

19 October 2009

City of Westminster:

“Creating a council organisation to deliver”

Summary of policy/project

From the 1st of October 2009, Westminster Council will introduce a new operating model, reducing headcount by 10%, delivering nearly £12m annual savings and improving services.

What problems does the policy/project solve?

This will deliver £11.7m full year savings.

Description

These changes recognise that the council has a track record for success with the ability to improve the quality of life for the people they serve. However, public expectations continue to rise, financial pressures are likely to intensify and the country is going through a period of immense social change. Their response to this is to seek to raise the quality and responsiveness of public services and to redefine the role of the city council.

What were the difficulties of implementation?

The new model replaces existing departments and central services with new Support and Delivery units under a Strategic Executive Board (SEB). The critical part of this change is a shift from departments specifying what outputs they will deliver to a system where SEB will commission outcomes from delivery units. This will align service delivery more closely with the needs of the city.

To achieve these goals, the council has recognised the need to restructure. Discussions between senior officers and leading members identified the approach — “commissioning” and agreed the general shape of the teams needed to be at the frontline, the Delivery Units, and the corporate teams— known as Support Units, that would provide pooled advice to the delivery units on issues from procurement to law and performance improvement.

What is the evidence of success?

Westminster began the process of changing the council organisation last November and has completed this major change project in under a year.

These changes will mean 265 posts (10% of total) coming out of the non-schools establishment. The majority of these (185) will leave the organisation in December 2009 in “phase one” of the changes, with a further 45 exiting by the end of March 2010 in “phase two”, and the remaining 35 leaving by the end of September 2010, “phase three”.

Over this period we have carefully monitored public perception scores for council services. The latest results show 81% satisfaction with the council, up 6% in the last quarter, 57% rate Westminster as providing good value for money, an increase of 5% and 47% of our citizens are prepared to speak highly of them, another 5% increase on the previous survey.

Among those residents who have heard of the council's plans to become more efficient, the satisfaction rate

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with the authority goes up to 95%.

Within the council they have also monitored staff views. There have been mixed responses to the changes and consequent redundancies. However, staff informed ratings are generally going up and frequency of management briefings has risen. Most feel their manager keeps them well briefed, with 75% reporting that they feel informed about what's going on at the council, and 60% saying they understand why the changes are happening.

Would this work in other Councils?

No reason why it shouldn't.

For more information

For more information on this scheme please write to info@westminster.gov.uk.

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