

14 April 2009

London Borough of Barnet: *The 'Future Shape' Programme*

Summary of policy/project

A programme looking into how to deliver high quality services at a lower cost—allowing the Council to develop through partnerships and harnessing innovation from staff and other partners.

Description

Barnet is a high performing council, providing high quality services. However, a number of very different challenges face us. Demand for services is rising. The nature of the challenges we face is becoming more complex and less susceptible to traditional forms of service. And keeping up with public expectations of the quality and responsiveness is a challenge. But above all, we face the prospect of the worst grant settlement in recent memory, far worse than anything we have experienced for many years. Put simply, in the coming years we will have to do far more with much less so, despite the fact that we are a high performing organisation, the status quo is not an option for us. So last year the Council's Cabinet asked for proposals to be developed about how the council can start to address these big problems while, at the same time, keeping costs low and providing good services. This is the Future Shape programme. The programme is looking at how we should radically redesign and reconfigure services across Barnet's public sector to meet the challenges we face. This will inevitably mean the Council becoming a smaller organisation, delivering fewer services itself and engaging in more partnerships with the public,

private and voluntary sectors to redesign how we delivery high quality for the borough's residents. We have already determined however that what we are not just seeking to do is recreate a mirror image of ourselves through alternative means of provision. That would only serve to lock-in current barriers to efficiency and collaboration. Instead we aim to develop our organisation through partnerships that enable us to harness the innovation and capacity of our own staff as well as that of our public, private and third sector partners.

What problems does the policy/project solve?

The council will be able to ensure the continued provision of excellent services to our residents, while still keeping costs low. We will not have to make large hikes in Council Tax bills or severe cuts in services. In future the council will be able to work more effectively as we will only provide the services that we need to/are best at providing and will partner up with the rest of the borough's public sector to address the institutional and departmental silos that get in the way of current service provision.

Has the idea worked elsewhere?

We believe that we are in the vanguard of innovative thinking about the future role of the council and local public services, so there are few reference sites for us to look to. However, there

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are a number of councils that are taking radical approaches to similar challenges to those we face and we are examining their experiences to build our understanding of how different delivery models might work.

not incurred any implementation costs. A full potential cost analysis is part of this phase of work.

What were the difficulties of implementation?

Maintaining staff morale in the face of significant change has been a challenge. Conveying the message that we need to change despite the fact that we perform well and despite the fact that people have been doing what has been asked of them is difficult. Resistance to this message is only natural. People are worried about the future of their jobs. The Future Shape programme is not about outsourcing, it is about improvement, but it is not difficult to portray what we are doing as a huge outsourcing and cost-cutting project that will impact on people's terms and conditions of employment. One of the lessons for us of the programme so far is that innovation on this scale does not happen overnight and it certainly doesn't happen in a straight line. We need to work our way carefully from concept to detailed planning to implementation and this leaves gaps that naysayers can fill with misinformation. Constant communication, therefore, has been a crucial element of the programme.

What is the evidence of success?

We have developed a number of 'future shape tests' that any proposals will have to pass. They are that any proposal for redesign of the way services are delivered will:

- cost significantly less
- take a different view of need, based on engaging with our population as citizens rather than customers of specific services
- be strategic and integrated, ensuring that resources are targeted to achieve priority outcomes
- facilitate greater self-help and service co-creation among members of our community
- be based on a clear contract between the citizens and services
- inspire behavioural change amongst our residents and businesses
- be capable of being accessed on the basis of citizen life challenges - help citizens to achieve better outcomes in their lives - be democratically accountable.

What is the cost of implementation?

We are currently at the feasibility stage so have

Would this work in other Councils?

The proposals and models we develop might be specific to Barnet, but the innovative approach we

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are taking and the tests we are applying to ourselves are universally applicable

What advice would you give any Councils wishing to adopt this idea?

Be very clear very early about the rationale for change and the objectives for the work. Engage staff in particular on the basis of these objectives rather than the detail of what they mean – i.e. focus on how you need to change the way services are delivered rather than the specific changes that need to be made. That way the discussion can move from concept to specific proposals without being hampered by detailed considerations before the broad direction of travel has been defined.

For more information

Richard Grice is the Future Shape Programme Director. He can be contacted on the following address: Building 2, North London Business Park Oakleigh Road South London N11 1NP. Or email: richard.grice@barnet.gov.uk

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