

## **London Borough of Hounslow, PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards – Best HR/OD Change Management or Transformation Programme**

Along with most other councils, budgetary pressures, continuous and complex change, and high expectations from residents, meant that Hounslow council needed to make changes to the way it worked to respond to these challenges. In addition to this modernisation programme, a decision was made to move 1,600 staff currently based in the Civic Centre, to a new building in the heart of Hounslow town centre in March this year (2019). This building will accommodate approximately half the staff, along with staff from new and existing partnership working arrangements. Although this move and the resulting 2:1 desk ratio it requires created a 'burning platform' for change, the modernisation of the workplace was a key driver. The aim of the WorkSmart Programme was to enable mobile and flexible working for all Civic Centre based staff by the end of September 2017. This would allow staff to continue to adapt to the new ways of working for at least a year before the physical move, as well as providing adequate time to sustain and embed the desired cultural change. Ultimately, the move to new ways of working for staff needed to have a positive impact on performance and service delivery for residents.

The programme had a robust governance structure: Workstreams reported via the Programme Director to a Programme Board, led by the Cabinet member for Finance and Citizen Engagement, and chaired by the Chief Executive. Historically, the council had very traditional ways of working, where staff travelled to the office every day, 'owned' their own desk and accumulated a lot of paper and storage. Staff were judged by their 'presence' in the office and the hours they worked, rather than by what they achieved. Attitudes and behaviours towards work needed to change for the project to succeed.

Several key strategic objectives were aligned to the WorkSmart project. These included:

- Achieving the priorities set out in the council's Corporate Plan, particularly priority 7, 'An ambitious council delivering quality services and value for money', which includes the promise to 'Explore mobile technologies that enable staff to work more flexibly and efficiently';
- Building over 900 homes on the site vacated by the Civic Centre;
- Regeneration of Hounslow town centre and a significant saving for the council by occupying a smaller and more cost-effective building;
- Digital transformation to provide more services to residents online;
- Reduction in our carbon footprint through the absence of staff car parking facilities in the new building along with a substantial reduction in the production of paper.

The main challenge at the beginning of the programme was resistance to change from managers and staff who were used to working in very traditional ways. There needed to be a mind-set change towards one of trust, where staff could take responsibility for managing their own work and time and where work became something staff 'do' rather than where they 'go'; this was a significant challenge. Alongside this, senior managers were concerned about critical service performance, e.g. Children's Social Work, dropping because of the changed ways of working. The teams moving into WorkSmart were subject to budget cuts and restructuring, which meant that they were already experiencing significant changes.

The recruitment of Change Agents from each team who acted as a link between their team and the project team was critical to overcoming these barriers and stands out as a very successful element of the project. This role was promoted as a development opportunity for staff and ensured that each service was provided with the appropriate communication and support to move into WorkSmart with the minimum disruption. A change readiness survey was sent at intervals to all staff and was analysed to identify and address any team specific or general concerns. Alongside this, implementing a communications strategy and plan, providing more support, negotiating timeframes within the deadlines of the phase, and coaching team managers helped teams to prepare for and adapt to the changes. The positive aspects of WorkSmart gradually filtered to staff who had not yet moved. These aspects of the project, along with the Chief Executive's personal commitment to leading the programme and her involvement in briefing staff about the project, helped to begin to change perceptions. In addition, a programme of training and support was implemented in each phase, including dedicated training and support in using the new technology (a laptop with integrated telephony, video conferencing and Instant Messaging), regular meetings with senior management teams, leadership and staff workshops, as well as briefing sessions, attendance at team meetings and regular one-to-one support with team managers and Change Agents. A WorkSmart policy and protocols in consultation with managers and Change Agents was developed and a final policy was agreed by Cabinet in April 2017. HR colleagues monitored and provided regular updates about the impact of the changes on other HR policies

such as Disciplinary and Grievance. No issues directly related to the new ways of working arose during the roll-out of the programme.

The WorkSmart Programme finished on time and within budget at the end of September 2017 and met the key priority and Corporate Plan promise to enable staff to work flexibly and efficiently using modern technology.

The council's full bi-annual staff survey in November 2017 provided important data which enabled the organisation to measure success and identify where to target its resources in readiness for the move to a new building. Several questions in the survey are helpful in measuring the impact of the changes brought about by the WorkSmart project:

- 'The ability to work flexibly and remotely' – 76% of staff agree or agree strongly that they are satisfied; a 17% increase compared to the 2015 survey;
- 'The council delivers a good standard of service to its customers' – 71% of staff agree or agree strongly; a 7% increase compared to 2015;
- 'I have the equipment and resources I need to do my job effectively' – 69% of staff agree or strongly agree; an 18% increase compared to 2015;
- 'I have the flexibility I need to balance my responsibilities at home and at work' – 80% agree or strongly agree; a 13% increase compared to 2015.

60% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that WorkSmart had improved the way they work. Given the budgetary challenges and continuous change the council continues to experience, the council's improved staff engagement score of 66 (60 in 2015) is something to be celebrated. Although a direct correlation cannot be made between the introduction of WorkSmart and the improvement, staff feedback suggests that the WorkSmart project has had a positive impact on staff job satisfaction and commitment to the council.

The ability of the organisation to operate successfully when staff are working remotely was put to the test on two occasions last year (snow and water supply problems). The introduction of WorkSmart meant that the business of the council continued uninterrupted during these periods without any impact on performance or service delivery.

The extent to which the programme's principles and aims were met are detailed in the supporting document. Since the programme ended, work to embed them continues through the programme which is coordinating the move to the new Civic building.