

Fenland District Council

THE MJ
2010
Achievement Awards

PEOPLE and WORKFORCE

MJ Awards - Livening Up Local Government

Executive Summary

Summary

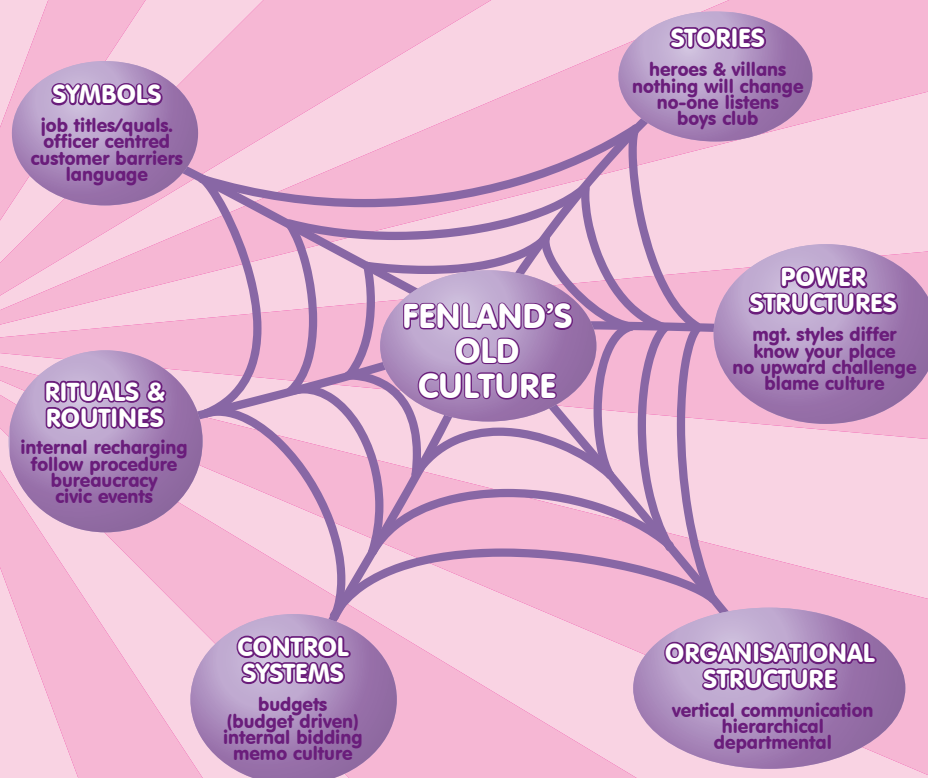
This is the story of how a council in Cambridgeshire set about changing the face of local government. Fed up with stuffy cultures and 'computer says no' attitudes, Fenland created an innovative culture where staff feel empowered to focus on outcomes, rather than inputs and outputs.

Fenland used to be a failing authority – now it is one that Councillors, Officers (91% of them!) and local people can be proud of. It has been named the Most Improved Council, the first district council to jump from CPA Fair to Excellent and the first organisation in England to achieve Corporate Customer Service Excellence (CSE).

The challenge

It has taken drive, vision and bags of enthusiasm to get where it is today. In 2002, the IDeA said they needed to 'overhaul the culture' of its organisation and highlighted a clear lack of corporate leadership, poor people management and little evidence of performance management. The organisation was seen as hierarchical, top down, silo-bound and outdated. A staff survey cited 'departmentalism' as a barrier to progress. BVPI performance for this financial year showed almost 70% of BVPIs below median, with only 8% in the upper quartile.

Fenland's old culture:



The recipe for change

Fenland introduced a comprehensive package of people management innovations, which developed an organisational ambition to improve services.

It developed a 100% people driven culture, where staff feel empowered to develop and deliver services that meet customer needs by:



Customer

- Removing departmental barriers and bidding rounds
- Moving away from purely 'FDC' services to a whole systems thinking approach to improving quality of life.
- Looking across organisational barriers to make sure public money is spent in the best way.



Staff

- Celebrating achievements, spotting talent and creating the 'one team' ethos
- Empowering staff to do something different
- Revamping recruitment
- Encouraging a flexible workforce
- Having the right skills in the right places

100% people driven – the customer

Fenland used to be heavily budget driven. Directors focused on their own service and had less regard to what was happening across the Council or in the local community.

To create a culture where the customer comes first, Fenland has abolished departmental bidding rounds and now work with members to listen to the community and agree the best use of resources. The 'one team' approach has been vital in delivering major projects including a new approach to neighbourhood management, Housing Stock Transfer and Corporate CSE accreditation. Staff work together for, and with, the community, rather than for an individual 'department.' When visiting the Council last year, Dave Prentis, General Secretary of Unison said as soon as you walk into the building, you feel a sense of 'Team Fenland'.

1. Community driven priorities

Community fair your voice - your choice - your future

The Council's priorities are based around quality of life issues such as educational attainment, health and fear of crime; Fenland will help to make improvements regardless of statutory responsibilities.

Local residents said they wanted to speak to and consult with all public sector organisations at the same time, so Fenland developed a programme of Community Fairs where they can do just that.

There's no more boring public meetings, but instead there's fun, interactive fairs, which provide practical information and empower the average person on the street to get involved in decision making. Customer insight from the fairs is used to develop local neighbourhood action plans, and

large scale issues are fed through into our Community Strategy.

Local mum Emily visited her Community Fair last October:

"The information was brilliant, it covered so much. My son and daughter went because they wanted a go on the Wii, but they were so busy going to all the stands that they only spent five minutes on it. It's a great opportunity to tell local services what you want and think is important."

- 96% of people thought they provided a good opportunity to raise local issues.



2. Dragon's Fen

Dragon's Fen provides a great example of the one team approach in practice. Fenland residents can expect to live 27 days less in every year of their life in comparison to other residents in Cambridgeshire. As always, Fenland staff are keen to make a positive change, so, they set up cross cutting project groups to look at the work of the Council and see how they could make more of an impact on key contributors to deprivation. Groups of staff at all levels of the organisation were then given the opportunity to pitch their ideas to Fenland's Corporate Management Team. Teams now appreciate the impact their service has on the wider determinants of deprivation and are adopting a whole systems thinking approach to their work.

2009 Staff Survey results showed that:

- 95% of staff feel that they make a positive contribution to the success of the council.
- 91% of staff feel a sense of job satisfaction in their work.

liP Assessor Jacqui Chapman commented that:

"Leadership, innovation, openness, consultation and involvement can be seen at many levels throughout the organisation."

3. Achieving Corporate Customer Service Excellence



The Government Standard

Working towards corporate CSE provided a great opportunity to review the entire Council's approach to putting the customer at the heart of everything it delivers. Fenland's approach led them to becoming the first organisation in England to obtain corporate accreditation. CSE assessor Leon Winston said the Council was 'positively unique'.

- 97% of customers are dealt with at the first point of contact
- 98% customer satisfaction rates with our one stop shops

100% people driven – our staff

1. Revamping recruitment

Fenland's recruitment process has been transformed into an unforgettable experience for both the council and the candidates. Shortlisted applicants can look forward to:

- 'Speed dating' potential colleagues and elected members
- A tour of the district and frank details of where future challenges lie
- Exercises that are tailored to the post, for example mock press conferences or attending a faux corporate management team meeting.

Recruiting people with the right attitude, confidence and drive means they can work to deliver a range of services across an organisation. Fenland have embedded a flexible approach to job roles, which has created a multi-skilled workforce equipped to take on different projects and eradicate the 'that's not my job' culture.

2. The right skills in the right places

The first aspect of Fenland's plan was a comprehensive senior management review to ensure the skills and capacity for improvement were in place, creating a flatter management structure and reducing barriers to cross-service working.

"The Leader and Chief Executive have 'left no stone unturned' in pursuit of a five-year change programme. The Council has been virtually deconstructed and reassembled. The Council's change programme is accompanied by learning and knowledge sharing at rapid pace, enhanced by an influx of new managers with diverse experience."

(IDeA Peer Review 2004)

The organisation used to have low customer satisfaction, so it set about developing the right skills in the right places.

Recognising the importance of workforce planning; Fenland introduced both an internal and external Management Development Programme.

Back in 2005, it began skills for life training with its Street Cleansing and Refuse Teams and is now delivering the following NVQs:

- Health and Safety Level 3
- Advice and Guidance Level 3
- Management Level 3
- Assessor Qualification
- Customer Service Excellence
- ITQ

All Refuse and Recycling and Customer Access teams have now been awarded an NVQ and Fenland's Skills for Life Action plan has been promoted as best practice in the region.

Sammy Betson, Learn Direct Regional Partnership Manager said:

"Lord Leitch identified the need for world class skills in the UK to enable us to compete in today's global market. FDC has not only taken on this challenge but has signed up to the Skills Pledge which commits you to a minimum level of staff qualifications for all staff."



But of course, being Fenland, why stay at the minimum expected level? The Customer Access team has now gained their NVQ Level 2 in Customer Service Excellence. The National bench mark for achieving this qualification is 70%; most regions are struggling to meet this. Fenland have not only met this, they have exceeded it with an impressive achievement rate of 97%!

FDC breaks any bar set and goes the extra mile."

3. A motivated workforce

Engagement has been totally transformed and now includes:

- A weekly internal staff e-newsletter
- Regular Chief Executive staff briefings
- A highly popular intranet system
- A staff suggestions scheme
- Staff celebration events, including a Christmas party, a Corporate Management Team pantomime and an F Factor talent contest.

95% of staff feel they make a positive contribution to the success of the council.



CMT celebrate at the 'Excellent' party to congratulate staff on their hard work

4. Let's celebrate

Celebrating and recognising the contribution of unsung heroes is at the core of Fenland's culture.

Fenland's night at the Oscars

Fenland's nationally recognised Staff Awards scheme sees quarterly winners attend a glitzy annual staff awards ceremony with local government VIP presenters.

The scheme has been vital in rewarding good performance, encouraging further service improvements, and contributing to high levels of staff motivation and morale.

Annual awards are presented by special guest presenters, such as Heather Jameson from the MJ. Several of the award presenters have offered special development opportunities to winners, for example the winner of the Manager of the Year award has been offered the opportunity to work for the Audit Commission by joining a team to inspect a peer authority.

As far as we are aware, Fenland is the only district council in the country running a staff awards

scheme of this scale. As well as extremely high staff satisfaction levels, since introducing the awards scheme, FDC:

- became one of the first Councils to achieve liP accreditation under the new tougher standards; and
- won an award at the 2007 Pay Awards for commitment to staff recognition.

After attending an annual staff awards ceremony, Julie Towers, Chief Executive of Tribal Resourcing said:

"Leadership in Fenland is visible throughout the organisation....As a privileged guest at the annual staff awards it was easy to see why this is the case, and where the energy and motivation came from. Upbeat, motivated and visibly passionate about the work they did the members, officers and staff were a shining example of modern local government."



5. The stars of the show

Fenland's culture focuses less on long service and more on good service, attitude, enthusiasm, skills and potential. Giving somebody the opportunity to shine, regardless of their age or qualifications is one of the secrets to Fenland's success. If you have the right people skills, you can deliver outcomes in any service.

Fenland's team is made up of a mix of different people from different backgrounds with a whole range of skills, but they all have one thing in common – a passion to make a difference.

- In a short period, graduate trainees have moved into senior management roles
- Over the last five years, over 5% of staff have been seconded to help deliver projects across the Council
- Senior managers mentor stars of the future
- Jobs are shaped around spotted stars

Every service area has won a national award over the last three years.

Liven up campaign

Local government is not known for its excitement, fun or off the wall ideas. Tackling deprivation and delivering services under tight budgets requires the cream of the crop. Reputation is a great way to attract stars and raise the profile of the district. Fenland has been on a joint mission with the MJ and IDeA to rebrand the face of local government and put the district on the map through their Liven up Local Government campaign. The campaign included:

- A national Culture Conference with the IDeA, which saw over 75 colleagues from across the country travel to Wisbech to talk about



culture change and hear Fenland's story. Guest speakers included Jan Parkinson (Local Government Employers), Julie Towers (Tribal Resourcing) and Heather Jameson (MJ). One delegate was heard to say "The staff are amazing - I wish my lot were like that!" and another said it's "Excellent to see a real cultural change that has worked and is lived across the organisation."

- A stand at the 2009 LGA Conference to celebrate achievements and share ideas with other organisations.

Conclusion

Fenland's people management is cutting edge, including a comprehensive approach to talent management, recruitment and engagement. These have led to phenomenal staff survey results, recognition of outstanding customer service and a national reputation that any organisation would be proud of. Staff are now 100% driven to improve quality of life for Fenland residents, no matter which organisation provides the service.

