



Improvement

Customer led transformation programme

Case study – Central Bedfordshire Council

Business engagement

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The Customer Led Transformation Programme

Central Bedfordshire's work has been funded under the Customer Led Transformation programme. The fund aims to embed the use of Customer Insight and Social Media tools and techniques as strategic management capabilities across the public sector family in order to support Place-Based working.

The Customer Led Transformation programme is overseen by the Local Government Delivery Council (supported by Local Government Association).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between local authorities and their partners focused on using customer insight and social media tools and techniques to improve service outcomes. These approaches offer public services bodies the opportunity to engage customers and gather insight into their preferences and needs, and thereby provide the evidence and intelligence needed to redesign services to be more targeted, effective and efficient.

About Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire is a Unitary Authority in the East of England, to the north of London. The area is mixed: to the North a large part of the area is rural with a number of small towns and villages, while in the South there are larger much more urban areas such as Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable.

Central Bedfordshire has a population of just over 250,000 people, over half of whom live in the rural areas. But the area is changing and has one of the most rapidly growing populations in the country.

Central Bedfordshire has good north to south road links including the M1 in the west and the A1 in the east. Other transport links include good regional and national rail lines and the nearby airport at Luton.

People who live in the area tend to be white, British and younger when compared with other parts of the country. But this is likely to change over the next fifteen to twenty years with a higher proportion of older people living in the area.

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) was created from the merger of Bedfordshire County Council, Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire in April 2009.



Background

Central Bedfordshire is strategically located on the northern fringe of London and connecting via road, rail and air to the gateways to Europe and beyond. Over the last two decades, its location plus its attractive environment has led to strong levels of population growth within the area.

However the rate of job creation over this period has not matched the population expansion leading to increasing numbers of residents not being able to work and live locally. With 26,000 new homes being anticipated over the next 10–15 years this mismatch is likely to increase, with more and more people living in the area but commuting out of it to work, unless the number of local jobs can be increased dramatically.

In order to support the creation of more jobs CBC needed to build a more informed picture of the needs, aspirations and issues of the business community. The council started this research by undertaking a Local Economic Assessment for the area. This included a SWOT analysis:

“We are open for business. In order to deliver on that, the contribution that this project makes is to put us in a position that we can get alongside either businesses that are here already, or that might want to come here and create the kind of one stop shop, rather than a business that needs to interact with us having to find their way around our organisation.”

**Richard Carr, Chief Executive,
Central Bedfordshire Council.**

Strengths

- world leading education Institutions and businesses
- strategic location, with strong transport links (M1, A1, A5, A6), rail and London Luton Airport
- positive business views of Central Bedfordshire and optimism for future growth prospects
- relatively low levels of unemployment and historic high levels of economic activity/employment
- strong growth in employment floor space
- high levels of managerial, professional and skilled occupation in the economy
- high levels of business and job growth.

Weaknesses

relatively low level of highly paid job opportunities for Central Bedfordshire residents

- low level of productivity
- lack of enterprise facilities
- significant leakage of retail and leisure spend
- poor business experiences of engagement and red tape
- pockets of deprivation in urban and rural areas
- low level of higher skills (level 4) relative to the wider South East
- low level of business employee training and engagement with education institutions in parallel
- around a quarter of businesses report hard to fill vacancies and skills gaps.

Opportunities

- high quality environment and major new tourist facilities for developing rural and visitor economy
- high levels of business growth supported by a proactive, enabling model of business engagement supporting an 'open for business' reputation
- major housing and population growth increasing demand for labour, goods and services
- existing education, business and infrastructure strengths in high value manufacturing/ engineering and emerging low carbon technologies, particularly around renewable energy generation and low carbon automotive sectors
- new forms of public, private and voluntary sector partnership initiatives to stimulate local employment growth and development
- a number of significant town centre and employment land scheme initiatives bringing in a step change in town centre performance and new private sector investment.



Threats

- public sector funding availability to deliver necessary infrastructure and economic programmes to meet Central Bedfordshire's ambitious growth targets
- ongoing uncertainty on wider macroeconomic conditions, including business finance availability
- increasing global and local competition in attracting new investment and employment opportunities
- a continued increase in those not participating in the labour market, either through lack of training or availability of opportunities.

In addition to these economic considerations there was a realisation, within the newly formed CBC, that although the council had numerous support offerings businesses did not appear to utilise them extensively. It was also clear, to those working in business support within the council, that council departments were not sharing information about businesses and did not provide a joined up cohesive service.

Setting these issues against their ambition both to grow indigenous businesses and to attract inward investment caused CBC to launch this project to identify the reasons for this under-utilisation, to ensure that providers of business support worked together to provide a cohesive and rationalised service and to address any other issues, problems and barriers identified.

Objective

Central Bedfordshire Council and its partners (eg the Chamber of Commerce) interact with businesses in many different ways. This project sought to identify these interactions, analyse their effectiveness and to seek opportunities for cooperation resulting in the improvement and streamlining of service delivery and identified resource savings.

To achieve this end the project piloted a new 'total place'/'say it once' approach to businesses and sought to:

- improve service delivery by developing a more tailored and joined up approach, reducing the time and effort it takes businesses to access council and partner services
- maximise the use of electronic channels and streamlined information provision to identify and capture measurable savings
- increase business involvement in council decision making
- increase uptake of council and partner services to businesses.



Approach

Initial research

CBC commissioned Live|work to undertake some initial research to get a general picture of the current take up, by the business community, of business support services from the council – which it was believed was quite low. To achieve this Live|work undertook 250 ten minute telephone interviews with business owners or senior managers of businesses in April 2011 and presented their findings to CBC in May 2011.

Segmentation

Using the Live|work results as a starting point, CBC sought to drill down to get a more detailed picture.

To do this it would be necessary to undertake more detailed research with a smaller number of businesses because, with some 11,500 businesses already operating within Central Bedfordshire, it would be impossible for this project to consult them all.

Consequently, the pilot project focussed on three key groups:

- **100 pillar companies**

At the outset of this project the council was already working to identify the top 100 strategically important companies within the area. These were not necessarily the biggest companies but were those that would have a significant impact on the local economy if they were to leave the locality. From this group the project set out to engage with a cross section of about 20 for in-depth consultation.

- **Business start ups**

There is a plethora of often confusing advice available for start ups both from the council and from a wide range of business intermediaries. The pilot aimed to work with a cross section of about 20 for in-depth consultation.

- **Business rates**

A wide range of businesses contact the council for business rate information and this group would provide access to a wide cross section of businesses in the area. The project aimed to undertake in depth consultation with a selection of approximately 10 businesses that contacted the council in this way and to do more generic research with a wider group of approximately 40 businesses.

Customer insight

Having selected the pilot groups the project utilised a range of customer insight techniques in order to understand the views of businesses and to identify issues and barriers to their growth:

- **Focus groups**

Focus groups were run for about 20 intermediaries (ie businesses providing services such as accountancy, property management etc to other businesses in the area) and for approximately 30 other businesses. These were used to test basic hypotheses about the services businesses wanted and to help identify issues and barriers.

- **Questionnaires**

Following on from the focus groups wider questionnaire based research was carried out, with approximately 250 businesses, to further probe and provide answers to some of the key issues, such as:

- the attitudes of businesses to CBC
- how account management processes could be utilised
- optimum contact methodologies and channel usage at different business life stages
- what do businesses feel about how CBC currently engages with them
- how do businesses want CBC to engage with them
- what needs to change to achieve excellent business engagement
- linkages between service areas within CBC.

- **Process mapping**


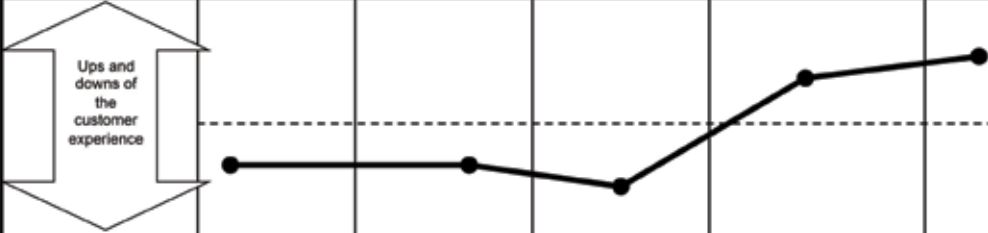
A number of processes within Business Rates and Property Services were mapped for information. This allowed the council to highlight how information could easily flow from these teams to the Economic Growth Skills and Regeneration team (EGSR).

“We have about 11,500 businesses in Central Bedfordshire and we wanted to understand what those businesses wanted from the council, how they wanted to engage with us, how they wanted to talk to us and how better we could work with them.”

Helen Shore, Head of Business Investment, Central Bedfordshire Council

- **Customer journey mapping and touchpoint analysis**

Customer journeys and touch points were mapped across business facing teams of the council to enable the identification of issues and hence to facilitate the creation of a Service Blueprint which outlines how the council can achieve customer service excellence.

Objectives, Scope & Journey Type	Track the process experienced by business customers in their interactions with Central Bedfordshire Council, with the aim of improving the overall customer experience.				Customer segment: Info regarding rateable value
Moments of truth					
Key Journey Step	Search for Information	Contact Centre	Next Contact	Through to Correct Team	Provision of Information
					
Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats at each stage	Initially customer looked for contact information on CBC website, but found it difficult, and the website confusing	Initial phone contact through contact centre. They did not really know who he should talk to.	"I was passed around from pillar to post. Nobody really knew who I should be talking to".	Eventually customer got passed through to a contact in the Business Rates Team, who he described as "really helpful", "knowledgeable" and "friendly" – giving him a positive perspective of the interaction	The customer was provided with accurate and useful information that allowed him to make an informed decision. His overall perception of the council was a positive one – however did not think it should have taken so long to get through to the correct point of contact.
Touch points (F2F, phone, web etc)	Internet	Phone	Phone	Phone	Phone

Findings

The key research findings were:

1. The business perspective

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“I’ve done business in America and Australia, there’s nothing they won’t do to help you get it up and running. Here all they want to do is throw brickbats.”

“It seemed like we had to go through a lot of unnecessary hoops. There was a lack of understanding about us as a business.”

Businesses want the Council to understand their situation and value their contributions to the economy and community.

Businesses feel that they pay high rates and expect enquiries and applications to be dealt with effectively and efficiently. Where they are not, regardless of the reason, it makes ALL Council service areas lose credibility. Businesses are not saying that they expect the Council to agree to everything that they want but in the very least to look at it from their perspective. This means that individual interactions with council service areas need to be much more joined up and coordinated – 65 per cent of those questioned wanted a single point of contact case officer.

2. Complexity and confusion

Much of businesses’ frustration lies in the confusion over complex regulations and different departments. Many businesses deal with a number of Council departments and may not realise how the different departmental functions are related or how council processes work. Nor do businesses recognise that the Council would want to be proactively engaged with them.

Complex regulations and confusing processes can lead to bad experiences which make engagement over positive activities such as skills development or growth programmes a difficult sell.

Handovers and referrals between service areas within the council are a vital point of possible service failure, but also a golden opportunity to engage with businesses proactively at the point where the businesses themselves have the most to gain from that engagement and so are likely to be receptive.

Complexity increases many times over when processes include partner organisation offers to business. The consultation for the All Age Skills Strategy has highlighted that businesses are often confused by the plethora of advice and the sheer choice of providers all offering a seemingly similar service.

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“They’re all in different departments, no-one speaks to each other.”

“A number of businesses think the Council don’t realise the constraints businesses are under, don’t have time to wait, need to grab opportunities and run with it...”

3. Size matters

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“We just don’t have the resources or the time to deal with it all”

Businesses of different sizes have very different needs, and in Central Bedfordshire they are mostly small and very small companies. The research has shown that there is a critical size (approximately 6-10 employees) where the founder/owner is still very much in charge but bearing the burden of sorting everything and are therefore struggling more than other businesses, larger or smaller than them.

The research shows that these businesses have the greatest propensity to grow but across the board Central Bedfordshire Council is consistently rated as providing poor service to this group.

4. Relevant and timely support and information

Businesses at different stages have unique concerns and need specific advice and experience. In developing engagement plans and activity there is a need to track businesses over their lifecycle and to target relevant and timely information to them.

There are just over 11,000 businesses in Central Bedfordshire, it would be almost impossible to maintain a relationship with each of these businesses. The research has identified that Central Bedfordshire Council needed to be much smarter in choosing who to engage with to ensure that information is timely and relevant.

The research has also shown that there are groups of people that businesses trust. These include intermediaries such as Accountants, Bank Business Advisors and providers of other business services. There are approximately 300 such businesses in the area.



Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“You want to talk with other people that know your problems – most of these things you go on – it’s general thing specific.”

“I had a chap come here, a retired colonel from British Aerospace! Trying to advise small businesses!”

Building relationships with these ‘trust points’ and channelling information to them to disseminate to their clients in the wider business community was identified as being a cost effective and efficient method of engagement.

The research has also looked at which businesses are important to Central Bedfordshire Council. It has enabled CBC to identify the 100 most strategically important employers. These are companies, who if because of their size or their position in the market, would cause disruption to the economy if they moved out of the area.

A mapping exercise has identified who internally and externally has engagement with these companies to enable the council to build an account management process that utilises existing relationships.

It is interesting to note that there is actually very little engagement with the major employers in the area, especially from partner organisations. Therefore, account management represents a great opportunity as these are the companies that are likely to have internal structures to enable them to manage skills development activity or apprentices easily.

It also represents an ideal opportunity to develop a joint approach or offer of relevant information to these companies without bombarding them with information from a number of organisations. There are issues with this as a number of the partners are in ‘competition’ with each other to provide a range of support services, including financial, business, property management, etc. The Council is considering undertaking an initial ‘diagnostic’ visit to look at skills, apprenticeships and general growth before coordinating partners.



5. Deal with each business as an individual

Communications need to be focused on issues that businesses are most concerned about (usually the bottom line) and to be as flexible and individually targeted as possible. Understanding how businesses operate and what is important to them means building relationships with them, listening to what they are trying to achieve and helping them to accomplish their goals.

Businesses see themselves as experts in their fields and value straightforward, practical and relevant advice about how CBC can impact on their business. They want clear timeframes and accurate and timely information.

This helps explain why start ups are more receptive as they don't yet feel like experts. Businesses want to feel like they are dealing with an organisation that values their activities and wants to see them succeed.

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“You have to talk to them – a business doesn't want to talk to a leaflet”

“It's like having a champion – where possible they will help you. All you would want is for them to make an effort.”

6. Networking and peer groups

Businesses find networking and sharing with their peer groups to be a valuable way of keeping an ear to the ground. An important aspect of the Employer Engagement process for Central Bedfordshire Council must be to work with these groups.

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“I've not particularly noticed any information from the council's business services.”

7. Awareness of offer

Businesses are unaware that the Council is interested in working with them and lack knowledge about the services that it can offer.

The research has also shown that there are many opportunities to raise the awareness of the offer through business facing statutory teams who 'have' to go out and visit businesses or who interact with them on a regular basis.



8. Work in partnership

Whilst the Council already works closely with a range of public and private partners, this research shows that this must be developed further and strengthened to fully realise the potential for partnership working to deliver real improvements in the area.

Key groups that are essential to the delivery of jobs growth include private sector businesses, the voluntary sector, social enterprises and education partners. The strength of this partnership approach is that it can deliver satisfaction and value for money in an era of diminishing resources by moving the solving of problems from the local authority towards harnessing the innovation and skills of partners, businesses and residents.

Typical comments received during the consultation included:

“We’re doing clinics first so businesses can think, ‘do we want them?’ – they will choose the people they respect.”

“I meet most other dealers at auctions, there’s a social side, it just comes on naturally.”

Outcomes

The findings from this project helped the council better understand how the different services they offered businesses were perceived and why take up was so poor. Consequently, the project enabled the delivered a range of short term outcomes, both within the council and for the businesses within the area, as well as contributing to the longer term development of economic strategy.

Service blueprint

In direct response to the findings from this project and the feedback from the consultation with the business community, LiveWorks worked with the council to develop an operational blueprint that would enable it to improve its delivery of services for the business sector. This blueprint described how a range of services and interactions would be managed.

It categorised the work of service provision into 6 areas:

- awareness
- initial contact
- response
- assessment
- resolution
- conclusion.

For each of these the blueprint:

- describes typical scenarios
- describes interactions across 5 communications channels (telephone, email, web, print and face to face)
- highlights significant barriers
- describes the necessary back stage actions.

Implementation of this blueprint included a restructuring of its Business Growth Team, creation of a Business Engagement post and the introduction of an account management process to assist businesses in their interaction with the council. All staff have key skills in employer engagement, marketing and are building skills in account management.

The EGSR team has also built much closer links with other business facing teams within the council, such as the property and business rates groups.

The new structure has allowed CBC to focus on key areas of activity. Customer insight has transformed the way that the section works enabling them to take a total of £100k out of their base budget for 2011/12 and 12/13. This has been done by moving away from direct delivery of skills activity and encouraging the private sector to provide these services through Business Timebanks.

The insight informed CBC that businesses did not necessarily value a local authority providing this service, they needed it but were wary of local authority provision.

The Welcome project and e-news system allows CBC to tailor targeted and specific information to businesses without a 'scattergun' approach. Purely focusing on intermediaries saves a huge amount of money in marketing terms as it is a much smaller group to market to than 11,500 businesses.

The identification of 100 Strategic Accounts and resultant account management process includes a business visit programme. All of the 100 companies have a dedicated account manager within the Business Investment Team. Visits to key employers also include the Chief Executive and key senior Councillors. Chessum Plants below are one of the Strategic Accounts and have benefited from the Account Management process.

The changes delivered through the implementation of this blueprint and account management process have had a direct impact on the service delivered to individual businesses. For example:

Chessum Plants grows roses and supplies them to large retail outlets. It started in the 1960's as a family firm, growing roses in the owner's garden, and over a number of years has grown into a multi-million pound business employing 20 full time and up to 200 seasonal staff.

chessum:roses



The next stage of its planned growth depended on a planning application. This was on the brink of rejection because of issues raised by the highways department of the council.

Karen Gill, Managing Director Chessum Plants, explains that the company didn't know "how to navigate the council minefield". As a result of its new working practices the business group became involved and 'account managed' the relationship. The resulting discussions led to the identification of a solution which will transform the way that the company is operated and create up to 200 jobs. Karen says "I would never have gotten to the bottom of this without this help".

Support services

One key finding from this project was that the council appeared to be competing with a number of other service providers. In particular with a range of business intermediaries that were known and trusted by businesses in the area.

Consequently, the council decided that a cooperative, rather than a competitive approach would be beneficial to all concerned and therefore it created a Business Timebank whereby trusted intermediaries within the area (eg experts on finance, insurance, property, etc) provide some initial professional advice to businesses at no cost.

Previously, the council would have tried to provide this advice directly and this clearly highlights a fundamental shift in the way that business support is offered by utilising the private sector rather than competing against it.

During a pilot run (October to December) there were 62 'interactions' within the Business Timebank. As a result of the pilot CBC have ironed out a few issues and a full launch and marketing will take place in February 2012.



The graphic is a promotional voucher for Business TimeBank. It features a background image of a diverse group of business professionals in a meeting. The text is arranged in several sections: a main headline, a description of the service, a list of hot topics, contact information, and a list of services. A purple circular callout is overlaid on the image. The voucher has a red and white checkered border on the right side.

Time to review and take stock of your business?

Business TimeBank™ is a unique scheme which helps businesses obtain help to start-up, grow and thrive.

It offers a free 1-1 session on a wide range of business related topics with the aim of building long term relationships between companies.

VOUCHER

Business TimeBank™

Get your free session now!
Hot topics include:

- Avoiding a cash flow disaster
- Raising your web profile and generating online sales
- Increase sales and cut costs!

Plus many more!

Contact us:
business@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
or 0300 300 5297
to book your session

Business seminars and clinics programme for 2012
Visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/businessimebank

It's good to talk!
Have a chat with local business experts who can help you to resolve your issues

Legal Advice / Marketing / Accounting / Finance / Growth / Search Engine Optimization / Legal Advice / Marketing / Accounting / Finance / Growth / Search Engine Optimization / Legal Advice / Marketing / Accounting / Finance / Growth / Search Engine Optimization / Legal Advice / Marketing / Accounting / Finance / Growth / Search Engine Optimization / Legal Advice

Disclaimer: The Business TimeBank service providers shall indemnify Central Bedfordshire Council for any loss or damage suffered as a result of negligent information supplied by the service provider.

Initial feedback regarding Timebank is very positive:

Business TimeBank stories

One of the service providers which specialises in sales training and helping people to win sales met with a company who do commercial blind cleaning. The client wanted to look at improving their sales and marketing. The initial Business TimeBank session went well and since then the service provider and client have met a couple of times. The service provider has helped the blind company to make some leads with a leading hotel chain. The service provider and client are now working together on an ongoing basis.

Running alongside the Business TimeBank programme, is our high growth programme. Companies on this programme get four interactions with the Business TimeBank. One of the companies on the programme specialises in emergency vehicle conversions. They identified a need for some marketing support, particularly with online marketing and therefore had a Business TimeBank session with an online marketing service provider. They found the meeting extremely useful and have since decided to have their website redesigned with the service provider. Through the high growth programme they have received a business growth voucher to help towards the redevelopment of the website, which will hopefully lead on to new business with an increased web presence.

A teleconferencing/telephone court hearing company contacted us from reading about Business TimeBank and the high growth programme in our News Central magazine. Through discussions with them, they decided they needed some marketing support. They had an initial Business TimeBank session and have since decided to have their email newsletters designed with the company. They are using their business growth voucher towards this work.

“The meeting was constructive and happily the client stated several times that he found the content helpful. We began to construct a low cost plan to build referrals and gain recommendations with other businesses that in turn have already won contracts and gained the trust of the types of business and domestic clients that he needs to win business from.”

Rob Harris, Synergy 7

“The Timebank scheme is an important new contribution to the local business community. Keens Shay Keens recognise that SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) are the cornerstone of the UK economy and are delighted to support this initiative that will enable them to obtain the expertise they need to develop and grow.”

Keens Shay Keens, Biggleswade

“It’s a great opportunity to engage with local businesses. Entrepreneurs are the life blood of the economy and we are happy to be involved in helping to foster growth within the community.”

Woodfines Solicitors, Sandy



CBC has also launched a Welcome project for new businesses in the area. This provides the new business with an initial 'light touch' welcome pack under the banner of 'Lets Talk Business'. This pack includes a memory stick allowing access to a web site which offers them the opportunity for ongoing support, advice and information through a registration service.

However the main point of the Welcome webpage is to get businesses to register on the council's alert system. This registration means that the council gets all the segmented information that they need about the business, including what they are interested in hearing about and whether they are a business start up or an inward investment. This allows the council to welcome them properly and to keep them updated with relevant opportunities and information.

Information and communications

In response to the findings from this project CBC has redesigned its business focussed pages on its web site to ensure that all the information required by businesses is available at a single point.

The site can be seen at:
<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/local-business/business-information-and-advice/default.aspx>

The council is trialling a Golden Number for businesses by telephone.

Another new way of working has included the analysis of all of the business networking groups in the area. Specific networks have been targeted based on size and type of member and are now regularly attended by the Business Investment Team. This activity is a very quick and simple method for engaging with large numbers of businesses in a forum that they value.



Benefits

For businesses

This project has delivered clear benefits to individual businesses, such as Chessum:Plants.

Another example of the success of the changed working practices introduced by CBC as a result of this project, concerns a business based in the town centre. Unfortunately, for commercial reasons, it is not possible to identify some of the businesses receiving help from the team – so this example will be referred to as Company X.

Company X, a retail business based in the town centre, was struggling in the current economic climate and was looking for ways to grow its turnover. When it received a regular copy of the 'Lets Talk' e-newsletter issued by CBC it contacted the Business Investment Team (BIT) for advice and guidance.

The BIT undertook diagnostic work and identified potential opportunities relating

to on-line sales. To take this forward, Business Timebank was used to identify an intermediary with on-line sales expertise and a meeting arranged between Company X and the Business Timebank member. As a direct result of the support offered by the BIT, Company X has now enhanced its web site and moved into on-line sales to complement its town centre retail outlet.

Successes of this type have been recognised by bodies representing businesses in the area, for example (see over):

Richard Carr, Chief Executive,
Central Bedfordshire Council

“This project has contributed to idea that Customer Insight must underpin all aspects of our work within the council and has helped to make it a major plank in our corporate thinking.”

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce and the Learning Partnership have worked with Central Bedfordshire to understand the insight that they have gathered from local businesses. This has supported us in our thinking as we develop new business support products for our members' particularly small companies. We have developed a close working relationship with the Team and are supporting the 'Let's Talk Business' project ensuring that our members are receiving timely and informative news from Central Bedfordshire Council'

Justin Richardson

Finance Director
Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Cost savings

Based on this project the council has already made around £100,000 of efficiency savings within their Business Growth/Investment budget. This is mainly due to changing the way that they work. Through the introduction of the new service blueprint the council is moving away from direct delivery to working through intermediaries both for business support and inward investment.

It is anticipated that further savings will be generated in future years as a result of channel shift.

The council has set the following target for this channel shift:

Channel	Cost £	Baseline %	Target % 2011/12
Face to face	7.80	1.5	1
Phone	4.00	57	10
Email	4.00	33.5	15
Web	0.17	8	74

It is too early yet to measure this change, but if it can be achieved then it would generate a saving of approx. £28,000 pa.

Customer insight

In addition, the project has also supported the use of Customer Insight across the council.

Within Central Bedfordshire Council a new corporate Chanel Shift project is underway. This aims to transform the Council's web-presence and increase on-line transactions.

The Business Facing Teams Workshops have also highlighted many 'urban myths' within the Council. Addressing these will help in improving CBC's Customer Service.

For example, at one of the workshops a Customer Service Officer indicated that it was frustrating that they were asked many, many times to recommend traders such as builders and plumbers. They had been told that that could not do this. In the workshop, which allows interaction between the business facing teams a Trading Standards Officer was able to respond to this and explain the Trading Standard's Approved Scheme

Customer Service now has the knowledge and a process to recommend local businesses to local residents.

Strategy development

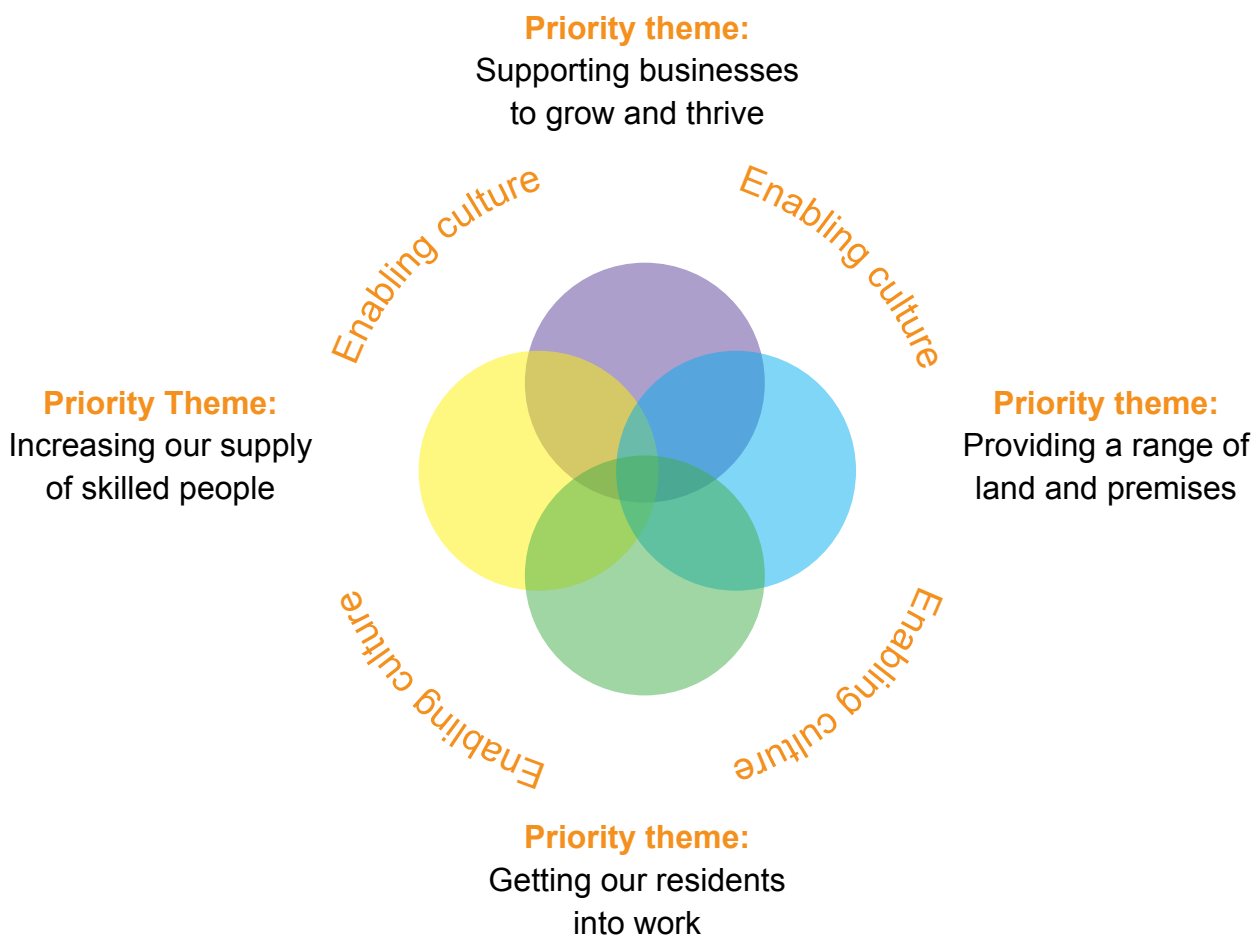
Looking to the future, this project has contributed to a greater strategic and policy interest in business engagement from across the council and has fed directly into the recently developed Economic Development Plan (EDP).

The EDP is Central Bedfordshire Council's response to reaching their full economic potential and meeting the challenge of creating 27,000 new jobs by 2026 and sets out what they plan to do to achieve this.

The EDP outlines how they will work in the short to medium term (three years) to ensure Central Bedfordshire is recognised as a leading location for business investment – a place where existing companies thrive and new entrepreneurs are freely able to start up and grow.

Local people must be appropriately equipped to be able to benefit from new business growth, through having the skills to prosper and being fully able to access new employment opportunities. In an increasingly global economy, where investment and jobs are more mobile, Central Bedfordshire will need to differentiate itself from other locations by building a positive reputation as a place open for business.

The EDP draws on a detailed evidence base contained within a Local Economic Assessment. The EDP identifies four interrelated priority themes where action is required to drive economic growth for Central Bedfordshire.



Governance

Governance has been very difficult. Internally a project board met intermittently and regular briefings to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and updates and presentations to the Environment and Economy Thematic Partnership were undertaken.

In addition to the CBC the following partners were involved in the project:

- East England Development Agency (EEDA)
- Business Link East
- East of England Invest (EEI)
- Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
- Chamber Business.

EEDA, EEI and Business Link were a core part of a number of areas of this project. It is with these partners that CBC developed a new jointly funded account management process. This was very much part of the 'legacy' of all 3 organisations who wanted to share their investor development experience with the local authority. This has really shaped the way that the council approaches relationship management and deals with key employers as 'Strategic Accounts'.

A 3 month pilot programme between the 4 organisations was developed where a 'virtual team' managed company visits. The learning was absolutely invaluable for the local authority.

Both the SFA and Chamber Business were keen to share their knowledge and processes with regards to employer engagement. The Chamber has particularly supported the development of the Business Timebank and as they are progressing business support diagnostic methodologies they are now looking to utilise the Business Timebank providers to deliver some of this support.

Resourcing

	Income	Expenditure
Grant from CLT	£67,500	
Matched funding	£57,500	
Total	£125,000	
Market research and consultation		£20,000
Journey and touchpoint mapping		£20,000
Lifecycle research and analysis		£10,000
Development and test of an account management process		£7,500
Development of workshops and training for business facing staff		£7,500
Marketing and promotion of the new services		£10,000
Additional Insight related research		£10,000
Customer management system – specification and systems requirements		£10,000
Additional PR and marketing		£10,000
Welcome pack development		£5,000
Business timebank		£15,000
Total		£125,000

Challenges and lessons learnt

This project faced a number of challenges and valuable lessons have been learnt which can be applied to future projects:

- During the consultation, a number of businesses reported that they felt that a range of public sector bodies were bombarding them with information regardless of whether it was suitable or not. The introduction of an account management process within CBC has already started to help with this by providing a filtering mechanism. However, another factor which might contribute to this rationalisation has been the disbanding of a number of public sector bodies, by the coalition government, some of whose remit may lead to duplication and overlap.
- During the period of this pilot the council was in a state of flux with extensive reorganisation, rationalisation and re-alignment of services and individuals. As a result, the project management could have been strengthened by a corporate sponsor and a stronger multi agency working group. Consequently, the success of the project depended on the enthusiasm and hard work of a number of individuals who ‘just got on with it’.
- Work in parallel on a corporate CRM, to include business contacts, has not progressed as quickly as was envisaged. Consequently, the ESGR team has had to build a number of interim spreadsheets to record information about their customers. Although this has worked in the short term, for obvious reasons, such as duplication of data, difficulties with maintaining and sharing information etc, this is not the preferred long term option.
- This project has allowed CBC to capture and absorb information and learning relating to employer engagement from regional agencies into local systems as part of their legacy.
- To be ‘Business Led’ means a change of culture internally which means a change of attitude by the public sector. The idea that “the public sector enables and the private sector delivers” requires a complete mindset change – from the public sector providing a solution for businesses to the private sector taking it on and leading it.



Next steps

A number of actions will flow from this project and the most important is for CBC to continue to deliver the Employer Engagement Framework which is part of the action plan that has resulted from the EDP which was adopted by the Council in November 2011.

Other short term actions include:

- Use of Google Alerts to alert the business support staff of important developments that might impact upon their customers.
- Use of software resources such as TRAKUR to monitor social media 'chatter' about businesses and services.
- The development of a training package for staff who are interacting with businesses, other than those in the ESGR team – the aim is to change the mindset of those individuals so that, for example, if a business falls behind on payment of its rates the first reaction is to try to support and help them rather than just sending in the bailiffs.
- Implementation of CRM system for business facing teams.
- Continued delivery of an Employer Engagement Framework to take many of the initiatives started during this project into a policy framework sitting beneath the Economic Development Plan. This outlines the medium and long term aims for employer engagement and processes for doing so.
- Introduction of better service measures of business satisfaction – currently looking at how we can use 'NET Promoter' scoring – a simple 1-10 scale which measures satisfaction by asking the question 'would you recommend x?'
- CBC has signed the Federation of Small Businesses Accord showing our commitment to consult and engage with businesses.





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