

Case Study

Business Transformation at Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils

At a time when councils across the country are responding to funding reductions by cutting their own frontline services, two authorities in Worcestershire are changing the way that they work to put the customer first. Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils led the way nationally six years ago when they shared services, realising savings of hundreds of thousands of pounds. Now, through a business transformation programme, they are continuing to save money, and customers are reaping the benefits.

Summary

Chief Executive Kevin Dicks said: “Given my position this is probably not a popular statement but unfortunately local government is synonymous with red tape and bureaucracy. When we embarked on this journey and looked at our processes, I was quite amazed at how much time and money was spent handing out forms and adhering to guidelines and Key Performance Indicators, which didn’t reflect the customers’ needs. Officers were doing nothing wrong – local government had to change, that’s all. Through our housing locality teams we have a better understanding about the challenges our tenants are experiencing which may be why they are late with their rent.”

Rent arrears and property allocation trials

Looking at rent arrears was one of the first trials that were carried out in Winyates, one of Redditch’s most deprived areas. Sending out letter after letter was often followed by eviction. By spending time with each customer however and seeing what their needs were, the right help and support was given, often with partner agency involvement, enabling customers to carry on and manage their lives. The trial has been extended across communities and now includes how the Council allocates properties.

Locality Teams and Housing Options are working in a more cohesive way to ensure that allocation of properties is done with both the customers’ and the wider community’s needs in mind. The main issue is that there are just not enough properties to meet the very high demand. It may be the case that the Council has a duty to house a family that has complex needs. Therefore the Council considers where such families would be best housed by taking into account other possible households nearby that also may have complex needs.

Kevin added: “The Locality Teams, through our transformation programme have a better understanding of the communities they are working in and gaining more insight than we have ever done before about the profile of our tenants.” It is also about building pride of place too, because local environmental quality matters to our residents.

How the trials began

Initially a team of cleansing, refuse and landscape officers and frontline operatives came together to develop a new way of working. To start with, they focussed their energy on a particular area to learn how a team could work more holistically in what was termed a ‘place’. This was subsequently expanded to a number of other area trials across the district and borough, which reflected the differing make-up of the two council areas.

In true transformational form the data was collected, based on customer experience, and then different ways of working were trialled until a system emerged that worked. The teams took the time to understand the needs of the area, rather than sticking to rigid historic schedules that dictated when litter bins were emptied even if they were not needed, or carrying out grass cutting and litter picking operations that were not co-ordinated, which often led to a poor quality outcome for local residents. The trial teams developed ways of working that suited their particular ‘place’.

How the approach has developed

A full service review has now been undertaken across the whole of Environmental Services and Environmental Enforcement, and this new way of working was rolled out across the two council areas from 1 June 2015. This new way of working is set to save Bromsgrove District Council £150,000 and Redditch Borough Council £190,000 on an ongoing basis.

Issues that emerged and how they were resolved

It has not all been plain sailing though. The councils had some initial teething problems. Grass for example was longer than usual in some areas than it should have been, and other maintenance work was missed while the new teams settled into their new areas and roles, and the councils started to work out what input each area needed. This did cause unrest and some residents took to social media and the press but the councils were upfront, honest and explained what was going on and that residents would benefit from this joined up service in the end, and the good news is that things are now back on track.

Conclusion

Kevin said: “It’s not just about the money of course and there it has been a lot work to change not only my mindset but that of Members, officers and indeed our customers. But when you see the difference you can make to people’s lives and changes to their story, that’s all the evidence and convincing you need! It’s about working together differently with the customer at the heart of everything we do.”

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