

LGC Award Submission

London Borough of Croydon: Innovation

People's Gateway Enablement and Welfare Service

The People's Gateway service was established in April 2015. It aims to provide an innovative, holistic, multidisciplinary, and preventative response to households heading towards crisis, rather than acting in an ad-hoc or piecemeal manner as is often the case in local authority interventions.

Initially, the Gateway service brought together housing needs assessment, emergency accommodation, welfare rights, financial support, and employment and training services. The approach sought to provide an integrated 'end-to-end' journey through council services for households at risk of homelessness or impacted by the welfare reforms. Customers are considered holistically and a joined up financial, training/work and housing action plan is co-produced with the customer, who takes responsibility, supported by a multi-disciplinary team.

One of the innovations from the Gateway service is that it is designed around the customer journey, building on data showing customer demand and use of services. Establishing a single front door, via a wide-ranging initial assessment of the customer's situation and needs, breaks down traditional barriers between services, both statutory and voluntary. Critically support is linked to the resident owning and taking actions to support their future position, with the aim of providing a single sustainable solution for families and individuals.

Gateway phase 2 expands this model, seeking to broaden the "gateway" to a range of customer journeys within adult social care, supported housing and children's services. The inclusion of mainstream services within the Gateway model marks a significant development of the approach. By providing a single point of contact for vulnerable adults and families requiring multiple interventions, the service is able to strengthen prevention and early intervention across the customer journey, increase independence, divert demand and reduce statutory need.

Development of the Gateway service

The People's Gateway concept originated in response to the welfare reforms introduced in 2013, affecting 16,000 local households. The council needed to find a way to prevent financial crisis, reliance on statutory services and subsequent negative impacts on health and wellbeing. Existing support services operated in separation from one another; alone they could not prevent crisis.

The key first step in developing the service was the use of data sets to analyse customer demand. This focused on identifying crossover of customers (over 50,000 households) across 10 different services, and multiple touch points. It found two thirds of customers appeared across two or more services and 15% across four or more service areas. Further segmentation of customers by total cost and debt to the council was undertaken. Mapping of customer journeys linked to temporary accommodation and social care helped identify how service delivery and processes could be redesigned within a new multidisciplinary approach.

A unique outcome focussed approach has been developed; intervention is proactive and designed around the customer. Plans go beyond the presenting issues to assist customers to identify and achieve long-lasting solutions. For example, where a household faces eviction from a private landlord traditional approaches focus on homelessness assessment, temporary accommodation and housing application. The new approach considers more, including finances, links to other areas in social care, provides support to get into employment, and negotiates to retain existing accommodation.

Multi-agency working is at the heart of the service. Involvement of front-line staff and partner organisations is critical in identifying intervention and prevention opportunities. Meetings with key services covering housing, support, NEETS, Adult and Children's services, Job Centre Plus, welfare rights and benefits have broken down barriers, enabled the development of referral processes and effective collaborative working.

Service users have been engaged in the delivery of the service through providing outreach and advice services. This has presented opportunities for officers to engage with customers about the services they have received. There have also been one-off service design engagements with customer groups, e.g. parents of children with disabilities on how income maximisation and debt advice could be delivered.

In Gateway phase 2, the approach has been further developed to identify and respond to wider vulnerabilities. Think Family panels have been set up to review the most expensive families in terms of combined cost to the Council across a range of services - adult social care, children's social care including children with disabilities and special educational needs, housing and welfare and Council debt. The aim is to identify opportunities for both immediate action and longer-term systemic change and service redesign to reduce costs and improve outcomes for these families.

The approach has been instrumental in developing a wider culture of service transformation and innovation within the authority. Services such as employment support and income maximisation, which have been provided separately across a wide range of council service areas, are being transferred into the Gateway Service. It is planned to extend the service into public health, GP and community services.

This will provide a more holistic, personalised service for families, vulnerable adults and care leavers to improve financial and housing stability

Outcomes

Since October 2015, over 7000 households have been engaged creating over £2.5m savings to the council. It is anticipated that over 14,000 households will be engaged this year.

1,700 residents at risk of crisis have been supported to become financially stable. 347 fewer households were placed in temporary accommodation and 587 residents helped into employment.

Debt to the council has been reduced and over £11 million has been claimed in additional welfare entitlements.

In phase 2, further savings of over £1.6m will be achieved with a further £1m identified from the review of the most expensive families.

The outcomes achieved evidence the effectiveness of the Gateway approach. Many authorities are facing similar pressures of homelessness, rising social care budgets and reduced funding and can benefit by replicating key elements of the approach:

- reviewing data to analyse customers' use of services
- mapping end to end journeys and identifying opportunities for multi-disciplinary interventions
- breaking down service barriers to ensure the right help in the right place at the right time
- maximising the effectiveness of partnership working with statutory and voluntary partners
- generating cost savings through improved financial resilience and independence.