

SMART Planning

From Possibility...

The Chief Executive's Department (CX) at Warwickshire County Council provides a diverse range of services for both internal and external customers. It provides services for the community including Emergency Planning and Registration of births, marriages and deaths. Internally, it provides support to the democratic process and internal initiatives identified in the Council's CPA Improvement Plan.

The Department, along with the rest of the County Council, has been using the EFQM Excellence Model (EEM) for several years to help drive continuous improvement in the way it conducts its business.

The regular use of Self-Assessments against the EEM has enabled the Department to identify a number of priority areas for improvement, which have had the support of the Departmental Management Team (DMT).

One of the areas for improvement was the development of an approach to Process Management and, among the priority processes was the Business Planning process.

Kate Nash, Head of Democratic Services and Process Champion for Business Planning, said

"Our business planning process was structured and delivered a plan on time, but plans were not very effective and were frustrating our efforts to improve. There were problems with ownership, with activities being unfocused and with the quality of our target setting".

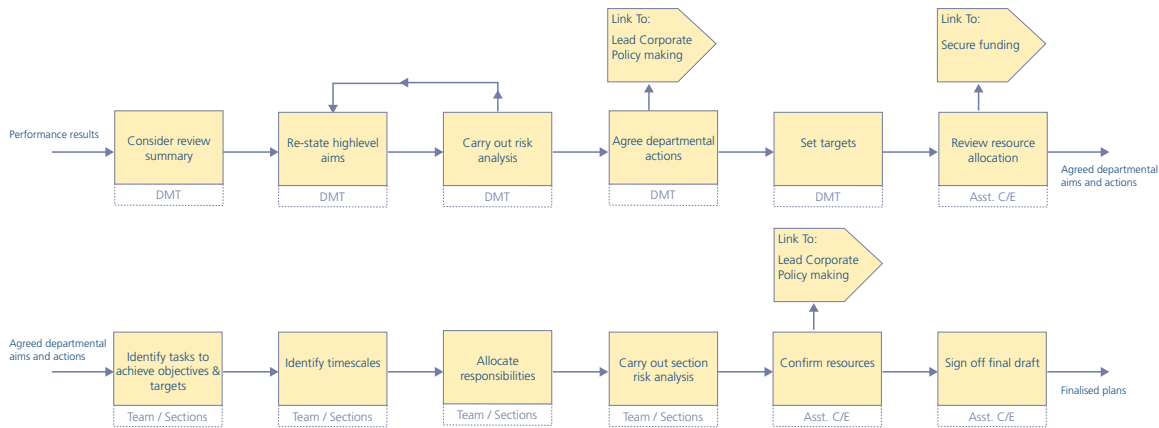
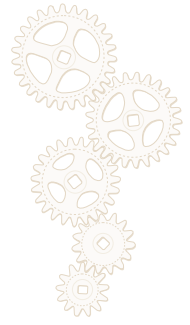
Like in many organisations, there was a clear need to improve the process, improve the quality of the plans produced and gain greater staff commitment to implementing the plans and managing performance against them.

ad•esse
consulting

OUR APPROACH

During 2005 we have provided specific support for the design, or re-design, of a number of the Department's processes and in developing process improvement skills for managers. Other support has been in the development and delivery of a workshop on performance management, for line managers; seen as an essential part of the implementation package.

Kate Nash developed a "to be" map for the Business Planning process, using control-ES process management software. The map clearly identified the activities that needed to be carried out, who was responsible for them and the required timescales. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the original maps have now been reviewed and updated twice. Part of the latest maps is shown below and highlights the clear ownership of tasks and linkages to other WCC processes.



To Actuality...

PROCESSES NEED CONTENT AND PEOPLE:

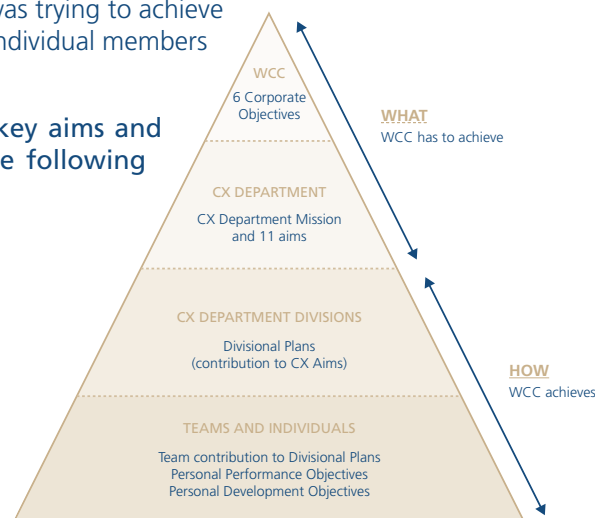
Process maps on their own are of limited value. So, two other important pieces of work were carried out to ensure the planning process could achieve its objectives of delivering a Departmental Plan that supported the Council's aims and which could be supported and implemented by the Department's staff.

Firstly, the Plan itself was re-designed and secondly, a performance planning workshop was designed for all managers who would be involved in producing the plan and managing performance against it.

The structure and content of the Departmental Plan was re-designed to ensure "line of sight" between what the Council was trying to achieve (as stated in its 6 Corporate Objectives) and what individual members of staff could do to contribute.

In order to measure performance against its key aims and actions, the Department defined and uses the following categories of target:

- Outcome targets
(e.g. 20% reduction in drug-related deaths in the County)
- Satisfaction targets
(e.g. 95% customers happy with service by March 05)
- Performance targets
(e.g. 80% of reviews implemented to time and budget)
- Milestone measures
(e.g. New Scrutiny Committees in place by April 05)



The first three are used to define desired levels of quantified performance required either for improvement, or compliance. Outcome targets are often beyond the direct control of the CX Department, but because of their role and activities, they are very relevant. Milestone measures are used for any action that the Department has to have completed by a specific point in time.

The combined use of these four types of target enables the Department to keep a focus on its contribution to the County Council’s objectives, how it operates for the benefit of its customers and how well its internal processes work.

PERFORMANCE PLANNING WORKSHOPS:

All managers attend a half-day Workshop which covers the following topics:

- Understand the departmental business planning process and your part in it
- Set good targets, within your plans
- Understand some principles of performance management
- Manage performance against plans

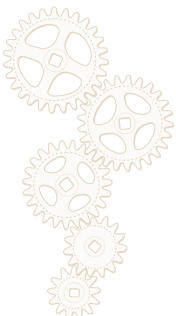
Some of the key principles explained in the workshops are:

- Everything we do in this department should support the County Council’s objectives
- Focus on impact/outcome, not on activity
- Develop a balanced set of indicators
- Targets tell us the level of performance we need to achieve
- Gather performance information as part of ‘the day job’
- Teams and individuals are accountable for achieving the targets
- Use performance information – it should trigger a response

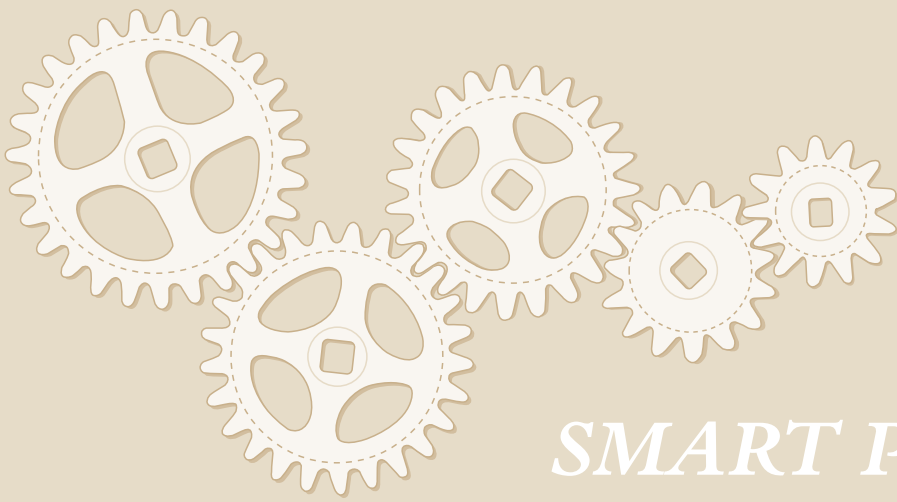
The workshops are highly participative and give people the opportunity to critique parts of the previous year’s plan, in light of their understanding of what “good” plans should look like.

Planning templates have been standardised for use by each of the six divisions within CX Department and part of the Performance Planning workshops is designed to enable people to write good quality plans within their division.

Aim <i>insert number</i>		Action <i>insert number</i>		
<i>Insert description from departmental business plan</i>		<i>Insert description from departmental business plan</i>		
Task	Who will do it?	When?	Other performance targets	Resource to be used
<i>Insert the outcome/performance target or milestone measure from the department business plan - each target/measure in the plan, which is relevant to your division, should have a set of tasks attached to it</i>				
<i>Insert here the tasks you will undertake in order to meet the target/measure specified above. Each task should be entered in a separate row in the table. There is no limit to the number of tasks but you should make them SMART!</i>	<i>Name of the officer responsible for delivery</i>	<i>Insert here the month you will complete the task</i>	<i>Insert here any other targets/measures you will be using at a divisional level to measure success</i>	<i>Quantify the resources you will use in order to deliver each task - these should be both people days and financial</i>



The final elements that have been put in place relate to regular performance reporting, implemented throughout the year. One of the main building blocks is a Lotus Notes database of business objectives which summarises the content of the Plan and progress against it. Line managers are responsible for updating their outcome/performance targets and milestone measures quarterly, providing a Traffic Light assessment, and completing a ‘Direction of travel’ indication, including remedial actions where plans are showing “Red” or “Amber”.



SMART Planning

THE BENEFITS

The benefits are now being delivered as a result of having three key elements in place:

- A clearly defined Business Planning process
- An effective Performance Management framework (with appropriate reporting)
- People with the knowledge, skills and motivation to build effective plans & deliver against them

The Planning process now delivers its outputs of divisional plans and a Departmental Plan on time. It also ensures a wide-scale engagement of staff in the planning cycle.

Importantly, the quality of the plans has significantly improved, with much more focussed and measurable SMART targets, which can now be performance managed.

The final comment should be left to David Carter, County Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive:

"We won't be judged by how good our plans look, we'll be judged by whether we've achieved what we set out to achieve."

ad•*esse*
consulting

FURTHER INFORMATION

To receive regular case studies and articles like this one, you can subscribe to our newsletter 'Actuality'. Contact us at Ad Esse Consulting Ltd.

PHONE: +44 (0) 870 458 6162 EMAIL: seriousfun@ad-esse.com WEBSITE: www.ad-esse.com