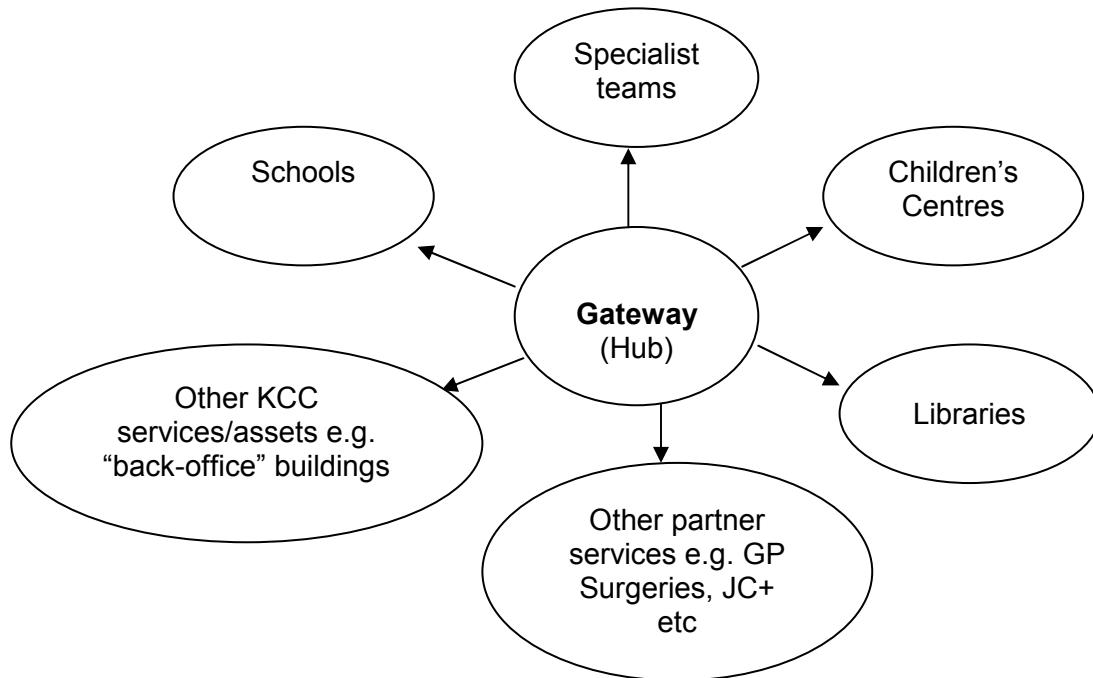
As an example, in 2009/10 Contact Kent handled 184379 calls to check library opening times, book a library PC, renew books online, online Reference Library. If a 50% migration could be achieved through better promotion of the facility on the website and library staff offering demonstrations face-to-face or promoting use of the online service via the phone, the savings would be very substantial.

2.8 It is accepted that it would not be appropriate to see all services moved online. A Channel Strategy is being prepared which will give details of the methodology that can be employed, including use of customer insight and Mosaic data, to understand how customers want to access our services, and how the organisation can shape itself to meet these needs moving forwards. Mosaic analysis will play an important part in identifying services which are accessed by those who traditionally use the internet in their daily lives for example online shopping or banking. By migrating these services on to web first we will be able to build confidence in our web presence enabling us to tackle more complicated transactions.

2.9 A survey analysing the channels used by our residents now is currently being undertaken in Contact Kent, Gateways and Libraries and through District web & phone channels. The survey gives our residents the opportunity to tell us what channels they are using to access our services, whether they use the internet and what they would like to see available online. The data collected will be analysed using Mosaic, to help us understand what we should be moving online and how we can encourage more residents to self-serve where possible.

2.10 Online channel shift options should not be looked at in isolation. They need to be considered as part of a wider multi-channel access strategy to make informed recommendations about the suitability and viability of service delivery. Clearly a mix of access channels will be appropriate for the organisation as a whole and the Channel Strategy will guide the achievement of the appropriate blend.

2.11 To achieve coherence across channels suggests a “Hub and Spoke” model with Gateway as the Hub providing a link to other front-facing service outlets, such as libraries and children’s centres. The diagram below shows how physical services could link (*virtual “hub and spoke”*): *



**Hub=generic services
Spoke = specialist services
(not mutually exclusive - there will be some
specialist services in Hubs and some generic
services in Spokes)*

2.12 . Contact Kent is recognised as providing a quality service but always striving to improve. In addition to handling KCC enquiries and running Consumer Direct South East, Contact Kent also provides business continuity for District Councils, out of hours services for homelessness on behalf of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells, and have been approached by other County Councils to provide out of hours services, generating additional income for the service. The ability that Contact Kent has to analyse call patterns and adapt its services to ensure customer demand is met, together with the fact that it is available 24/7 are significant factors in wanting to channel all initial contacts through this route.

2.13 Contact Kent Customer Service Advisers are also supporting the Gateway face to face service, using the Contact Kent infrastructure for training, performance management and support. This also underpins the multi-channel delivery by Contact Kent, supporting the channel shift strategy. Contact Kent has a clear role to play in reducing duplication and complexity across the organisation.

2.14 Over time, Contact Kent has developed significant expertise and has already gone a long way in developing the services they offer to the point where it is capable of delivering highly specialised services. It already delivers a wide variety of services on behalf of directorates (a list of the services currently offered was included in the report on Contact Kent to this committee on 24 September this

year). It is well placed to enhance the customer experience by increasing the number of enquiries, questions and issues at the first point of contact.

3. Progress to Date

3.1 In addition to the work already underway within directorates (as referred to above), the following progress has been made:

- Mapped existing assessment activity across KCC and identified potential overlaps both internally and with other organisations (the list of assessment activity is attached as Appendix B)
- Progressed the Benefits Hub work with partners e.g. district and borough councils, NHS, Job Centre Plus etc.
- Progressed the Community Safety Hub work with partners e.g. district and borough councils, Police, Fire etc.
- Begun the reception closure programme, starting with HQ and rolling-out to other offices where more appropriate access points are available (i.e. Gateway).
- Begun a draft Channel and Access Strategy that will be consulted upon (and will come to a Corporate POSC, subject to Member agreement)
- Identified some areas of service activity that could more effectively be done online i.e. Freedom Pass and renewing a higher proportion of library books
- Identified a range of services that could be available online that currently are not
- Continued to develop MOSAIC profiling to ensure we have a good understanding of how our customers wish to access services and how we can target our resources more effectively
- Secured Job Centre Plus commitment to the Gateway Programme through Total Place
- Signed the lease for Sheerness Gateway in October 2010, which will bring together a range of KCC, Swale Borough Council and other partner services
- Identified all the IT and payments systems being used to see where there are opportunities to streamline
- Using the Margate Taskforce to pilot some of the work
- Exploring the potential for using Trusted Assessors
- An internal operational Access and Assessment Board has been established with service representatives across the organisation to ensure KCC is maximising the opportunities presented by this programme of work

3.2 A range of other opportunities and options are being discussed with service units and more details will be available as we progress.

3.3 Kent County Council commissioned Steria Ltd to deliver the proof of concept and blueprint for the Benefits Hub. This project is designed to map existing customer journeys for those individuals and families accessing benefits and redesign these journeys in order to:

- Remove duplication of information (such as validation of identity)
- Reducing the amount of data entry
- Reduce repeat visits
- Reduce multiple-assessments
- Reduce unnecessary referrals
- Enhance the customer experience
- Reducing customer waiting times
- Identify savings

3.4 A range of partners have been involved in this work to maximise the potential improvements. It is clear that many perceived barriers to closer working could be overcome, if organisations are prepared to reconsider their strategies and processes. Many of these barriers are cultural and seeing things from the customer's point of view leads to improvements and savings. Appendix B outlines the "as-is" and "to-be" customer journeys based on retirement and redundancy as an example.

3.5 The Benefit Hub work is nearing its conclusion and we hope to report in January with identified savings for KCC and other organisations and proposals to redesign customer journeys. The Total Place February submission outlines more detail on the Benefits Hub and the initial potential savings.

3.6 A similar approach is being taken with the Community Safety Hub where mapping of relatively simple processes such as that used for abandoned vehicles is showing clear potential to reduce overlap and timescales with a consequent financial saving. The Gateway team and Community Safety team are working with districts and boroughs through the Community Safety Hub to create a single back office form to streamline the process which involves KCC and Districts as well as the Police, with all three conducting separate DVLA checks. Time is currently being lost between the Districts requesting the removal of the vehicle and the owner being given a defined timeline before their car is crushed by KCC. If we were able to 'start the clock ticking' from the first letter sent to owners by Districts notifying them that their vehicle has been identified as abandoned rather than waiting until KCC produces the first letter then we could potentially reduce the amount of time a vehicle spends in a pound and therefore reduce the amount we pay in day rates.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Appendix C attempts to capture the range of online access to KCC services as well as the range of assessments carried out by KCC staff. Clearly there is the potential for collecting the same information a number of times which is costly for the organisation and unsatisfactory for the customer. One potential barrier to further progress is the current lack of a single customer record system (as described in "The First Bold Step") that would enable staff to see in one place the nature of all our involvements with an individual or family. There may therefore need to be an element of invest to save if we are to achieve these aims. The current configuration and capacity of our existing online services is ready to deal with enhanced functionality or large increases in web volumes.

4.2 This is very much work in progress. The Strategic Development unit is working with service directorates to achieve improvements and deliver the savings and there will be more details provided on specific savings as we progress.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members of the Corporate Policy Overview Committee are asked to **NOTE** the contents of this report.

Background Documents:

Bold Steps for Kent – October 2010