

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

11 February 2016

Report of the Director of Central Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION OF THE FUTURE OF KCC SERVICES WITH TONBRIDGE GATEWAY

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 For over two years, Kent County Council has been reviewing its financial commitment to Gateways across Kent, including the Gateway at Tonbridge Castle. Their proposal, outlined in the consultation document attached at **Annex 1**, is to relocate the KCC services currently delivered from the Gateway, bringing an end to the current agreement with TMBC with effect from July 2017. The net financial effect for this Council would be a loss of revenue of approximately £140,000 per annum.

1.1.2 This report outlines the views of Management Team to the proposals within the consultation.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Members will recall that the Tonbridge Gateway opened in July 2009 and was developed with joint funding from Kent County Council (KCC) and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. A number of Gateways were opened across Kent, although there was no set 'model' of service so the specific service delivery has varied at different locations.

1.2.2 The Gateway programme (which began back in 2003) aimed to provide a model for integrated face to face customer service delivery across the public sector where customers' complex and varied needs could be met through a multi-agency approach with shared efficiencies and reduced duplication.

1.2.3 KCC's review of the Gateway offer in Tonbridge began in November 2013. The review focused on how the service at Tonbridge Gateway is being delivered, whether it is providing value for money for KCC (with a focus on customer transactions and associated operational costs), district perspective and the impact of the Customer Service Strategy (and other strategic interdependencies) on future use of the Gateway.

- 1.2.4 The review concluded that the Gateway in Tonbridge was not financially sustainable for KCC when capital and revenue commitments were balanced against transactional volumes and diminishing face to face customer interaction.
- 1.2.5 Since November 2013 there have been a number of meetings between KCC and the Borough Council which have culminated in the proposal to, effectively, bring an end to the Gateway Agreement with this Council in July 2017, when there is a 'break clause' in the Agreement. Subject to certain requirements in relation to notice periods, KCC are able to exercise the break clause without the consent of the Borough Council.
- 1.2.6 In response to KCC's review report, the following summary points were made by this Council in making a case for the continuation of Gateway at Tonbridge:
- *We can understand the desire to review the delivery of service in view of the channel shift agenda (which is our agenda too) and would want to work with KCC to ensure that the most vulnerable who may not be in a position to channel shift are fully supported. Therefore we feel there is still a place for Gateway in some form going forward*
 - *It is disappointing that some KCC services have not engaged with Gateway, particularly in light of comments above regarding support for those most vulnerable*
 - *During the floods, for example, we saw first-hand the value of Gateway as a place for joined up services. If gateway was decommissioned, it would seem to be a retrograde step*
- 1.2.7 These comments were largely supported by the, then, KCC lead officer for Gateway and she too accepted that there was a service need for Gateway in Tonbridge. Regrettably our arguments were not enough to overcome the apparent priority of KCC to realise savings in their property portfolio.
- 1.2.8 Before making the final decision to re-locate KCC services to other buildings in the town, a consultation was launched on 11th January, to last 6 weeks.

1.3 Response to the consultation

- 1.3.1 As the likely outcome of the review has been suspected for some time, your Management Team have concluded that there is no benefit in responding to the consultation and that it is instead more appropriate to concentrate resources on identifying what steps might be taken to 'off-set' the financial effect of the Agreement's termination.
- 1.3.2 To this end, there is a proposal being worked upon for alternative joint occupation of the Castle offices which would help mitigate the loss of the Gateway. This will be reported to Members in due course.
- 1.3.3 In the meantime, Members are invited to consider whether they may wish to respond to the consultation individually.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 There are no direct legal implications by the Council not making a formal response to the consultation.
- 1.4.2 In the event that KCC were to terminate the existing Gateway agreement there would be a loss of revenue of approximately £140,000 per annum.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 Not applicable.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 Not applicable.

Background papers:

contact: Charlie Steel

Nil

Adrian Stanfield
Director of Central Services