

## **Introduction**

Thank you, Debbie, for your warm welcome, and my thanks also to you and your colleagues for asking me to speak at today's conference.

Good morning, colleagues, I am delighted to be here today, and to have the opportunity to share with you some of the key learning and experiences of the London Borough of Bromley's Children's Transformation Programme.

My hope today is that everyone in this room, and those who have been able to join virtually, are able to take away, and even implement at least one thing from the experiences and lessons of our Transformation Programme, and give you all the courage and inspiration to make a success of your own Programmes, whether you are years in delivery, or are in the development stages of launching your own Programmes.

## **Context setting**

We live in a time of unprecedented change, where the only constant is the need to adapt and innovate. And nowhere is this more evident than in our councils, where the services we provide have the power to shape the lives of millions.

The world around us is evolving. Demands on our council services are increasing, amplified by shifting demographics, technological advancements, and changing societal expectations. To remain relevant, we must not only adapt, but lead the change.

In today's rapidly changing world, our citizens expect more from their local councils than ever before. They demand services that are accessible, responsive, and tailored to their individual needs. This requires us to move away from one-size-fits-all solutions and towards a more personalized approach that considers the unique circumstances and preferences of everyone.

So, colleagues, service changes are not merely about making adjustments; they are about embracing innovation, enhancing efficiency, and ultimately, improving the lives of our citizens. It's about recognizing that the way we've always done things may not be the best way anymore and having the courage to explore new approaches that better serve the needs of our communities.

In an era of fiscal uncertainty and competing priorities, the pressure to do more with less has never been greater. However, I firmly believe that the path to achieving budget savings lies not in simply slashing expenditures or scaling back services, but rather in embracing innovation, efficiency, and strategic transformation.

The question for us is how to transform our council services in ways that not only deliver budget savings but also enhance the quality of life for our citizens and strengthen the fabric of our communities. This was a question I had to address when I first joined Bromley as the newly appointed statutory Director of Children's services and deputy chief

executive in 2017 - to turnaround a failing – inadequate children services with an overspend of £5m.

## **Transformation**

Transformation begins with a fundamental shift in mindset. It's about moving away from siloed approaches and bureaucratic red tape towards a culture of collaboration, agility, and citizen-centricity. Our focus must be on understanding the needs of our communities and empowering them to actively participate in the decision-making process.

But transformation is not just about change for change's sake. It's about seizing opportunities, embracing challenges, and charting a course towards a brighter tomorrow.

Transformation is about daring to dream big and having the courage to turn those dreams into reality. Transformation is not just about embracing new tools; it's about rethinking entire systems. It's about breaking down barriers between departments, forging partnerships with the private sector and non-profit organizations, and leveraging the collective wisdom of our communities.

Successful transformation requires a deep understanding of the needs and aspirations of our communities. We must listen attentively, engage proactively, and co-create solutions together with those we serve. By placing citizens at the center of our efforts, we can ensure that our services are relevant, responsive, and reflective of the diverse needs of our population.

## **So, what did we do in Bromley?**

**In Bromley**, we embarked on children`s services transformation programme in January 2017 based on **7 key principles** (which is applicable to service transformation or whole council transformation)

**Identify your goals.** At the heart of our transformation programme in Bromley lies the recognition that we can no longer afford to be complacent. Following an inadequate Ofsted Inspection, the goal was simply to keep children safe and to achieve a good rating within 2 years and an outstanding rating within 5 years.

Our transformation programme began with a commitment to putting children first. Our children are not just recipients of services – they are active participants in the life of our communities.

So, be clear about your approach and scope of any transformation before you start.

Do you want to use a particular methodology to guide the transformation? ...or will your transformation be required to deliver against metric's?

Are you wishing to use a particular academic approach/value base to measure the impact of the project?

Be clear about what you want it to deliver.

Ensure you have the mandate of elected members – in particular, your cabinet and the Leader of the Council – In Bromley, the Leader of the Council championed the transformation agenda and provided outstanding support to Officers during the transformation Programme.

A recognition that transformation is not just a necessity but an opportunity. By reimagining the way, we deliver services and optimizing processes we can achieve significant cost savings while simultaneously improving outcomes for our children.

Transformation demands a shift towards a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. We must be willing to challenge the status quo, experiment with new ideas, when identifying our transformation goals. We also need to embrace a mindset of innovation as this will enable us to identify opportunities for improvement, optimize processes, and deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

**What does the future look like?** – A future where children are safe, where statutory partners work together, a future where we listen to the wishes and concerns of children and where stakeholders work together, and silos broken. A future where we listen to the needs of children, involving them in decision making and empowering them to shape their own destinies.

In Bromley, we defined the expected outcomes of the transformation programme – so, colleagues, be bold by defining what you hope to achieve from the transformation programme – be mindful, but not be disappointed that some colleagues might not believe you or that the defined outcome is possible.....and yes, this happened in Bromley – how can the worst social care department hope to be good within 2 years?

**What actions do you need to take?** – A detailed programme of improvements, with clarity of targets broken down into achievable steps. In Bromley, “our roadmap to outstanding” – document sets out the required steps, actions, and targets as well as the fundamental changes to be made in service provision. It defines the challenges as well as the required outcomes. It sets out the key priorities and timescales.

In formulating our action plan, we must also recognize the importance of fiscal responsibility. Transformation does not necessarily mean pouring endless resources into new initiatives. Instead, it requires strategic investments, prioritization of projects based on their impact, and a relentless pursuit of efficiency.

But service changes are not just about adopting new technologies; they are also about rethinking our organizational structures, processes, and priorities. This may involve consolidating services, reassigning resources, or even fundamentally reimagining the way we deliver certain services altogether.

As such colleagues, In Bromley, our transformation programme addressed service improvements, structural changes, organizational delivery as well as practice related issues.

**What is your project governance approach?** – As articulated in our “roadmap to outstanding document”, an improvement board was set up with 5 practice groups focusing on strategic changes – including a group of frontline staff, stakeholders, and children

Ensure you have a project lead with sufficient dedicated time to undertake key tasks. Use performance data to demonstrate progress and to show impact.

Ensure you have the right internal and external colleagues on your board who can make decisions and commit resources on behalf of the respective organizations. Colleagues who are signed up and committed to the transformation objectives and outcomes.

So, In Bromley, we started our meetings reflecting on our agreed stated outcomes and objectives and in particular, the future that we want for our children in Bromley – this is about our values and beliefs. It is about ensuring our governance or project board remembering what we are trying to achieve.

**How do you keep everyone motivated?** – reminder of why we are doing what we are doing, our values, principles, and ethos – effective communications, engagement and reminding everyone of our goals and the future.

It requires a fundamental shift in mindset. It means moving away from top-down approaches and bureaucratic inefficiency towards a culture of collaboration, transparency, and accountability. It means breaking down silos, fostering partnerships, and harnessing the collective intelligence of our workforce.

In Bromley, we established a social work practice advisory board advising senior managers about transformation, provided regular drop-in sessions and activated key transformation messages through internal communications.

To keep everyone motivated, do identify quick wins to win hearts and minds.

**How do you manage challenges on the way?** –

Of course, transformation is not without its challenges. There will be obstacles along the way – resistance to change, budget constraints, and unforeseen hurdles. But let us not be deterred by the magnitude of the task ahead. Instead, let us be inspired by the opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

In Bromley, we created a safe and reflective space for agencies to share concerns but also provide solutions. An environment that was empowering and not disempowering.

**How will you celebrate success?** – A bold statement that sets out what you would do upon achieving the objectives of the programme – In Bromley, I promised a big party for staff, a celebratory event for our children and stakeholders –

And colleagues, we **celebrated** our first milestone in 2018 when Bromley moved from inadequate to good with outstanding features (fastest improved children`s services – took

18 months) and then celebrated in 2023 when Bromley moved from good to outstanding in all Ofsted judgment areas - the third in the country.

So, colleagues, successful transformation requires strong leadership, effective governance, and a collaborative approach. It involves working together across departments, sectors to break down silos, leverage synergies, and maximize our collective impact. By fostering partnerships, sharing best practices, and learning from one another, we can accelerate our progress towards achieving our shared vision.

**And, yes, we managed down the £5m overspend as part of the transformation programme.** Achieving budget savings required a relentless focus on performance management and accountability. By setting clear targets, measuring outcomes, and regularly evaluating our progress, we identified areas for improvement, eliminated waste, and optimized resource allocation. This data-driven approach enabled us to achieve immediate cost savings but also empowered us to make smarter, more informed decisions in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, as we embark on this transformational journey together, let us pledge to be bold, to be visionary, and to be unwavering in our commitment to building a better future for all. Let us seize this moment as an opportunity to unleash our collective potential and to create a world where our councils are not just institutions, but beacons of hope and progress.

As we embark on this transformative journey together, let us do so with courage, conviction, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

Let us seize this moment as an opportunity to redefine the role of our councils, to elevate the quality of our services, and to create a future that is brighter, more inclusive, and more equitable for all.

Thank You for Listening – enjoy today`s conference