

SHAPING THE NEW COUNCIL

1. What sort of organisation do we want the new Council to be? What will it be like for people who use its services? For other organisations who work with it or do business with it? What will it be like to work for the new Council? What image of the new Council will citizens have in their minds when they engage with its decision making, or vote for its Councillors?
2. These are slippery questions, not easy to answer in a precise and objective way; but they matter. They influence the morale and effectiveness of staff; they shape public satisfaction and customer experience; and ultimately they determine whether the Council is effective and successful.
3. For the purposes of this note, we shall refer to the answers to these questions as defining 'the culture' of the new Council, and its values.
4. The note considers in turn how we should define the culture and which values we want for the new Council, and how we can create that culture.

Defining the culture and values of the new Council

5. We are not starting with a blank sheet. We have five Councils which will form the new one. We should identify what aspects of these five organisations are regarded as strengths and should be retained in the new Council. Staff and Councillors should all contribute to this: for example, a survey of all employees and Councillors of all five Councils via the intranet, possibly followed by focus groups and meetings.
6. We have the submission to Government proposing the new Council. This contained broad 'brush strokes' defining the goals of the new Council and how it would work, including:
 - strong 'customer focus' including:
 - access to services and information in ways convenient to the customer,
 - services co-ordinated to reflect the customer's needs,
 - Council responsive to the diversity of the population it serves
 - delegation of decision making and local responsiveness. Transparent governance of the Council
 - effective collaboration with other public agencies
 - strong 'community focus', shaping the purpose and operation of the Council by reference to the geographical communities and communities of interest in Wiltshire
 - emphasis upon enabling communities to be more self-reliant, and upon the role of the Council in helping to build "social capital"
7. Also, we have evidence from the evaluation of individual Councils (and other organisations) about what factors make Councils more effective organisations.

8. From these starting points, we can develop a view of the sort of organisation we want the new Council to be.
9. (It might be argued that this task should be left to the new Council, advised by its Directorate. Why should the Councillors and staff of the five existing Councils limit the direction and freedom of their successors in this way? Yet in effect we shall do this, whether deliberately or by default. Unless we are explicit about the type of organisation we want the new Council to be, the new Councillors will inherit an organisation which by default embodies the characteristics of its predecessors, and notably the largest one, the County Council.)
10. Following the Government's approval of the Submission, One Council for Wiltshire, some work on the culture of the new Council has been undertaken. In particular, a well attended event for managers from the five Councils in December 2007 provided a good basis for wider discussion. Managers were asked in groups to consider a number of questions, and their answers were then the subject of voting by all present. The results are attached at Appendix 1. The key points are as follows:
 1. For the Council's customers the most important values of the new Council will be:
 - To be clear and honest about what we will provide, and do it
 - To be local and flexible
 - To listen, communicate and involve
 2. For employees the most important values of the new Council will be:
 - Empowered staff
 - Strong customer focus
 - Effective and visible leadership
 3. For customers the most important features of the new Council will be:
 - Knowing and involving the customer
 - Ease and quality of access
 - Clear and simple access
 4. The factors which would motivate staff to be involved in the process of change towards a new Council are:
 - strong transformational leadership
 - involve staff at all levels in all services
 - clarity over what we are working towards
 - equitable and transparent opportunities for all
 - need to know how I will make a difference
11. This analysis can provide a starting point for discussion, by the Implementation Executive, and in due course by:
 - Members' seminar (date to be confirmed)
 - Survey of staff and Councillors (see above)

- Discussions with partners, user groups, community partnerships
12. We should aim to bring these various exercises together in a statement of policy by the Implementation Executive by May/June 2008.
13. The Implementation Executive is invited:
- i) to note the key points in the submission, "One Council for Wiltshire", regarding the goals and values of the new Council (para 6 above)
 - ii) to consider the proposal regarding a survey of the view of Councillors and staff of the five current Councils, in order to ascertain what aspects of each Council are seen as strengths which should be retained in the new Council (para 5 above)
 - iii) to consider the views of managers (summarized at para 10 above) regarding the culture and values of the new organisation from the viewpoint of customers and employees; and
 - iv) to indicate any other work they wish to undertake
 - v) to agree that this work should be brought together in a statement of policy by the Implementation Executive by May/June 2008

Shaping the organisation

14. Defining the culture we want is the easy part; shaping the organisation to reflect that is more complicated.
15. The complication arises from the fact that the nature of an organisation is not shaped by a simple policy document; it is the product of a complex web of factors, many of them visible only through the behaviour of the people who lead and work in the organisation.
16. One way of organising our thinking about this is provided by the diagram below:



17. This model would provide a good basis for thinking about how we can create a culture in the new Council which we shall define through the process described in the preceding section. Thus, as that process develops, we can ask how the various parts of the cultural web could foster and sustain the culture we want to develop.
18. In case this all seems too abstract and theoretical, some examples may help:
 - control systems: how will the new Council manage its performance, its budget, and its risks? What HR processes will it adopt?
 - what stories will people tell about the new Council? What will be seen as success? What do we celebrate and acknowledge?
 - what language will the Council use to describe itself? There is an opportunity to break away from traditional local government language (internally and with customers) which symbolises a traditional Council doing things in traditional ways.
 - how can we ensure that organisational structures in the new Council reflect the type of organisation we want? How can we make them flexible, not rigid?
 - how do we ensure that the effective power structures (as distinct from the formal structure) reflect the type of organisation we want? Is effective power concentrated in HQ (County Hall)? How do staff have a voice and influence?
19. In addition, some of the decisions which we shall have to take during the coming twelve months will influence the cultural web of the new Council. The strategy on customer access is an obvious example. Another is the establishment of Area Boards. So this work should have regard to specific development such as these, and their implications.
20. The key to the development of a cultural web which supports the type of organisation we want the new Council to be is communication. The clearer and more explicit we can be, the more we build on the views of all interested parties, the more opportunities for debate (and argument), the better. This includes informal discussion and also formal events, particularly training and development. As April 2009 approaches, communication and appropriate training and development will become increasingly important.
21. The Implementation Executive is invited:
 - vi) to consider the analysis in paragraphs 16-20 above, concerning the ways of shaping the new Council to embody the appropriate culture and values
 - vii) to ask the Joint Implementation Team to ensure that the factors and influences described above should be incorporated in decisions and actions in the preparation for the new Council
 - viii) to ask the JIT to propose a communications strategy to support the culture and values of the new Council

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KR/CJC
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