



Audit Commission and IDeA Competition

Innovation in local public services

Foreword

- 1 Local government faces huge challenges. The agenda includes coping with the implications of demographic change and migration; addressing sustainability and the challenge of climate change; and tackling systemic inequalities in health, worklessness and levels of cohesion, both between and within localities. To confront these issues, councils need to work collaboratively and in partnership with local stakeholders; ways of working which bring their own challenges. Authorities and their partners are also developing their approaches to changing individual lifestyles and behaviour, such as reducing levels of obesity and smoking. And all of this needs to be done in the context of increased public expectations, council tax pressures, tighter funding and more demanding efficiency targets.
- 2 To address these challenges local authorities will both have to do new things and do some things in new ways. And that requires innovation. That does not mean ignoring the day job in favour of blue-sky thinking. Innovation needs to be closely linked to day-to-day service delivery, learning with and from communities, users and employees. And rather than neighbouring authorities re-inventing the wheel, what is needed is innovation in the local government sector as a whole, which means that sharing and learning from each other is crucial.
- 3 The need for innovation will grow over the coming years as councils and their partners address increasingly complex and pressing issues. This is clearly identified by Clive Grace and Steve Martin in the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) paper, *Getting Better all the Time?*¹ (www.idea.gov.uk/gettingbetter). Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) results show a dramatic improvement in councils' performance, but there is now a need to look beyond making transactional changes – squeezing a little more improvement from council services year on year. The best authorities are pursuing a transformational agenda, making radical changes to established practice to achieve a leap in performance or release resources to the front line.

¹ Grace, C and Martin, S *Getting better all the time?* An independent assessment of local government improvement and its future prospects Improvement and Development Agency for local government, January 2008

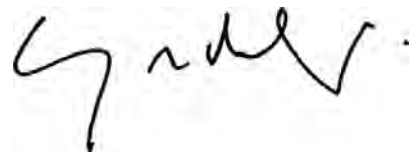
- 4 The Audit Commission's report in 2007, *Seeing the Light: Innovation in Local Public Services*¹¹, and associated case studies showed how innovative councils and their partners can be, and the tremendous potential for further innovation. The IDeA has been working with others to develop its understanding of innovation and is developing proposals to promote innovation within local government.
- 5 The Audit Commission and IDeA have built on that work by running a competition to find and share more examples of innovation. We have selected four winners from the 42 submissions we received from local authorities. Case studies of the winners, together with briefer descriptions of short listed initiatives, are published here. They are also available, together with a full list of all entries, through the Improvement Network (www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/innovationcompetition).
- 6 As with the earlier case studies in *Seeing the Light*, the benefits lie as much in the story of how authorities went about their innovations as in the final innovations themselves; it is the **how** as well as the **what**.
- 7 The case studies illustrate significant aspects of the process:
 - the spark for an idea could come from many different sources – it is important to think laterally based on your own experience, but also to look widely and be prepared to borrow from anywhere;
 - leadership and support from the top helps dramatically in ensuring that ideas come to fruition;
 - it won't be plain sailing, so be prepared to stick with it;
 - involve people as much and as early as possible – to make use of a wide range of experience in getting the innovation to work, and to build awareness and goodwill towards it;
 - manage the risks, for instance by building up from small-scale pilots.

¹¹ *Seeing the Light: Innovation in Local Public Services* Audit Commission national report, May 2007

- 8 What came through very strongly from the case studies was the overwhelming commitment of everyone involved to making a difference to the people they serve, whether it was people with long-term health conditions, people involved in emergency situations or members of the general public in their day-to-day relations with the council. The desire to provide better services to local people is what drove them to success: and what better driving force could there be? We commend these examples of excellent practice to you.



Michael O'Higgins
Chairman
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Introduction

- 9 In May 2007, the Audit Commission published a national study report *Seeing the Light: Innovation in Local Public Services*. The report looked at what constitutes innovation in the local government sector, the conditions that allow it to thrive and the processes by which successful innovative projects have been implemented. By setting out the potential benefits of innovating, and the enablers of, and barriers to, achieving those benefits, it aimed to encourage local authorities to consider innovation as one way of achieving sustained performance improvement.
- 10 The report found significant innovation taking place in local authorities. Analysis of CPA reports identified some degree of innovation in 75 per cent of single tier and fire authorities and, when surveyed, nearly half of all authorities claimed to be engaged in 'a great deal' of innovation. Ten case studies of innovative practice in local authorities were published on the web as part of the report.
- 11 However, authorities also reported that the advances taking place, both in terms of knowledge about individual initiatives and learning about how innovation occurs, were not being shared with peers. Two-thirds of authorities regarded the availability of relevant examples of innovative practice to be important or essential in supporting innovation, yet only a quarter were able to access such examples when they required them. The report called on local government bodies to work with authorities in identifying and sharing innovative practice that could be replicated throughout the sector.
- 12 In the autumn of 2007, the Audit Commission and the IDeA invited entries to a competition designed to elicit further examples of innovation in local public bodies. We received 42 submissions detailing initiatives across a wide range of local authority activity, ranging from performance management processes to digital television channels. Many of the entries also involved local partners, including collaborative approaches to embedding diversity and improving the quality of housing stock.
- 13 In selecting a short list of entries we looked for innovations that fulfilled the criteria set out in the Audit Commission report: something which is sufficiently new to the authority that it represents a break with established practice, and demonstrates a willingness to experiment and take risks in the pursuit of a performance breakthrough.

- 14 We have selected four winning entries from our short list, and these are described in detailed case studies below:
- A telehealth pilot run by **Kent County Council** that contributes to the longer-term care of the chronically ill by providing in-home systems that allow users to monitor their conditions and report their health status directly to health professionals;
 - A recuperation vehicle and marine response vessel developed by **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service** following government recommendations and widening statutory responsibilities;
 - An interactive website based on 'Web 2.0' principles in the **London Borough of Redbridge**. This allows users to define website content and is designed to stimulate community engagement through the use of forums and blogs;
 - Bus and taxi marshals to address violent crime and the challenges of the night-time economy in Bristol. This initiative was developed by the **Safer Bristol Partnership**, working closely with licensees and bus companies.
- 15 The winning entries have **clearly identifiable drivers**, whether these are pressing local issues, national agendas, or a requirement for efficiency savings. In response to these pressures, the winning authorities were open to creative ideas from a variety of sources, including other countries and the private sector. Once a possible solution was identified, they were willing to spend time and money researching and evaluating it in order to assure themselves of its potential value.
- 16 The response in each case was **well-managed risk taking**, backed by strong support and challenge from senior management and members. But there was also an acceptance that a firm vision needs to be balanced by a flexible and pragmatic implementation. As one senior officer told us: 'For innovation to work you have to accept that you don't know exactly where it is going, if you know where it's going it isn't innovation – it's already been done.'

- 17 When we visited these authorities it was clear that innovation was consciously **part of the ambition of the organisation**, and understood to be so by members and officers at all levels. This kind of mindset allows organisations to develop a portfolio of innovative projects. Four authorities submitted multiple entries from different areas of their activity. Several short listed organisations, including Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority and Wiltshire County Council, were also featured in the Audit Commission's *Seeing the Light* study for innovative practice in entirely different areas of their activity. Kent County Council maintains a catalogue of innovative projects on their website available to staff and external audiences, to transfer learning and encourage networking among staff.
- 18 The initiatives have been **delivered by skilled teams**, often with members drawn from varied backgrounds and with different specialisms. They were able to build and draw on support from colleagues, users, local partners and private sector companies, even when they had initially encountered scepticism.
- 19 This is not to say that the journeys were smooth ones. Many **barriers had to be overcome** as the innovative projects developed. The Kent case study is the clearest example of this. Crucially, a solid methodology for evaluating benefits, including a pre-pilot stage with a small number of users, provided strong arguments to convince the clinical community of the telehealth concept.
- 20 Most importantly, the four winners show **evidence of impact on service users** and taxpayers: a drop in violent crime and anti-social behaviour; enhanced capacity to respond to fire incidents; reduced hospital admissions; and increased web usage and savings in transaction costs. While all the initiatives are in their infancy, there are clear indications that these benefits are sustainable.
- 21 While transferring innovation will always entail some adaptation of the original idea to the circumstances of the adopting organisation, these projects are broadly replicable elsewhere. Moreover, they offer pointers for all authorities seeking a performance breakthrough.
- 22 Many of these findings reinforce what is already known about innovation in the public sector. But there have also been some new insights into the innovation process, for example, the potential of links to local universities to research and evaluate new ideas. Merseyside's work with Liverpool John Moores University illustrates the benefits of such associations most clearly.

- 23 It was also apparent that the recommendations of the Varney Review of public service delivery¹ are driving authorities to reconfigure the ways in which customers access services. This involved using customer records management techniques, in particular developing single customer accounts, to design services around the needs of individuals. In the best cases these changes have harnessed the possibilities of Web 2.0 technologies, creating platforms for users to define how they interact with their councils. Roger Hampson, Chief Executive at the London Borough of Redbridge, is emphatic about the opportunity this presents: ‘this technology will fundamentally change the nature of the relationship between citizens and their government, and re-define the balance of power between residents and their council’.
- 24 This focus illustrates the important role of technology in delivering innovative projects. The Safer Bristol Partnership case study shows how head camera technology has been used by taxi and bus marshals to deter violent incidents, and how this approach has influenced wider police thinking. New technology is often characterised as an innovation in its own right, but it is most effective when it is employed intelligently to deliver a good idea. As one officer we spoke to put it: ‘if you don’t use business process re-engineering or some service redesign principles you can’t achieve improved service delivery – even if you have all the technology in the world’.
- 25 The Seeing the Light report highlighted several barriers that local public bodies face in disseminating innovation, not least the time and resource involved in publicising new initiatives. This knowledge transfer is, however, critical to improving performance across the sector: innovation which is copied or adapted can quickly become established practice. The Audit Commission and the IDeA are grateful to those authorities who were willing to share their experiences, and hope that their example encourages others to share their own innovative practice as widely as possible.

¹ Varney, Sir David, *Service Transformation: A Better Service for Citizens and Businesses, a Better Deal for Taxpayers*, December 2006.

Kent County Council

What is the innovation?

- 26 The innovation in Kent is a successful trial of home health monitoring equipment for older people with longer-term conditions. The technology enables them to monitor their health and transmit data directly to clinical professionals, such as doctors or nurses.

How did it happen?

- 27 In 2004, as part of Kent County Council's Seattle exchange programme, Chief Executive Peter Gilroy, then Director of Social Care, saw a demonstration of a 'telehealth' scheme. The scheme was run by the US Veterans' Association, and he thought a similar approach could be used in this country.
- 28 The telehealth concept involves patients using technology placed in their own homes to record aspects of their health, (for example blood pressure, blood sugar levels or their weight), and make this data available to their clinician. By providing clinicians with access to monitoring information they are able to see trends in patients' conditions and make any changes to their care plans accordingly.
- 29 Peter Gilroy discussed the concept with five local PCTs. They agreed to help pilot a similar telehealth project to be led by Kent adult social services using funding awarded under the council's Public Service Agreement. Later that year Kent sent a mixed team to Seattle, comprising policy staff, care managers, nurses and two GP 'champions' put forward by the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- 30 The Council brought together a diverse team to implement the *Telehealth Evaluative Development Pilot*, which ran from April 2005 to December 2007 across Kent. In August 2005 the team began a pre-pilot of 17 patients recommended by the champion GPs' practices.
- 31 Patients are offered a simple, customised on-screen menu that allows them to take readings relevant to their condition. They are also asked questions about their condition, devised by a local clinical panel. Readings are taken every day from a place in their home where users feel comfortable: this is important to ensure that data is comparable over time and free of any negative influences, such as the presence of a nurse or doctor, which might lead to abnormal readings. The data collected is automatically sent over the phone

line to a central server, where it is available to clinicians. They are able to spot anomalies or problems before they escalate and make timely and appropriate interventions.

- 32 The telehealth units also have an advice function, which enables clinicians to send one-way messages to patients, to provide positive feedback and encourage them to monitor their conditions. They also have a camera which enables images, for example of wounds, to be taken and sent and allows for two-way video-conferencing, which can be arranged by appointment.
- 33 In the United States, the telehealth model had been used for people who had been honourably discharged from the military, many of whom were younger than the expected target group in Kent. One reservation voiced at the outset was that elderly people might not have the same capability to use the new technology. This concern proved to be unfounded: the equipment was well received and judged easy to use.
- 34 The roll-out of the initiative began in earnest in January 2006, but implementing the scheme was not as simple as installing the infrastructure. There was a clear gulf between the PCTs' commitment to the project and GPs' engagement at an operational level. GPs were busy, subject to other pressures and justifiably required hard evidence of benefits before they were prepared to take on additional monitoring tasks. By May 2006, only 20 machines were in use and the team was under increasing pressure to justify an expensive and high profile initiative.
- 35 The major breakthrough came when Shepway PCT suggested that the team worked with their soon-to-be-appointed community matrons. In practice, nurses had often provided much of the support for the telehealth patient group and were a receptive audience. Further discussions led to telehealth monitoring being integrated into the Shepway community matrons' job roles. The telehealth team provided training and encouraged them to refer patients to the telehealth service. Over the subsequent months it became clear that the telehealth model fitted well with the way community matrons work and further community matrons across Kent were approached to become involved.

What has changed?

- 36 Kent has now installed some 250 terminals in patients' homes across the county. The telehealth team has implemented an ongoing evaluative programme which has shown that the targeted use of telehealth can deliver positive outcomes for users and clinicians.

- 37 The trial indicates that this approach has had a number of benefits, including improved quality of life and reduced anxiety for patients, and more effective use of time for health professionals. There are also direct benefits to patients from self-monitoring their conditions, with one diabetic patient losing two stone as a result of regularly monitoring his weight. Follow-up surveys have shown a 93 per cent satisfaction rate among users.
- 38 The pilot has reduced pressure on local health services, with fewer visits to GP practices and reduced hospital admissions. Kent is currently undertaking a full evaluation of the pilot, but early indications are that work with community matrons has reduced acute care costs by over 60 per cent (after 4-6 weeks), and led to 40 per cent reductions in contacts with GPs. An evaluation of work with 15 patients monitored by practice nurses across two GP surgeries has shown that acute care costs were reduced from £43,000 to £10,500.
- 39 In the Shepway area a significant fall in emergency bed days was identified in respect of 60 patients managed by the community matrons. In the 12 months prior to being accepted onto the matron caseload the patients used 870 bed days. Usage has subsequently dropped to 85 bed days.
- 40 Telehealth has also had benefits for patients' carers. In one case a family member who had provided full-time care for two years was able to work again because the patient was more stable and she spent less time travelling to, and in, hospital.
- 41 The team believes that long-term benefits also accrue to Kent's social care services, although these are harder to quantify. The intervention enables better health monitoring, reducing the severity of patients' care needs, and facilitates more effective relationships between community nurses and social care professionals providing services to the same individuals.

Why did it work?

- 42 The Kent telehealth project translates and adapts an existing approach from the United States, making it available to a different client group. Applying the concept to older people with longer-term conditions has required **day-to-day learning about what works**. Matt Rye, who is responsible for the evaluation of the project, underlined the importance of a clear and rigid methodology and patient selection criteria. However, he also explained: 'We have tried to be adaptive and flexible all the way through... Having a vision for where you want to go is very important, but so is having an open mind about how you achieve it.'

- 43 The Kent pilot benefited greatly from **upfront funding**, particularly a £1 million pump priming grant as part of Kent's local public service agreement. This allowed the team to invest in 250 telehealth units, but brought its own pressure, not least high expectations from local leaders.
- 44 The project was underpinned by a **strong research methodology**, designed to help the team provide evidence of benefits and demonstrate it had met health ethics requirements. A pre-pilot ironed out teething problems and secured patients' input from an early stage. This up-front thinking provided a firm foundation for further development.
- 45 Take-up also owed much to the **intelligent use of the available technology**. The team has been careful to manage users' expectations about what the hardware can do, and has developed clear tutorials on installation, backed-up by user manuals. They explain to all patients that the technology is not designed to replace clinical advice provided by doctors or nurses in person. One way electronic messages are used to provide encouragement and feedback to patients.
- 46 There is also a **diversity of skills and backgrounds within the project team**, including experience in marketing and sales, which has helped in messaging and communications. Richard Parton, whose role is to help communication with internal and external partners, was previously a change manager and has worked on innovative projects elsewhere in the Council. Hazel Price, the Project Manager, has experience in both strategic and operational roles and was able to draw on her contacts across the organisation to maintain the momentum of the project.

What next?

- 47 A commitment to providing telehealth services is part of Kent's Local Area Agreement *A Vision for Kent*. Since July 2007, Kent is one of three local authorities involved in a two-year national pilot sponsored by the Department of Health, which will evaluate the approach in much more detail. For Kent this means expanding the project to 1,333 telehealth users and exploring possibilities for closer working between health and social care services.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

What is the innovation?

- 48 The innovation in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) is the development of new vehicles designed to enhance the effectiveness of firefighters in emergency response situations.

How did it happen?

- 49 Most innovation in the public sector entails service innovation: providing a new service to users, or delivering existing services in a new way. Merseyside's approach to enhancing their operational capacity, however, is an example of product innovation, more usually the realm of the private sector.
- 50 The service has responded to new challenges and responsibilities by prototyping and deploying bespoke emergency response vehicles including a recuperation vehicle and a specially equipped marine rescue vessel.
- 51 MFRS had long been aware of the cumulative debilitating effect of heat, exertion, stress and heavy equipment on firefighters during emergency response. In 2004, the national Building Disaster Assessment Group examined the physiological stress placed on deployed firefighters. It found that heat strain could limit firefighting performance and called for further research on techniques and strategies that might alleviate its effects.
- 52 MFRS looked at techniques used in other countries, and identified a welfare vehicle deployed by the New York Fire Department in hot weather to rehydrate firefighters. They also commissioned new research from Liverpool John Moores University to examine the effectiveness of 'active cooling', immersing of hands and forearms in cold water, in reducing core body temperature. Dave Barr of the University's Research Institute for Sports and Exercise Sciences conducted the research, which involved monitoring firefighters' core body temperature in training scenarios and control environments. He found that hydration alone was insufficient in reducing core body temperature and that active cooling was highly effective in combating heat exhaustion.

- 53 Taking what it had learned MFRS developed its own welfare vehicle that can be deployed in emergency response and training exercises. The vehicle provides immediate care to firefighters suffering from the effects of heat exhaustion through rehydration, active cooling (using a customised chair developed by firefighters in the US), rest and food to sustain energy. It cost MFRS £50,000 to purchase a suitable vehicle and adapt and equip it to its requirements.
- 54 MFRS took a similar approach to developing its marine rescue capacity. In 2005, it took over an inshore rescue service that had run into financial difficulties. This new capacity addressed risks identified in the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan stemming from increased coastal leisure activity and riverside development. It also specifically addressed the Service's marine rescue responsibility for Liverpool John Lennon Airport.
- 55 Merseyside commissioned a new boat, which was custom built to its specifications. It incorporates specially designed slide rafts for fast running water and sleds for specialised rescue on mud flats. The slide rafts can be towed quickly in fast-running water, a limitation of standard marine life rafts. Firefighters have now been trained and accredited in swift water and rope access rescue techniques.

What has changed?

- 56 The recuperation vehicle was first deployed in October 2007, and is crewed full-time by firefighters who are not fully operationally fit. The vehicle, badged as the Cool Van, has so far been deployed ten times at operational incidents and attended eight tactical exercises.
- 57 The research undertaken for Merseyside showed a pronounced decrease in firefighters' core temperature and heart rate using cooling methods, compared to control of seated rest and taking on fluids. It proved that the equipment provided on the recuperation vehicle will reduce the average recovery rate after hard work from several hours down to between 15 and 20 minutes. By promoting the recovery rate of firefighters, the recuperation vehicle allows incident commanders to ensure the health and welfare of their crews, and keep them available to respond to emergency situations. This allows the Service to maximise the cumulative work times of its firefighters.

- 58 By backing the marine rescue service with innovative equipment and training, MFRS now provides an enhanced operational capacity on the River Mersey. Its new vessel can conduct open water searches, rescue casualties from entrapment in mud or quicksand and allows firefighters to treat and transfer any casualties. The slide raft is capable of transferring up to 60 people at any single time at high speed, which would allow MFRS to evacuate large numbers of casualties in the event of an aircraft ditch. Between June 2005 and the end of December 2007, the marine vessel attended 400 critical call outs, ranging from rescues from the river and mud flats to towing vessels in distress to shore.

Why did it work?

- 59 At the outset of both these initiatives considerable work went into **establishing proof of concept** for the vehicles. Merseyside worked with a local contractor to design a prototype of the marine rescue vessel, while similar work for the recuperation vehicle was done in-house by the Service's workshop manager.
- 60 MFRS has established good **relationships with local universities** and maintains a contestable research fund for university researchers who can show that their work will be of benefit to the fire community. The research conducted by Liverpool John Moores University was funded through the Fire and Rescue Research Fund Trust. It established the value of active cooling on core body temperature through laboratory and live fire experiments. The rigour of this approach has helped Merseyside to sell the benefits of the recuperation vehicle to other fire authorities: 'if ever we had any doubts, they were dispelled by the very striking results of this work. When we talk to other authorities the research is the key to convincing them that it's a good idea.'
- 61 The vehicles' development is organic and MFRS is developing their functions as it uses them. This approach demonstrates a **willingness to push ahead on agendas** which are not yet fully formed. For example, it is unclear whether the role of the fire services extends to water rescue, but as Merseyside's Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mike Hagen explains: 'whilst the debate is going on about legal details, we are rescuing people from the water. The energy that goes into proving something won't work is wasted energy.'

- 62 Many of the best ideas for its new emergency response vehicles have come from firefighters themselves. Problem solving is fundamental to the role of a firefighter, and MFRS tries to ensure this **creativity is applied to all challenges** facing the Authority, rather than just emergency response situations. Mike Hagen believes this change in the culture of the organisation is beginning to bring benefits: 'firefighters are never short of ideas. The difference is that a lot of ideas like these are now actually happening rather than sitting in someone's notepad somewhere.'

What next?

- 63 MFRS has commissioned further research from Liverpool John Moores University, which aims to understand the effects of heat on firefighters' cognitive processes during deployment better. It expects to develop the recuperation vehicle further in response to findings from this work. It also plans to expand the focus of its marine rescue work and is exploring the potential to use marine vessels in flood scenarios. It expects deployment of the vessel to increase in line with use of a new liner landing dock in Liverpool and activities as part of the City of Culture programme in 2008.
- 64 The Service recognises that many good ideas that come from its staff may go unexplored. Its Corporate Leadership Team has appointed an innovations manager who will work with staff from a range of departments to evaluate new ideas and report back on those that merit developing or exploring. It is hoped that this arrangement will realise benefits for the organisation across all its core and support functions.

London Borough of Redbridge

What is the innovation?

- 65 The innovation in Redbridge is a new council website, Redbridge-i, which users can customise and personalise, and which uses features based on Web 2.0 principles to encourage community engagement.

How did it happen?

- 66 The initial idea for Redbridge-i came from the Council's Chief Executive Roger Hampson, in early 2006. He wanted to draw on the best of private sector thinking in terms of the tools used on their websites. He set his officers the task of reviewing the impact of these new technologies on the private sector and their potential uses in public organisations.
- 67 Redbridge felt that a website that incorporated user generated content could give residents a direct say in how services are delivered. By improving communication with the public, the Council would also gain information about the needs of communities in the Borough and increase the savings made through online transactions.
- 68 The Chief Executive also felt that if the Council didn't offer users the opportunity to comment on services, other websites would fill this gap in the market: 'Who owns the local authority? It should be the public. It should be their descriptions of their localities. We should be able to say to them, "this belongs to you, and you don't need to go to another website to make us do something".'
- 69 From an initial set-up meeting in June 2006, the development of the Redbridge-i website took about a year. The work was progressed through a weekly project board meeting involving staff from across the organisation and chaired by the Chief Executive. A live website was built as a proof of concept and this was demonstrated to the Council's Management Board and members in September 2006.
- 70 Following Cabinet approval in October 2006, the technical development of the site began. The proof of concept demonstrated that the Council had the internal expertise to deliver the project in-house. Redbridge felt that this option represented the best value for money, offered them the most flexibility to make ongoing changes to the site and promoted a greater sense of ownership within the Council.

- 71 A light touch approach has been taken to user registration on the website. Users do not need to register to customise the site. They can modify the features that appear on the homepage and their layout on the page. These include internal and external modules, for example 'my councillors' or BBC news and weather.
- 72 Users accessing services through the site can also register to personalise the site based on their postcode. Information such as the location of recycling points, library opening times or transport services, will then relate directly to their locality. They can request emails alerting them to changes to services, for example informing them of waste collection times during holiday periods. Users are provided with recommendations for other pages they might find useful based on their profile and the pages they access.
- 73 Interactive maps allow the public to report the exact location of incidents such as missed bin collections, graffiti, street lighting problems or abandoned vehicles. The site is also integrated with the local land and property gazetteer.
- 74 The Council hosts and moderates a number of discussion forums on the website, on topics such as the use of allotments, forthcoming budget decisions and Redbridge's impact on the environment. There are seven area-based forums where participants can discuss issues relevant to their specific localities. The Mayor also writes a regular blog.
- 75 News of the site, including features in national newspaper and radio media, has generated a lot of interest from other authorities. The Council is keen to make the features of Redbridge-i available to other authorities, and has continued to use open source technologies which allow maximum compatibility.

What has changed?

- 76 There has been a steady increase in online registrations since the website was launched. These are currently running at about 500 new registrations a month and there has been a 10 per cent increase month on month since Redbridge-i launched. In total Redbridge-i has over 10,100 live registered users and 50,000 unique visitors in total. This has largely been achieved through word of mouth. Forty-six per cent of registered users have requested email alerts about changes to services.

- 77 People are starting to use the site for transactions. Payments online doubled in the month after Redbridge-i went live and are currently running at over 3,500 a month, equating to nearly £500,000; around 1,000 transactions a month more than the previous year's figures. Each transaction carried out on Redbridge-i is £1.75 cheaper than a phone transaction and £6.32 cheaper than a face to face transaction. There has been a resultant drop in visits to one-stop-shops and telephone enquiries. However moving people to cheaper channels is not the sole goal of Redbridge-i: it aims to get residents more interested in the Council and its services.
- 78 Redbridge sees the changes to its website as having widened the field of participation and debate. It has engaged groups of people who do not normally contribute to debates about local services, and is receiving more and broader feedback on its performance.
- 79 The online forums are a popular feature of the new website, with over 1,000 forum messages posted in the last quarter of 2007. Over 700 incident reports were made via the website in the same period. The Council has found out about minor issues, such as not being able to get in the building early enough when observing committee meetings, that are a source of irritation for the public and can be rectified quickly. It has now developed community specific forums, for example for the different faith groups in the Borough, to facilitate more discussion. Ultimately it plans to develop a 'pledge bank', where citizens can get together, for example, to clean up a local pond.
- 80 This approach also allows the Council to identify coherent patterns of interaction, providing them with rich data for segmenting the local communities. For example, it can identify school service users and forum contributors on related topics and contact these people if any changes are proposed to education services. This is timely, cost-effective and targeted.

Why did it work?

- 81 Key to the success of the initiative is a **clear vision driven by a wider philosophy** about changing the relationship between citizens and local councils. The notion that technology is making people more aware of their neighbourhoods, and that the local authority was the natural organisation to channel this interest, was key to securing broad political support for the initiative.

- 82 Redbridge-i was **not a heavily planned programme**, and was delivered by a small team with engagement across the Council. The team felt it would be hard to predict consumer demand, and so followed an 'emergent strategy' of adding functions and seeing how well they are used. As Chief Executive Roger Hampson says, 'I am not going to map out all the possible consequences of any new function... we let the resident do that, and where it doesn't work well we discontinue it.'
- 83 The Council's members were involved in the early debates on how to develop the website and their input has shaped it throughout. One concern was that increased public engagement through the forums might diminish the role of councillors as the representatives of their wards. However, **members have been given training on contributing to discussion forums** and many contribute regularly to debates. In this way Redbridge-i is beginning to facilitate increased engagement between councillors and the public.
- 84 Redbridge was keen that the website was not seen as the province of their ICT team. A conference in the spring of 2007 **involved about 500 staff from across the organisation** in developing the website. Workshops explored issues such as using mapping techniques, enhancing transactional capacity, and using the discussion forums. Focus groups were also held with the public to explore the website features they would expect to use.
- 85 An important ingredient for the success of the forums is that relevant officers respond quickly, when appropriate, and members frequently participate in discussions. This means questions are answered effectively, positions clarified and a more productive dialogue can be held. This has required a **culture that is prepared to accept criticism** and engage in debate in real time.

What next?

- 86 Redbridge is continuing to develop the website, particularly its interactive features. The Council is using the technology to start an ongoing dialogue with communities in the Borough on local issues. The Council is also launching The Redbridge Conversation, a large-scale collaboration with the public to clarify local funding priorities. In particular it hopes to widen the consultation beyond the people who will get involved anyway, for example through area committees, and engage in more detailed discussions with particular sections of the community.

Safer Bristol Partnership

What is the innovation?

- 87 The innovation in Bristol is the provision of taxi and bus marshals to help people visiting the city centre on weekend evenings disperse safely. The innovation addresses problems of violent crime and anti-social behaviour in the city.

How did it happen?

- 88 Following an increase in violent crime, Bristol City Council made reducing crime and the fear of crime one of its four strategic priorities for the period 2004-07.
- 89 Helen Flyng was recruited to work with the police to reduce violent crime, with a specific remit to address problems in the city centre (Cabot) ward, which accounted for 18 per cent of violent crime in the city. Police were reporting an increase in alcohol related violence on Friday and Saturday nights, and their resources were increasingly stretched. They were managing the dispersal of customers from over 100 pubs and clubs licensed until the early hours of the morning.
- 90 Avon and Somerset Police Inspector Mike Cox, who held the watching brief for the city centre, worked closely with Helen and was a key member of the Violent Crime Delivery Group (VCDG). This forum for discussing responses to the challenges of violent crime in the city includes representatives from the Council's environment and cultural services departments, the police, and health and fire services. Other local stakeholders, such as justices of the peace, trading standards officers and representatives from the city's licensing department, also attend regularly.
- 91 Helen accompanied the police on a late-night weekend shift, and was able to see for herself what the problems were: 'what struck me immediately was not that the city centre was dangerous, but that it was a difficult place to leave at night'. In particular the central taxi rank was crowded and a flashpoint for anti-social and violent behaviour, making it intimidating for people queuing for taxis. This had also deterred taxi drivers from working weekend nights, exacerbating the problem of getting people home safely.

- 92 The VCDG felt that an increased police presence in the city centre at weekends was not a sustainable solution, and discussed the possibility of introducing alternative resource to support the police in dispersing crowds. They contracted a private sector firm and worked with them to provide trained security personnel as taxi marshals as a pilot. The marshals wear high visibility jackets badged with the Safer Bristol logo, and are responsible for managing the orderly dispersal of revellers at peak times. Their role includes: identifying and assisting priority customers, for example lone women; making sure customers are in a fit state to travel; ensuring passengers dispose of food and drink; and checking that taxis are licensed. If anti-social or violent behaviour does take place, marshals are equipped with radios that provide a direct link to the police and the central CCTV monitoring operation.
- 93 Discussions with transport colleagues on the VCDG also revealed similar issues of anti-social behaviour on the city's night bus service. First Bus, which provides eight night bus routes, was considering withdrawing the service due to low usage and high levels of fare evasion. The partners were keen to extend the taxi marshal concept to bus services, but feared that bus marshals would be vulnerable when the buses left the city centre.
- 94 The Partnership asked its security contractors whether there were any techniques that would help it to maintain the safety of marshals while in transit. They suggested the use of head-mounted cameras as a tool to deter anti-social behaviour and record any violent incidents that did take place. The trial of bus marshals equipped with this technology, as well as radio links to police stations on each route, began in March 2006, and six marshals now work on the night bus routes at weekends.
- 95 Taxi and bus marshals form part of a wider programme of measures designed to manage the city's night-time economy, which also include a street drinking ban, improved street lighting and a new CCTV dome camera linked to a control room manned by the police. The approach is backed by signs making people aware that they are being monitored and of the potential consequences of a criminal record on their lives.

What has changed?

- 96 Taxi and bus marshals are now a mainstream service in Bristol's city centre. Since their introduction there has been a 40 per cent reduction in violent incidents on night buses and in the vicinity of the city centre taxi rank. Survey work undertaken by the Partnership indicates that customers feel safer queuing at the taxi rank, and taxi provision has increased as drivers return to working weekend shifts. Night bus use has risen and all fares are now collected. Anti-social behaviour has been all but eradicated on the bus services.
- 97 More widely, violent crime figures for the city as a whole fell by seven per cent in 2006/07, countering projected rises predicted by Avon and Somerset Police.
- 98 The partners also feel that they are beginning to change the behaviours of people visiting the city centre at weekends. The marshals have no formal powers beyond those of ordinary citizens, and it was felt that the key to their success would be establishing a good relationship with the public. Helen describes the model as closer to crowd management than policing: 'We wanted to move away from the idea of burly security guards to one of meeting and greeting, and the provision of a helpful, supportive service'. The VCDG monitors incidents of anti-social behaviour: some behaviours, such as carrying bottles and glasses, are no longer prevalent.
- 99 Head camera technology is now used by all marshals, who report that it is a particularly effective deterrent to violent incidents. The success of this approach has influenced wider police thinking, and they are now using head cameras when responding to reported incidents of domestic violence.

Why did it work?

- 100 When the problem of alcohol-related violent crime was first identified, partnership in the city still relied on networks of individual contacts in local agencies. The **commitment to partnership working** through the VCDG has helped establish strong links with important local stakeholders, such as the PCT's alcohol harm reduction unit, which ensures a joined-up approach to licensing and festival strategies. It also allows partners to share information to identify performance gaps, discuss and recommend possible interventions and jointly evaluate new initiatives. Critically, the group is well-attended.

- 101 The VCDG reports to the Safer Bristol executive, providing them with a bi-monthly performance update and raising any significant issues. The executive comprises senior officers from local partner organisations, including Bristol City Council's Chief Executive, and is chaired by Peter Hammond, the Council's deputy leader. The VCDG feels it has benefited greatly from **high-level commitment** to its work and has escalated issues to the executive when they have found it difficult to secure working-level cooperation from local partners.
- 102 The Partnership has demonstrated a **willingness to engage with local business interests**, including licensees, the licensed taxi trade and First Bus. In particular new license applications are now discussed at the VCDG, and licensees now engage with the police and other partners much earlier in the license application process. Due to the originality of the marshals' role, the police and the local authority also worked closely with their service provider to define the service principles and operating requirements of the marshals' jobs.

What next?

- 103 The Partnership is extending the marshal concept to other locations in the city, and foot patrol marshals now operate in the Harbourside and Corn Street areas. The foot patrol marshals work closely with venue door staff and include first-responder medics. Early figures for the Harbourside indicate they have reduced recorded crime by around 30 per cent. The VCDG has set up a forum for representatives of entertainment venues in the Harbourside, and many of the venues have now agreed to contribute towards the cost of the initiative. As Helen Flyng explains: 'these posts have become a valued part of the overall service offered in this part of our city and this demonstrates a commitment to customer care from many of the Harbourside licensees.'

Short listed entries

East Riding of Yorkshire

East Riding's CitizenLink booths provide customer access through a face-to-face video link, allowing citizens to access services from within their own communities.

- 104 East Riding of Yorkshire Council was created following local government reorganisation in 1996. It is a sparsely populated rural authority, with 173 towns and parishes covering 1,000 square miles.
- 105 One of the founding principles of the authority was that citizens should have equal access to services, regardless of geographical location. This is a challenge: consultation has shown local service users prefer face-to-face contact with the Council. For example, providing publicly funded legal help and advice to relatively deprived communities has proved problematic. Welfare, debts and benefits assistance are big issues for the authority, yet accessing the services of legal professionals could involve a 40 mile round trip.
- 106 CitizenLink offers the public face-to-face advice and information using video conferencing facilities. In more isolated communities, this technology is accessed from custom built booths located on the street. Users ring for access to the booth and are connected to customer service staff in existing office bases. They can advise on a range of services offered by the Council and its local partners, which are increasingly using CitizenLink to deliver their services. The same technology is also available in all of East Riding's contact centres, mobile libraries and in three hospitals. There are now 33 CitizenLink access points in total.
- 107 The idea for CitizenLink came from East Riding's Head of Customer Services, and has been championed by the Council's deputy leader, who holds the cross-cutting corporate strategy portfolio. Funding came from a variety of sources including the Legal Services Commission, the Local Government Online fund and Yorkshire Forward – which contributed £450,000.

108 CitizenLink is part of a wider customer access strategy which aims to tackle rural isolation and social exclusion while delivering efficiently. Customer service centres in larger communities, such as the Peturia Centre in Brough, provide a community hub for accessing services. Some forty agencies are represented at the Peturia Centre and 25 different community groups meet there. Savings of over £600,000 have been made through reduced staff costs and asset rationalisation.

Kent County Council

Kent's Gateways are one stop shops in retail centres offering a range of services from the council and local and national partners.

- 109** Kent's Gateways were the idea of Kent County Council's Chief Executive Peter Gilroy. He felt that service users often do not know, and shouldn't need to know, which local agency deals with which service. The aim of the Gateways is to provide a single 'front-end' for local service providers in high streets and shopping centres.
- 110** The first Gateway, in Ashford, opened in 2005. There is now a further Gateway in Margate with centres in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells opening later in 2008. They offer services from the county council, district councils, central government agencies such as the Department of Work and Pensions, PCTs and the voluntary sector. Over 30 agencies have a presence at the Ashford Gateway, some permanently and others through drop-in or surgery facilities. Staff are multi-agency trained and can provide information on the full range of local services.
- 111** Gateways aim to be much more than the co-location of different agencies. Each centre has been developed with local partners and the services on offer vary depending on local customer needs. In many cases service delivery processes have been re-engineered to make them appropriate to the new front office model.
- 112** Gateways are open-plan. Visitors are met and greeted informally and after a brief discussion, are directed to the services they need. Advice and information is provided through e-enabled self-help, assistance on more complex technical issues and referrals to other services if necessary. In this way Gateway aims to provide access to services for people 'who wouldn't normally know where to start', and to offer access to services that they may not already be aware of. Feedback from users indicates that a further strength of the concept is that services are offered without stigmatising users: it is a shop like any other on the high street.

- 113** Strong retail marketing is central to the concept, with services delivered by a range of agencies subsumed within the unique Gateway brand. Kent felt that the public need to be able to recognise the name, logo and style of the Gateways wherever they come across them. Persuading partners to adopt the neutral branding has been a challenge, but this has been achieved by ensuring parity in the way in which partner agencies are acknowledged within the brand.
- 114** In its first year Ashford's Gateway attracted 35,000 visitors, and services including the payment kiosk, housing advice and occupational therapy have all experienced growth. The model also offers the potential for efficiency savings. As each Gateway is introduced the number of public sector properties operated by local agencies will be reduced, further helping to direct users to the most efficient access channels.

Salford City Council

Salford's approach to customer records management allows its central contact centre to offer joined-up services to customers.

- 115** In 2003, Salford was rated weak in its CPA, which highlighted a lack of customer focus across the organisation. Salford made customer engagement one of its three overarching priorities and its leader instructed a review of front line services.
- 116** Salford has now reconfigured its customer access channels based on the principle of 'no wrong door': users contacting any local agency should receive consistent messages and a consistent standard of service, irrespective of the nature of their enquiry.
- 117** In order to put this pledge into practice, Salford has integrated its service-specific contact centres into a central contact centre. It offers 35 services provided by the Council and local partners, including PCTs, fire and police services and a housing arm's length management organisation. It uses a centralised customer records management (CRM) system, based on single customer records. These changes were accompanied by a programme of professional training for existing and new staff, many of whom work flexibly and from home, allowing them to answer queries across 'clusters' of service specialisms.

- 118** The strength of this approach has been the facility to alert callers to other council and partner services, and to refer them where required. On-screen pop-ups alert operators to other services that match the customer's profile. For example, a housing benefit enquiry from an older person will alert the operator if they are also entitled to pension credits, free smoke alarms, winter fuel payments or flu jabs. Since April 2006, operators have made 3,000 referrals for smoke alarms to be fitted and the take-up of flu jabs in Salford's elderly population has risen from 40 to 70 per cent.
- 119** The project has been driven by commitment from Salford's leadership. Responsibility for customer service lies with Salford's lead member for Service Improvement and the Think Customer Programme, who is briefed fortnightly by officers. Members offer a constant scrutiny of progress, and will challenge officers and partners where they identify a lack of buy-in.
- 120** The contact centre offers extended hours, and receives 900,000 calls annually. Costs per transaction have been reduced to levels significantly lower than average for the public sector. Salford's CRM system has now become a tool for delivering other council priorities. For example it supports the current council pledge to tackle worklessness, with a single phone line for employment, skills and training services offered by the Council and local and national partners.

South Somerset District Council

South Somerset piloted a biometric identification scheme, where users of late night pubs and clubs were registered to allow access based on fingerprints.

- 121** In 2005, South Somerset District Council became increasingly concerned about the negative effects of anti-social behaviour and under-age drinking in Yeovil. A particularly high number of alcohol sales in the area are to under 18s: about 50 per cent compared to 15-20 per cent nationally.
- 122** Having been alerted to the potential uses of finger-print scanning by a newspaper article, South Somerset undertook further research on systems, costs and viability. This included visiting other parts of the country where similar technology had been introduced and inviting technology providers to demonstrate fingerprint scanning systems.

- 123** Six licensed premises were involved in the pilot, which began in April 2006. In order to register for the scheme, customers' fingerprints are scanned using a laptop with a small fingerprint scanner and camera. Together with the requisite identification proving their age this information forms a profile of the individual that can be read when they subsequently enter licensed premises. This provides licensed premises with assurance that customers are over 18 and frees customers from carrying identification. Registered information is networked through a central server, so that individuals who commit an offence in one establishment are automatically barred from others.
- 124** The project was funded by the Home Office and the local Crime and Disorder Partnership – the Mendip and South Somerset Community Safety Action Panel. Local agencies, including South Somerset District Council and Avon and Somerset Constabulary established a partnership to implement the project.
- 125** Clearly, there were serious issues to be considered before taking the project forward, not least data protection and human rights concerns. The partnership worked with young people, their parents and licensees to explain the reasons for the changes.
- 126** The outcomes from the initial pilot include a fall in acts of violence in the premises by 36 per cent when compared with the same period the previous year. This compares to a general increase across the district of 3 per cent. There is no evidence to suggest there has been a displacement of violent crime. South Somerset District Council has plans to extend the network across the district and to explore the potential of new biometric palm recognition technology.

Telford and Wrekin Council

Telford's STARS supported housing scheme for homeless 16-18 year olds provides training in life skills to help them obtain employment and permanent accommodation.

- 127** In 2007, Telford undertook a review of their homelessness data. While overall homelessness had decreased, 50 per cent of new cases were 16-18 year olds who had been excluded by family and friends. Younger people often have difficulty obtaining tenancies, and are placed in temporary accommodation.

- 128** The Telford and Wrekin Young Persons Scheme, delivered by the Council's Housing Needs Business Unit, targets this group. The Supported Tenancies and Resettlement Service (STARS) facility is located in a refurbished former nursing home, Ivylands, which provides self-contained rooms for seven homeless young people, including one room equipped for disabled users. The building is leased by the Council and jointly managed with the YMCA.
- 129** The facility also houses an education room where residents undertake a local tenancy accreditation scheme. Residents work through a programme of activities where they learn and demonstrate skills, such as healthy eating, sexual health, budgeting, and exercise and leisure, to a point where landlords will guarantee their tenancies. The programme has been developed with the help of local social landlords and the young people themselves, and each resident has an individual development plan. Many modules are delivered by the local college and the scheme offers support in accessing education, training and employment.
- 130** The project builds on established and productive partnership working. A range of partners have been involved in the project, including voluntary organisations, health agencies, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. In particular, the Council was able to harness the expertise and experience of the YMCA, which runs 24 other homeless units in the area.
- 131** Support from the Council's housing portfolio holder and the local ward member was also important, particularly in dispelling some of the fears of local people about the opening of the STARS facility. The role of the young person's resettlement officer was also important in terms of engaging young homeless people in the development of the facility and the accreditation training course.
- 132** STARS is part of Telford and Wrekin's wider approach to addressing housing issues for the 16-18 age group. It also facilitates flat-share accommodation and is considering 'crash pad' facilities where young people can stay while the Council undertakes mediation with their parents. The Council has reduced the numbers of people in temporary accommodation from 335 during 2005-2006 to 275 in 2006-2007, and projected figures indicate a further reduction to 225 in 2007-2008.

Wiltshire County Council

Wiltshire's disabled parking service has been redesigned using the 'lean' approach. This has led to reduced assessment times and efficiency savings.

- 133** In February 2007, following the appointment of a new Director of Resources, Wiltshire decided to use its disabled parking (blue badge) service as a pilot for redesigning services using the 'lean' approach. This is a process management technique that involves mapping current service delivery processes, identifying any waste of resources, and reconfiguring the service accordingly. The aim was to improve the blue badge service for users without raising costs to the Council.
- 134** The investigatory stage of the approach revealed some valuable insights. Wiltshire's existing application process was centred on reducing fraud, despite there being relatively few cases of this. Moreover, revised government guidance meant that it was no longer necessary to ask GPs to confirm that applicants are disabled. Wiltshire also consulted users of the service who indicated a preference for telephone applications.
- 135** The council re-defined the purpose of the service as 'providing a Blue Badge to those who are entitled, or to say no, as quickly as possible'. They now encourage users to make applications using a new direct phone number or redesigned application forms. Staff have been trained to make assessments of need and are often able to make an immediate judgement on eligibility. Support on decision making and appeals is provided through the Council's Occupational Therapy service, with referrals to a GP made only when necessary.
- 136** Critical to the redesign was the support of an expert in the lean technique, who worked at a local district council. Once changes to the service were agreed the risks to successful delivery were identified and actively managed. In particular the team trialled changes to the application forms with small groups of users before implementing them more widely.
- 137** The main benefit for users of the blue badge service is the dramatic reduction in turnaround times for applications. There has been a reduction in the average time taken to deal with a new application from 20 days, with some taking as long as 55, to 1.1 days. Removing automatic referral to doctors from the process will save the local PCT £56,000 per year and reduce Wiltshire's internal costs by £120,000. There are currently the same proportion of refusals, 3 per cent, under the new system as the previous one.

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