

## 2.4 Key Findings - Gateway Strategic Outcomes

- 2.4.1 Regional NOMS leadership has enabled engagement from regionally and nationally based organisations who can provide support for this work across the regions and sub-regions. Regional relationships between SWAG and HMPS have been critical
- 2.4.2 Gateways have contributed to the re-thinking of area strategies for accommodating offenders through advocating for this client group and being represented at the strategic table.
- 2.4.3 There is qualitative support for cost savings resulting from the co-ordination of activity through the Gateway which has resulted in replacing services previously undertaken by other key agencies.
- 2.4.4 Gateways have been instrumental in promoting the view that offenders are a group with needs in their own right. Whilst these needs may well overlap with other priority groups (e.g. drug and alcohol misuse, mental health, homelessness) this should not obscure the issues specific to offending which need to be addressed within homelessness services.
- 2.4.5 Gateways have collected a wealth of information around offender profiles and needs in relation to accommodation and 'what works'. Their data systems provide a unique source to inform and support future commissioning priorities and service delivery.

## 2.5 Key Findings - Applying the Lessons

- 2.5.1 There is significant support in the literature for the links between accommodation and reducing re-offending and this has also been a strong theme emerging from the stakeholder research. Thus the work of the Gateways is seen as having far-reaching outcomes and consequences for individuals and communities which would benefit all areas dealing with offender homelessness.
- 2.5.2 A one size fits all approach to this complex issue is neither appropriate nor feasible. It is neither possible nor desirable to promote a single model which can be replicated across the country, instead three successful approaches can be drawn upon. Flexible, local responsiveness is the key dynamic of change.
- 2.5.3 Organisational leadership of a Gateway does not appear to be better located in any one particular agency - probation, voluntary sector, city council, prison or independent provider. There are advantages and disadvantages to each location. Inter-agency working is necessarily complex and must build on pre-existing networks.
- 2.5.4 A co-ordinated approach to data management is an absolutely necessary building block for a successful project. Investing in a co-ordinated provision for meeting the housing needs of offenders will demand an investment of resources. Data Management systems and collection of baseline data for comparative purposes have to be put in place to make reliable judgments of the efficacy of any project.
- 2.5.5 Critical Success Factors have been identified which can be applied in any area of the country.



This independent evaluation was funded by the Ministry of Justice



SARPENS YOUR THINKING

## 3 Key Recommendations

### For the Gateways,

**Key Recommendation 1:** Each Gateway needs to ensure that strategic and operational management is clearly delineated and co-ordinated and sufficient time is dedicated to each aspect of this role, whether by allocating to separate staff or by clear demarcation of job responsibility.

**Key Recommendation 2:** Through the provision of a one-stop shop the Gateways have gained knowledge to support streamlining of provision and increased awareness of gaps and shortfalls. All Gateways need to identify formal and systematic mechanisms to ensure that this knowledge is disseminated to relevant agencies and acted upon to achieve best practice.

**Key Recommendation 3:** Gateways must prioritise the collection of useable data, such as 3 month and 6 month data, to demonstrate the sustainability of accommodation for offenders

**Key Recommendation 4:** Gateways must establish processes for ensuring the offender voice is captured to inform best practice. This might include: exit interviews, feedback questionnaires and service user representation.

**Key Recommendation 5:** Gateways should collect statistical data on the range of interventions and activities to demonstrate more robustly the range of activities and their impact on other agencies

**Key Recommendation 6:** Gateways should instigate formal processes of continuing reflection on the operation of their models and their application to changing local demands. This should include the capture and response to what does not work, as well as what does.

**Key Recommendation 7:** Gateways should work with referrers to collect more consistent data on AURs to enable outcomes on this key group to be tracked

**Key Recommendation 8:** Gateways should monitor closely and explore their falling referral and accommodation rates to ensure that these are as a result of more effective prioritisation rather than any fall in levels of engagement by referrers or providers

**Key Recommendation 9:** Gateways should capture data on numbers and outcomes of End of Custody Licence (ECL)<sup>2</sup> clients and liaise with other agencies to inform and influence the policy and operational agenda

### For agencies working with the Gateways

**Key Recommendation 10:** Referrers should assist the Gateways in ensuring that information on referrals is complete, accurate and consistent to enable more comprehensive conclusions to be drawn from data.

**Key Recommendation 11:** Effective inter-agency working depends on an approach which is built on openness, transparency and willingness to share and establish processes, protocols and practices. Agencies should ensure that they are willing to change to meet identified need.

**Key Recommendation 12:** Referral agencies could consider small-scale evaluations of the impact of the Gateways on their own work to provide additional evidence of the impact of the service on their own resources.

### For Policy-makers

**Key Recommendation 13:** NOMS needs to consider the negative impact of ECL on Gateways ability to achieve sustainable accommodation outcomes for prisoners

**Key Recommendation 14:** NOMS, prisons and Probation Areas should draw on the Gateway model and lessons of the SWAG pilot in order to: better enable offenders to both access and sustain different types of accommodation; develop more effective strategies to engage with local accommodation providers (which are often remote from the areas in which offenders are placed in custody); and proactively use the lessons from service delivery to inform future strategy.

<sup>2</sup>ECL introduced a presumption in favour of release from custody on licence for those prisoners serving between 4 weeks and 4 years for the final 18 days of their sentence, subject to meeting strict eligibility criteria and providing a release address.

# CHANGING THE DYNAMIC:

## An Evaluation of the South West Accommodation Gateway (SWAG)

July 2008

### Executive Summary



Professor Paul Senior and Linda Meadows

with

Dr Hayden Bird, Joanna Davidson, Simon Feasey,  
Valerie Monti-Holland, Caroline O'Keeffe, Anne Robinson, Jaime Waters

Hallam Centre for Community Justice Sheffield Hallam University

# Executive Summary

## 1 Context

- 1.1 The South-West Accommodation Gateway (SWAG) was a two-year project, funded by the Ministry of Justice until March 2008 with an annual budget of approximately £700k per annum. Managed by NOMS South West, its aim was to reduce re-offending and crime by preventing and reducing the homelessness of offenders in the community and on release from custody.
- 1.2 NOMS SW commissioned Gateways in three areas in the South West. The first two Gateways opened in Plymouth and Dorset in September 2006, and the third, in Bristol in February 2007. Delivery is led by the local probation areas in Plymouth (Devon and Cornwall Probation Area) and Dorset (Dorset Probation Area), and by Bristol City Council in Bristol. However, in both Plymouth and Bristol, a local voluntary sector agency is a critical delivery partner.
- 1.3 The underlying principles governing the methodology of the Evaluation are adapted from action research. The Evaluation Team have placed great importance on the needs of stakeholders - Partnership Board members, Gateway staff, stakeholders from agencies working with the projects, referrers, providers and offenders - and action research methods provide a continual linking of research with practice.
- 1.4 The process of working alongside stakeholders and in particular the staff of the SWAG has had a major impact on the recommendations and outcomes presented. Indeed the Evaluators have adopted a variety of roles during this project including those of consultant, advisors, facilitators and researchers. We have seen the projects respond and adapt their processes and practices in the light of emerging findings.
- 1.5 The findings presented in this report represent some fascinating and insightful conclusions on the experience of three Gateways operating in different geographical locations, with a range of agencies, differentially related to each other through local structural arrangements, a range of referrers and providers, unique sets of offender profiles and variable amount and quality of housing provision and resources to meet need.
- 1.6 This report will not recommend a single model which can be replicated across the country. Instead trends have been observed and replicated across models charting a robust set of critical success factors which will enable other areas to develop the concept to fit its own local circumstances.
- 1.7 The operational staff of all the Gateways have worked tirelessly to produce workable and replicable practices which has enabled us to draw conclusions about building joined-up services in any locality.
- 1.8 The three Gateways are examined to identify their objectives, performance, strengths and challenges and the profile of referrals and their accommodation outcomes. The evaluation uses qualitative data gathered from the stakeholder interviews, staff workshops, offender interviews and workshops, and quantitative data extracted from the Gateways' monitoring systems. It also draws on documentary analysis of key documents including Service Level Agreements, Performance Management and KPI Reports, Gateway case studies, prioritisation and referral protocols and guidance and partnership board documents.

## 2.1 Key Findings - Overview

2.1.1 Four strands can be identified as key to the work of the Gateways. Key findings are summarised under these themes which are:

- operational work in the placing of offenders in sustainable accommodation and increasing number of offender accessible bed spaces
- developing partnership and inter-agency work
- informing local and regional strategy/commissioning using Gateway data and learning
- drawing learning from the Gateways to support national roll out

## 2.2 Key Findings - Gateway Operational Practices

- 2.2.1 Each Gateway has established a model of working which responds appropriately and dynamically to local circumstances, achieves local engagement by all significant agencies, builds effectively on prior arrangements and improves the access to appropriate housing for its target group.
- 2.2.2 Within each Model a centralised, one-stop shop for housing needs for offenders, particularly for those with the greatest vulnerability to re-offending, has been created as a vehicle for co-ordinated action which will assist offenders in desisting from future criminal activity
- 2.2.3 Each Gateway has received and managed a high number of referrals, with complex criminogenic histories and often at the highest level of risk.
- 2.2.4 In addition to direct impact on availability of accommodation for offenders, the Gateways' capacity to influence availability of housing for offenders was found to be linked to more effective matching to vacancies and better access to information on the range of provision.
- 2.2.5 Of those referrals needing accommodation more than one in three has been accommodated. If those offenders the Gateways were unable to assist are excluded this rises to an impressive 47 % almost **one in two of all referrals**<sup>1</sup>
- 2.2.6 Of those accommodated, 91% were in settled accommodation
- 2.2.7 Whilst data remains incomplete across the Gateways for sustaining accommodation over 3 and 6 months, data extracted from one Gateway shows a 90 % retention rate over 3 months, a very stable picture of sustained accommodation.
- 2.2.8 All Gateways have been able to respond to the needs of female offenders having referrals around 9% of the total and achieving similarly strong levels of engagement with BME referrals.
- 2.2.9 Each Gateway has identifiable strengths showing the diversity of approaches possible in achieving similar goals.
  - The Dorset Gateway efficiently processes high numbers of referrals, with sound assessment systems and good provider links. It has worked effectively with probation who provide the necessary support role. At the same time, it has effectively engaged all key agencies in its work including prisons, Supporting People and providers.

- The Plymouth Gateway has adopted a holistic casework approach with the delivery arm provided by a key, local voluntary sector agency. It has established effective relationships with Supporting People, has produced high levels of sustained accommodation through providing a range of support to their clients throughout the process and established a move-on model of ensuring sustainability of accommodation outcomes.
- The Bristol Gateway delivered through the City Council was established later than the other two Gateway projects. It has offered pre-placement support and assessment to secure sustainable accommodation. It has further developed an important role in co-ordinating agencies to provide support beyond the placement of offenders. It has had a focus on women and BME offenders and has had a worker working in the local prisons to help support effective resettlement.

2.2.10 Offender feedback on their experiences with the Gateways was consistently positive appreciating the responsiveness and flexibility of the Gateway staff which often contrasted with their previous experiences of the formal systems.

2.2.11 In summary, Gateways provide a more joined up and streamlined service than was previously available, have increased access to bed spaces and provided an effective one-stop shop.

## 2.3 Key Findings - Inter-agency Outcomes

- 2.3.1 All Gateways have been effective in advocating for their client group with key local agencies. This has produced a positive engagement from all key agencies, which is reflected in practical financial support for the continuation of all the Gateways during 2008/09. Alongside local funding streams, NOMS has committed a total of £250k across the three Gateways during 2008/09, to provide for a period of transition into local budgets.
- 2.3.2 The role of the Gateway Partnership Boards proved important in communicating and embedding the Gateways' operations, in providing cohesive partnership working and cross forum interaction. The overall consensus of the interview data was that the Partnership Boards functioned well and fulfilled their remit effectively.
- 2.3.3 A key area of impact of the Gateways has been in their engagement with partners, joining up services and working across agencies.
- 2.3.4 Many providers identified the increase in trust which the Gateways had brought and felt that this underpinned good and improving relationships amongst them all.
- 2.3.5 Gateways have worked well with local providers including private landlords and have been able to change priorities and achieve access to more bed spaces for offenders than were previously available. This role has also helped in the streamlining of services. This is evidenced in experiences of referrers, providers and offenders. The Gateway has created more effective pathways for offenders.
- 2.3.6 Staff have been effective in advocating for offenders at a variety of groups, panels and forums to help create a more positive engagement with the needs of this difficult group. It is clear that all of the Gateways have had a positive impact on the work of other agencies through their more targeted and offender-focused provision.
- 2.3.7 The piloting of a Common Referral Form has now produced an agreed document which can be replicated across the country which will particularly assist those agencies who might typically refer beyond one particular local area e.g. the prison estate.

<sup>1</sup>Cases thus include referrals which the Gateway may currently be working on. An outcome, achieved after the 'accommodation required by date' for that case is therefore not recorded. Although it is acknowledged that this will, in some cases, understate the accommodation outcomes they are included to ensure that we are measuring those referrals who were accommodated at the point at which accommodation was required.