

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 5 October 2010**

#### **Gateway Review: Interview with Job Centre Plus**

**Report of:** Performance & Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Committee requested to hear from the Job Centre Plus regarding the Job Search Support service experience in the Gateway as part of the information gathering stage of the gateway review.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to interview Alison Culshaw from Job Centre Plus in relation to the Corporate Services review into the Gateway. The terms of reference for the review are attached at **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 Ms Culshaw has been asked to talk about her experience of dealing with the gateway and any idea she may have on how the current service could be improved or expanded.
- 2.3 Areas of questioning could include but are not limited to:
- What are the key issues facing your service?
  - Where else can people access a face2face service?
  - Would you provide additional Job Centre Plus services in the Gateway?
  - How is the current service advertised and marketed to customers?
  - Is the current space allocated to the service sufficient?
  - Have you seen a change in customer levels since moving to the Gateway?
  - Have there been any complaints relating to service delivery through the Gateway?
  - Are you able to extend the number of hours your service is available in the Gateway?

- What feedback have you received from residents regarding the Gateway?

### **3. Interview with Job Centre Plus**

- 3.1 Job Centre Plus is a government agency supporting people of working age from welfare into work, and helping employers to fill their vacancies. They are part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and play a major role in supporting the Department's aim to "promote opportunity and independence for all through modern, customer-focused services."
- 3.2 They provide a wide range of information and services, like benefits, loans and grants and help with finding a job and have one of Britain's largest databases of job vacancies, which is updated constantly. The database also lets you search for training, career information, voluntary work and childcare providers across the UK.
- 3.3 They key objectives of the service are:
- Increase the effective supply of labour by promoting work as the best form of welfare and helping unemployed and economically inactive people move into employment.
  - Work towards parity of outcomes for ethnic minority customers.
  - Pay customers the correct benefit at the right time and protect the benefit system from fraud, error and abuse.
  - Provide high-quality and demand-led services to employers, which help fill job vacancies quickly and effectively with well-prepared and motivated employees.
  - Help people facing the greatest barriers to employment to compete effectively in the labour market and move into and remain in work.
  - Improve continuously the quality, accessibility and delivery of services to all customers.
  - Ensure that people receiving working age benefits fulfil their responsibilities while providing appropriate help and support for those without work.
  - Increase Jobcentre Plus's overall productivity, efficiency and effectiveness

- 3.4 They currently provide Job Search Support service in the gateway, which aim to help people back into work. The current arrangement in the Gateway is by appointment only.

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

- 4.1 The review of the gateway links in to corporate objectives through the Council's priority of Efficient and Effective Public Services it is directly linked to the following objectives:
- KO 21 Deliver more efficient and effective Council services and increase value for money
  - KO 022 Ensure people can access a wider range of services in ways that suit them.

**Name of Review: Customer Services**

**What are the objectives and desired outcomes of the review**

- To review the operation of the Gateway, in particular:
  - Establish what resident’s awareness of the services provided in the gateway was;
  - Determine the suitability of the Gateway operations, including opening times and accessibility
  - Identify whether there is a suitable provision for rural residents;
  - Establish whether the Gateway offered value for money and provided a good use of space;
  - Determine whether the Gateway resources were appropriate;
  - Identify opportunities to release service pressures through removing avoidable contact and channel migration;
  - Identify the provision and suitability of facilities available for staff;
  - Identify the provision and range of services available to residents in the Gateway and establish if this is fit for purpose and what benefits each service provides residents through their presence;
  - Identify how the presence of partner organisations is communicated and marketed by the organisations to Maidstone’s residents;
  - Identify opportunities for new service provisions in the gateway (this could include interviews with Kent County Council Partners and Citizen Advice Bureau regarding their experiences);
  - Identify funding arrangements with partners and make recommendations as required;
  - Identify alternative ways of delivering services and make recommendations as required;
  - Consider performance standards and performance targets; and
- To review Customer Services, in particular:
  - To identify the practice of authorities with superb service delivery reputations amongst their local populations and identify how they attained that reputation, including consideration of Councils in affluent and less affluent areas;
  - To determine the type of customer complaints received and identify how the Council had responded to them; and
  - To establish how the Council’s welfare and benefits services are communicated and marketed to Maidstone’s residents.

**What equality issues will need to be considered as part of the review – giving consideration to the 6 strands:**

- Are Council services widely accessible to people regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, faith or disability?
- Is the Gateway provision accessible and useable to people with disabilities (including visual impairment)?
- Are Council communications and marketing accessible to all?
- Are customer services targeted towards particular groups? If so, is

<p>this justified?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are staff trained to deal sensitively with individuals with specific needs/ faith/race/sexual orientation?</li> <li>• Is help available for those who need it e.g. those who cannot access IT, those who do not have English as their first language?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Which witnesses are required?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet Member for Corporate Services</li> <li>• Director of Regeneration and Communities</li> <li>• Head of Finance and Customer Services</li> <li>• Customer Services Manager</li> <li>• Gateway Team Manager</li> <li>• Kent County Council Partners</li> <li>• Partners operating in the Gateway</li> <li>• Voluntary organisations</li> <li>• Academics</li> <li>• Best Practice Local Authorities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other ways to seek evidence? E.g. site visits, involving members of the public, consultation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Groups</li> <li>• Visit the Gateway</li> <li>• Visit other Gateways</li> <li>• Gateway staff surveys</li> <li>• Residents questionnaire for those who use the Gateway service</li> <li>• Press release for why some residents do not use Gateway service</li> <li>• Consult local representatives of suitable services who have/have not used the Gateway</li> </ul>
<p><b>What information/training is needed?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gateway data</li> <li>• Mosaic data</li> <li>• GIS data</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suggested time for review and report completion date</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine months: Gateway sub section by end of September 2010 to feed into the Council budget setting process</li> </ul>
<p><b>How does the review link to council priorities?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A place with efficient and effective public services</li> </ul>
<p><b>How does this item deliver CfPS effective scrutiny principles?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables the voice and concerns of the public</li> <li>• Drives improvement in public services</li> </ul>
<p><b>Any co-optees or expert witnesses?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required</li> </ul>

