

Six top tips for doing more with less in the public sector

Paul Smedley uncovers the secrets of six recent success stories and finds that it's not the technology but how it's used in the business that still makes the critical difference.

Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, it's clear that all public sector services are going to need further and deeper plans to drive efficiency, delivering more with less. In this new world, technology appears again and again in transformation plans and budgets. But what are the underlying drivers of successful transformation and what is the true role of technology within that?

It's clear that the technology alone doesn't drive down costs. As David

It's clear that all public sector services are going to need further and deeper plans to drive efficiency, delivering more with less.

McElhinney, Acting Chief Executive of Liverpool Council, said at our recent Public Sector seminar in Liverpool on November 23rd, just buying new laptops never saved a penny, but getting people to work differently does.

Public sector managers need to get clever about how to work differently and to understand where technology is a key enabler and where it actually isn't necessary. Certainly the internet is a key driver of channel shift; but just having a website or a social media team doesn't mean customers will use it rather than call. The same thing applies to more traditional technologies; cloud computing can be a great enabler, but only if the other strategies are in place to drive how it's utilised.

Six recent public sector success stories demonstrate the scale of impact that can be achieved when there is a vision and commitment, together with the skills and resources to make change happen. All have case studies in the Innovation Awards section of this guide. And all of them are putting the customer at the heart of the decision – one key factor that sets

apart the best – with a focus on simplicity and processes re-design.

One service at Liverpool that's made a dramatic difference is the ground breaking Careline service, which uniquely offers full 24/7 social care support by telephone for vulnerable children, adults and families throughout Liverpool. Highly skilled call-handlers now assess all new cases in this extremely sensitive area of work, supported 24-hours by trained social workers within the team.

Costs are down 23%, with 20% more calls answered and fewer cases passed to area social work teams – and employee survey scores for communication are up 26%.

Social care is a brave area for innovation in the public sector; with high risks and huge consequences if the wrong judgements are made. What's significant at Liverpool is that work in this area was able to build on the wider infrastructure – of

Public sector managers need to get clever about how to work differently... are we putting the customer at the heart of every decision... with a focus on simplicity and processes re-design?

technology and business process experience – which already exists in Liverpool Direct Ltd. Furthermore once the concept has been proven successfully it can now be offered to other authorities looking to achieve a similar transformation.

A totally different approach can be seen at Wokingham Council, where smart working was introduced, using flexible hours and home-based agents, with the aim of making council-wide savings of £1million. Taking a different approach to

resourcing services is key to delivery of real benefit – whether cost reduction or service improvement – and the contact centre is a vital catalyst for the council's wider transformation programme.

Breaking down silos has delivered budget savings of £100k, cut email response time from 10 days to 1 day, and reduced abandonment rates from 40% to under 5%.

A major lesson at the council is the use of technology such as cloud computing, webchat and SMS to make contact quick, cheap and easy for customers. And both website and the comms team now come under the same management as the contact centre, making it easier to move fast and develop an integrated communications plan.

At the NHS Business Services Authority, resource flexibility and efficiency has been massively improved, by implementing a preference-based scheduling and workforce management system. This saved £150k in year one, with further savings of £250k expected, through full union consultation. While preference-based scheduling is a more complex approach, its

introduction has increased flexibility, improved work/life balance for employees and allows better planning of training, recruitment, meetings, reviews and coaching. It has even freed up time for 45 employees to complete their NVQs. And all this was achieved in just three months.

Student Loans bounced back from well-publicised problems to answer 38% more calls in 2010, cutting abandon calls by 53%. Securing extra funding was vital – but this



was supported by understanding the true demand drivers and developing cross-functional planning for both front and back office that was proven to do far more with the resource than would ever otherwise have been possible.

Another authority famous for transforming customer service is Surrey County Council, commended at the European Call Centre Awards. They developed a new model contact centre to

Discover what happens when an organisation changes the 'thinking' that drives service design and delivery... uncovering what creates true customer satisfaction.

successfully streamline process, halve complaints, and raise colleague satisfaction to 72% – all while saving £400,000 for the tax payer. Working with customers, front-line staff and other departments, the council drove improvement projects that have reduced the number of calls coming in by 11.5%. Thanks to a holistic channel strategy and setting up a web service team within the contact centre, problems are identified as soon as they occur and cost per contact has been reduced by 28%.

In these inspiring models of change, we see that technology has a major role to play, but that none of these successes have been led by the technology itself. What's drives change is a vision, careful planning and a belief that a real difference can be made – together with close attention to what the customer wants and to the needs of our employees.

Portsmouth City Council provides a valuable example of a different kind of approach which is even less reliant on technology. Here we can discover what happens when an organisation changes the 'thinking' that drives service design and delivery. Portsmouth transformed the housing service and halved the cost of repair, by applying

Vanguard's Systems Thinking methods and uncovering what creates true customer satisfaction.

Repairs are provided at the specific time/day requested by tenants – 75% within 48 hours – and completed to a high standard on the first visit. Most managers would argue that it couldn't be done or would be massively expensive. In fact, focus on people and value, rather than cost and process, has cost less – with £2m

annual savings, fewer properties left empty and double the grounds maintenance at no cost.

Getting people to work differently patently does more with less – if it's focussed on what the customer needs, employees are fully engaged and good planning creates a framework for improvement. Many of these success stories have indeed involved technology, but none can be described as technology-driven. Start with your customer; does it make their life simpler?

Paul Smedley is Executive Director of the Planning Forum and leads the Forum's support for local government. He can be contacted on 020 8993 1129. or paul.smedley@planningforum.co.uk

Six top tips

1. Start with the customers – does it make their life simpler?
2. Change the thinking in your own organisation
3. Engage your front-line teams so that they feel listened to
4. Good planning creates a framework for engagement and continuous improvement
5. Measure the impact – and check you are delivering what you plan
6. Learn from others; there is such a lot of good practice out there already!

Share your story

- What were the biggest challenges you've faced in driving transformation?
- What have been your biggest successes?
- What were the key enablers?
- What would be your top six tips to others?
- How can we support you best?

Email us, join our discussion group on LinkedIn <http://ppf.bz/hnhMhE> or visit our public sector Forum on www.planningforum.co.uk

