

**To:** Paul Carter, The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Business Strategy, Audit, Transformation and Commercial and Traded Services

**From:** Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

**Subject:** Re-location of KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway

**Decision No:** 16/000107

**Classification:** Non Exempt

**Future Pathway of Paper:** Cabinet Member Decision

**Electoral Division:** Malling North: Mrs Sarah Hohler  
Malling Rural North East: Mr Peter Homewood  
Malling Rural East: Mr Matthew Balfour  
Malling West: Mrs Valerie Dagger  
Malling Central Mrs Trudy Dean  
Tonbridge: Mr Christopher Smith  
Tonbridge: Mr Richard Long

**Summary:**

To make sure every pound spent in Kent is delivering better outcomes for our customers, communities and businesses, we must review the services we provide and where we provide them from to ensure we are getting value for money. As part of this KCC have undertaken a review of its Gateway Service Provision.

We are now considering whether the Tonbridge Gateway is the right location from which to provide KCC services. Since Tonbridge Gateway opened in Castle Street, Tonbridge, people have visited the Gateway to access a range of Kent County Council (KCC), Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) and partner services. We know that customers frequently visit Tonbridge Gateway to access services provided by TMBC, but rarely access KCC services.

While the services that KCC provides will remain available it is possible that they could be accessed from alternative locations in the future including other KCC buildings in Tonbridge. This could deliver property savings.

KCC provides or commissions the following services from Tonbridge Gateway:

- Kent Supported Employment
- Carers First
- Life Choice Independent Living
- Smoking Cessation
- Sexual Health
- General KCC Enquiries

**Recommendation(s):**

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Business Strategy, Audit, Transformation and Commercial and Traded Services is asked agree to the relocation of KCC services and commissioned services from Tonbridge Gateway to the Tonbridge Library and Adult Education Centre.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The proposal to relocate KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway follows a series of KCC service reviews of the Gateway programme which were carried out between 2012 and 2014. The reviews considered the effectiveness of Gateways predominately from KCC's perspective.
- 1.2 The initial review, which looked at the overarching Gateway programme, found that although Gateways provided the potential to generate significant savings for KCC through rationalisation of processes and premises, realisation of this potential has been limited. Transactional data showed that the take up of KCC service provision at Gateways (other than for Library provision and Adult Education) by visiting customers had been consistently low. In addition, there was perceived to be limited need to increase service provision in Gateways throughout KCC.
- 1.3 Following the conclusions of the review into KCC's presence at the Gateways it was recommended that further analysis was required into each Gateway to consider the KCC services provided and whether the Gateway continued to be the best place from which to deliver KCC services. Given the partnership arrangements and the levels of current use it was proposed the review focus on standalone gateways: Maidstone, Tonbridge, Dover, Tunbridge Wells and Gravesham Gateway respectively.
- 1.4 It is proposed there will be a separate consultation for each Gateway and a key decision taken by the Leader. Each consultation will put forward one or more options for relocation of the relevant KCC Gateway services, and will offer the opportunity for the public and Gateway partners to comment on this. There will be an open question in each consultation to allow for any unidentified issues to be raised. The feedback from each consultation will be considered as part of the decision making process.
- 1.5 Public consultation on the relocation of KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway started on 11 January 2016 and a key decision will be taken in March 2016.
- 1.6 Public consultation on Dover Gateway is expected to launch in March 2016 with a decision anticipated to be taken by July 2016. Timelines for Tunbridge Wells and Gravesham are yet to be confirmed.

## **2. Tonbridge Gateway**

- 2.1 The review of Tonbridge Gateway, which analysed a year's transactional data, found that whilst the Gateway is well received by customers utilising TMBC services, the placement of KCC services within the Gateway and take up of those services that are provided by visiting customers has been consistently low. Data shows that out of 47,256 recorded visits to the Gateway in 2015, only 7% of total customer transactions (3,097 visits) were for KCC services or those we commission (8.48 per day). This has been an overall reduction by over 2000 visitors per annum from the previous year.
- 2.2 The indicative face to face transactional costs for KCC at Tonbridge Gateway are just over £113 per customer visit. These are significantly higher than the national channel costs which based on public service surveys, such as SOCITM's channel benchmarking survey are:
  - £8.62 Face-to-face
  - £2.83 Telephone

- £0.15 Website<sup>1</sup>
- 2.3 In addition, it found that there were several public facing buildings in Tonbridge delivering alternative KCC services that may be appropriate to deliver property savings through the relocation of services currently being delivered from Tonbridge Gateway.
  - 2.4 To capture the views and understand the potential impact to our customers, KCC held a 6 week public consultation on the relocation of KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway. The consultation ran from the 11<sup>th</sup> January to the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2016.
  - 2.5 Following the consultation a full EqlA has been completed (Appendix C). Following the consideration of the responses to the consultation, the final EqlA and feedback at this Policy and Resource Cabinet Committee meeting, the Leader will take a decision regarding KCC's future within Tonbridge Gateway.
  - 2.6 The proposals focus on the five specific KCC delivered or commissioned services, which run either pre-booked or drop-in face to face clinics with customers from the Tonbridge Gateway. These services are present in the Gateway at fixed times during the week, and utilise either a desk or a room in the Gateway. The KCC delivered or commissioned services provided from Tonbridge Gateway are:
    - Kent Supported Employment (56 customer transactions in Tonbridge Gateway in 2015)
    - Carers First (62 customers transactions in Tonbridge Gateway in 2015)
    - Life Choice Independent Living (129 customer transactions in Tonbridge Gateway in 2015)
    - Smoking Cessation (121 customer transactions in Tonbridge Gateway in 2015)
    - Sexual Health (17 customer transactions in Tonbridge Gateway in 2015)

We are proposing to relocate the five service clinics listed above to the Tonbridge Library and Tonbridge Adult Education Centre.

- 2.7 Each of the service clinics listed above have relatively low customer footfall (the highest being Life Choice Independent Living and Smoking Cessation, who saw 129 and 121 customers respectively between January and December 2015). No service utilises more than one meeting room or desk at any one time, and Kent Supported Employment is the only service to run clinics on more than one day. It is therefore estimated that there would be a low impact on existing services within the selected buildings, should KCC decide to relocate these service clinics from Tonbridge Gateway.
- 2.8 Tonbridge Library and Adult Education Centre are both properties which are owned by KCC. Tonbridge Library and the Adult Education Centre both have publicly accessible receptions. The library reception currently provides Blue Badge Application forms for the public to complete, in addition to a number of other forms. The public already visit Tonbridge Library and Adult Education Centre to carry out a number of other different transactions, in addition to what might be considered 'typical' library services. These include registering a birth or death and registering most types of bus passes. There are also computers in the library which members of the public can use for one hour per day.
- 2.9 In both locations staff members can assist with other general enquiries about KCC services by signposting to the relevant team or department where possible. If a decision is taken to relocate KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway, customers who

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<sup>1</sup> SOCITM Customer Access Improvement Service Briefing, 2012

wish to ask about KCC services face to face will continue to be able to do this from the Gateway at the Tonbridge Castle site (TMBC), Tonbridge Library and the Adult Education Centre. We are also considering the option of commissioning KCC general enquiries from other locations in the future.

- 2.10 All KCC services and commissioned services were invited to attend pre-consultation engagement sessions jointly held by KCC and TMBC. These sessions were attended by Life Choice Independent Living, Carer's First, Smoking Cessation, Kent Supported Employment and Hi Kent with the others preferring email communication. All services were interested in how a decision on their relocation from Tonbridge Gateway might impact on their service delivery, with a number of them keen on the move. The continued presence of some of these parties in the Gateway depends on how TMBC would operate the Gateway in the future, should KCC relocate its services from this location. KCC have been engaging with TMBC before and throughout the consultation period.

### **3. Public Consultation feedback**

- 3.1 The consultation focussed on identifying how customers and our partners would be impacted if KCC decided to relocate services from Tonbridge Gateway in March 2017. The consultation proposed continued face to face service provision from two possible locations in Tonbridge.
- 3.2 The consultation consisted of a consultation document, three drop in sessions in Tonbridge Gateway and a questionnaire, which was also produced in an Easy Read version and available in electronic and paper formats.
- 3.3 Stakeholders, including Gateway customers were invited to respond to the consultation using various communication methods.
- 3.4 23 consultation responses were received in total and a response from Tom Tugendhat MP. Several detailed responses were received to the open consultation question, which asked for feedback on the proposals. The majority of responses were received online (16) and 7 were received in hard copy. 56% of the responses received were in favour of the relocation, 34% opposed the relocation of services and 10% were undecided. These responses have been grouped into themes; the most frequently discussed theme related to concerns regarding the accessibility of the proposed alternative locations and in particular car parking provision along with the economic benefits of relocating KCC services from the Gateway.
- 3.5 The Consultation Report (Appendix B) sets out the consultation process and provides detailed analysis on the consultation feedback. The table on the next page is extracted from the consultation report and lists the main response themes.

Theme of comments	Number of online comments	Number of paper comments	Most popular comments ranked
Location feedback (accessibility of the proposed sites)	11	6	1 <sup>st</sup>
Benefits of co-location	10	1	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Economic benefits of using other KCC buildings	6	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Parking concerns at proposed locations	3	4	4 <sup>th</sup>
Protection of the Library	2	0	5 <sup>th</sup> =
Financial burden on the Borough Council	2	0	5 <sup>th</sup> =

3.6 An EqlA was carried out to accompany the proposals and shape the consultation. This has been updated following consultation feedback to include a full action plan. Table 3 of the EqlA lists the key issues which will need to be novated if KCC is to relocate services from Tonbridge Gateway. Table 4 of the EqlA sets out an action plan to novate the identified issues. The key actions are as follows:

- Ensure all locations are accessible
- Ensure that staff in alternative locations can assist service users in completing Blue Badge applications
- Look at the feasibility of introducing hearing loops to alternative locations
- Look at the feasibility of introducing baby changing facilities to alternative locations
- Look at the feasibility of introducing a Changing Space to alternative locations
- Raise awareness of transport routes to alternative locations
- Consideration of disabled parking at alternative locations

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Each year KCC pays 50% towards the annual property costs of Tonbridge Gateway, which amounts to £46,000. It is possible that if KCC were to relocate its Gateway services to other KCC buildings this £46,000 could be saved each year. If KCC chose not to exercise the break provisions in the partnership agreement and lease KCC will be tied into the agreements for a further 7 years.
- 4.2 There will also be minor adaptation expenditure to create the appropriate modifications in the Library / Adult Education Centre buildings.
- 4.3 As a matter of good estate management practice KCC regularly reviews its asset base to ensure that KCC are making the best use of our accommodation and it meets the

needs of our service users. This would include other KCC buildings in the Tonbridge area including the Library and Adult Education complex in due course to ensure that they meet our future service needs. Any proposed changes would be subject to appropriate consultation should they be brought forward.

## 5. Legal implications

5.1 KCC and TMBC have a number of partnership agreements which govern the usage of the Gateway. KCC's decision on whether to relocate its services from the Gateway will be taken in accordance with the overarching partnership agreements. TMBC have been fully engaged in advance of and throughout the consultation period.

## 6. Equalities Implications

6.1 An Equalities and Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed to support the consultation and has been updated (Appendix C).

## 7. Recommended Future Service Locations

7.1 The table below shows the KCC services currently delivered in the Gateway and the recommended future locations for each:

KCC service or commissioned service	Recommended future location
Kent Supported Employment	Tonbridge Library and Adult Education Centre
Carers First	
Life Choice Independent Living	
Smoking Cessation	
Sexual Health	
Meet and Greet (general enquiries)	

7.2 This takes into account the feedback from the consultation, as set out in detail in the consultation report (Appendix B, sections 7-9.)

## 8 Next Steps

8.1 The consultation report and full EqIA will be used to inform the decision on whether to relocate KCC services from Tonbridge Gateway. A decision will be made following recommendations made at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee and information will be made available online and in the Gateway. If KCC decides to relocate the KCC services in the Gateway, any changes will be in place from March 2017.

## 9. Recommendation:

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Business Strategy, Audit, Transformation and Commercial and Traded Services is asked agree to the relocation of KCC services and commissioned services from Tonbridge Gateway to the Tonbridge Library and Adult Education Centre.

## **10. Background Documents**

10.1 The documents which support this report are as follows:

- Tonbridge Gateway Consultation Document - Standard and Easy Read versions (Appendix A)
- Consultation Report (Appendix B)
- Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C)

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