

## Focusing on the needs of citizens



### Client

Warrington Borough Council serves a population of around 194,000 people in the town of Warrington and 18 civil parishes nearby.

### Goals

- ◆ Focus services on the needs of customers to improve customer satisfaction
- ◆ Reduce operating costs, by eliminating process inefficiency
- ◆ Develop the skills and potential of employees

### Charteris' Role

- ◆ Facilitate the development of the council's new customer-focused processes
- ◆ Support employees through process and culture changes
- ◆ Transfer knowledge and skills to the council's in-house team

### Results

- ◆ A clear programme direction that is on track to deliver improvements in customer satisfaction and cost savings
- ◆ Enthusiastic employees who have embraced the changes and are supportive of the programme
- ◆ New skills passed to project managers, enabling them to play an increasing role in the programme

**At a time when all public sector organisations are under pressure to do more with less, Warrington Borough Council is piloting a new approach to service delivery. It is working with Charteris and employing lean principles to help it eliminate waste, save time and focus more directly on the needs of citizens. The programme is expected to lead to both a higher level of customer satisfaction and substantially reduced costs.**

At the close of 2009, Warrington Borough Council - like all local authorities in the UK - faced the prospect of having to make substantial cuts in its expenditure. It resolved to achieve this by eliminating waste, duplication and process inefficiency. At the same time, it also wanted to find a better way of working that would fully utilise the skills and potential of its employees and optimise the value it gained from its existing technology. The council's top priority, however, was to re-focus its services on the needs of the customer.

"We wanted to put the customer at the heart of everything we do," says Kanza Ahmed, a project manager in the chief executive's office. "We were also starting out on a journey to implement lean tools and techniques across the organisation. To achieve our goals, we knew that we didn't just need a process change, but also a culture change."

The council decided to pilot its service transformation programme in Social Transport, a business area that deals with

the provision of transportation for young, old and vulnerable people. This includes school buses, specialist transport for people with disabilities and lifts to day care centres for the elderly.

Prior to launching the project, senior managers from Warrington Borough Council made visits to a number of other progressive councils who were embarking on similar projects to transform their service delivery. One of these visits was to Wiltshire County Council, where Charteris has been engaged in a highly successful programme to focus services on customers.

Managers from Warrington liked what Charteris had achieved. "We liked the fact that Charteris doesn't just arrive with a set of predefined tools," says Ahmed. "The firm has a more flexible way of working with a strong emphasis on knowledge transfer. We knew we wouldn't be shoe-horned into a set approach and would have the opportunity to develop new skills and techniques in house."



“The project has already exceeded our initial expectations in terms of the potential financial savings and the benefits for customers. The project is going in a positive direction.”

**Kanza Ahmed,**  
project manager, chief executive's  
office, Warrington Borough Council



### An environment of trust

The first thing that Charteris did was to bring senior stakeholders together, through a series of workshops. “This enabled us to find a single voice and create a clear direction for the project,” Ahmed says. The workshop also drew out a number of key issues and enabled the project team to address them early on.

Charteris then brought together people who wouldn't normally work together, such as transport staff and adult social care staff, to discuss current processes and ways to improve them. This helped to highlight a range of communication and system issues. It also helped different groups of people to pull together more as a team.

From the outset of the project, Charteris succeeded in developing very positive relationships with operational staff. “The consultants created an environment of trust,” believes Ahmed. “Employees feel comfortable speaking up, talking about issues and sharing ideas. Charteris has empowered the staff, made them feel involved and given them ownership.”

Employees, who, at first, were perhaps a little resistant to the idea of change, are now very enthusiastic about it. “The Charteris consultants have a gentle, supportive approach that gets people onboard,” observes Ahmed. “Operational staff are so keen now that they are starting to push us for the next step and drive the project forwards.”

### Benefits beyond expectations

A key part of the programme is a ‘Voice of the Customer’ exercise, to survey the views of citizens about current service levels. Ahmed explains: “It is vital for us to know exactly what our customers think and need. If we didn't have that conversation now, we would be in danger of designing a service based on assumptions that could be wrong.”

Initially Charteris led these sessions, but gradually the consultants passed on knowledge of their techniques to Ahmed and other managers within the council. Now, Ahmed and her team are able to lead ‘Voice of the Customer’ sessions themselves. “I have acquired new skills and have the confidence to use them for the benefit of the organisation,” she says. “I'm now training other colleagues, so that they too can use the same techniques. This is crucial for the development of this council.”

She adds: “Charteris’ commitment to skills transfer is quite a unique selling point.”

The pilot project in Social Transport is not yet complete, but the early indications are that it will be highly successful. Charteris has presented Warrington Borough Council with its interim results - and the findings are very encouraging. “The project has already exceeded our initial expectations in terms of the financial savings and the benefits for customers,” says Ahmed. “The project is going in a positive direction.”

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