

Buckinghamshire County Council

Buckinghamshire has used the DMA approach to underpin a programme of major transformational change. The county council has been implementing a 'future shape model' to ensure it can continue to improve outcomes and deliver high-quality services in a more challenging financial climate.

The change process has involved developing a new target operating model with a 'headquarters' function (corporate function and corporate strategy) and a series of business units, each of which will have a clear set of outcomes to deliver. The principal aim is to make the council more commercially-focused and more financially sustainable while protecting services for local residents.

DMA has been used to influence the council's organisational structure as the future shape model is introduced. Frances Mills, Head of People and Organisational Development, had come across the approach and liked the clarity it could bring to accountability and its bottom-up ethos. She says: "We liked the idea that it's not about de-layering, it's about right layering." The managing director of business enterprise had also read about DMA and together they thought it would fit well. Sessions were organised for the leadership team to outline the approach and the business case, and councillors were kept informed.

Frances Mills says the process came up with practical organisational design solutions. "DMA doesn't tell you which functions go where or how to divide a service up, but the interview process helps you identify the management structure required to support each function." For example, the council was able to identify areas where there were two managers operating in the same space.

The interview process was well received by staff. "Our LGA colleagues gave us some good advice on how to communicate the approach to our people. Employees found the interviews really engaging and saw them as a good opportunity to talk about their jobs – areas where they could be making decisions but weren't empowered to, or where they were unclear about where to go to get a decision made." At first, Buckinghamshire's own officers did much of the interviewing, but LGA consultants were used more over time due to resource issues.

The council was very happy with the support provided by the LGA team, who were seen as accessible and supportive. The process came out on budget and on time. The restructuring is ongoing and as with any organisational change there have been challenges: some staff who were not embedded in the process found it difficult to understand, and it has not always been possible to put a pure bottom-up model in place. The DMA approach has been successfully used across three-quarters of the organisation. Conflicting pressures in some service areas meant it could not be implemented now but could be used in the future.

Frances Mills says DMA has already led to cost savings, largely due to a reduction in management posts. In the first year of using it the council saved £517,000 and in the second year they look set to save around £683,000. Buckinghamshire is happy to recommend DMA to others and is now working to support a London council looking to use the same approach.