



Wiltshire Strategic Partnership, Urban Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing

Summary

The quality of the street scene and urban open spaces contribute significantly to the public's perception of Wiltshire as a good place to live. It also affects public perception of local government.

Wiltshire Strategic Partnership has set a target of increasing customer satisfaction with the urban environment in Wiltshire by 20% by 2014. Through this South West Centre of Excellence sponsored sub-regional project the partners have benchmarked the different approaches to urban environment work and are using the results to streamline their approaches.

General benefits identified so far include:

- Improved understanding of relative costs of service delivery
- Improved understanding of relative standards of service delivery
- A full understanding of which partner delivers the best service
- A full understanding of which partner delivers the most cost effective service
- An ability to highlight best practice amongst the partners

Project Background

The project was planned in two distinct stages. In the first stage, high level benchmarking information was used to make initial comparisons between the four district councils that form the partnership.

Partners examined performance and financial data on urban grounds maintenance, street sweeping, grass cutting, horticultural space and emptying of litter bins. Information was gathered from questionnaires and interviews with partners' own staff, as well as external organisations such as Housing Associations and contractors providing services on behalf of some of the partners.

As part of this initial stage, basic processes in these areas were mapped for each district. Following completion of the process maps a comparison was made across the four districts and a model process was developed taking best practice from each district. The research revealed that Kennet District Council was particularly successful, due to a very efficient work management IT system.



In stage two, the partners had planned to adopt the model process identified in stage one. However, Kennet District Council's work management IT system was based on Lotus Notes, and was therefore not compatible with other authorities' existing systems.

The partners have instead identified a range of alternative approaches.

The second stage of the project now includes funding for each of the districts to help integrate their customer contact system with planned back office systems to achieve more efficient work practices.

In addition, West Wiltshire District Council is exploring joint working with Wiltshire County Council, the procurement of which is being designed in such a way that other districts and other public sector partners could join at a later stage.

Objectives

Stage one aimed to look in detail at the way the partners manage and deliver grounds and cleansing services and identify best practice through a model process. The revised scope of the project's second stage does differ to the original but more accurately reflects individual partner aspirations. It now comprises a series of projects aimed at delivering improvements in each of the partner organisations. The largest of these projects will be the procurement of joint services.

The final objective of this project is to build capability in business process re-engineering, project delivery, partnership working and relationship management that can be applied to other potential joint working initiatives.

Benefits achieved

Following completion of stage one of the project there has been a greater degree of cooperation and joint working between the districts and the county council. A range of general benefits have been identified:

- Improved understanding of relative costs of service delivery
- Improved understanding of relative standards of service delivery
- A full understanding of which partner delivers the best service
- A full understanding of which partner delivers the most cost effective service
- An ability to highlight best practice amongst the partners

Stage two includes funding for each district to help integrate its customer contact system with planned back office systems. A number of non cashable benefits will be realised once this work is complete.

In all of the districts the partnership has seen a measurable improvement in the performance indicators that assess acceptable standards of cleanliness. In West Wiltshire performance has doubled. A coordinated approach has also resulted in improved weed control in all of the districts. While it is not possible to definitively link this improvement to the project, the team believes that just by giving services specific attention through the project, performance levels have been improved.

Critical Success factors and lessons learned

Joint meetings with accountants and technical officers were important to ensure information being utilised was comparative.

Street cleansing information concerning lengths of highways, cleansing schedules and inspections was easy to access and straightforward and districts that had well developed IT systems were able to supply information with little effort required. However, it was difficult to get hold of detailed information in some districts. Several districts were unable to supply accurate volumes of the grass cut which was fundamental to the project and in particular to the project's ability to move forward on procurement.

Although operational managers were aware of the project's aims few of the operational staff knew anything about the work being undertaken. Workshops held within each district outlining the aims and ambitions of the project might have enabled better "buy in".

Risks

In stage one the key risk was around delay to completion, which would affect stage two delivery timescales. To mitigate this the Project Manager reviewed progress weekly. In addition there was a risk that the solution would be rejected by stakeholders. This was mitigated through regular meetings with each stakeholder.

In stage two several risks were considered. The risk that the project team would be unable to implement a solution in time for the 2007 grass cutting season was managed by establishing and agreeing the resources in stage one. The internal recruitment process for the procurement lead started well in advance of stage two, in order to mitigate the risk of a lead not being recruited.

The risk that service standards in stage two would be too expensive for one or more partners was mitigated by developing a range of options with varying outputs and costs.

Further Information

If your authority is interested in learning more about making efficiencies in Street Scene services, the South West Centre of Excellence can help - contact details below.

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