



SHUTTERSTOCK / DARREN WHITT

Everyone loves a sharer

Councils are wrestling with making efficiencies which afford value for money for residents and deal with the expected cuts in revenue support grant, but also building a civil society so that residents are more directly involved in shaping their own outcomes.

The Efficiency Exchange helps councils do this by collaboration to develop ideas and test what works – and what doesn't.

The activities covered are constantly developing. For example, a recent online conference attracted 1,000 participants from more than 10 countries and looked at the following areas – innovations for cuts without cutting services; Total Place; releasing organisational potential; smarter procurement; delivering the Big Society; and strategic commissioning (see below for URL).

Ian Trenholm, chief executive for Windsor and Maidenhead Council – also one of the pilots for the prime minister's Big Society – says about his lean systems approach: 'I suppose the favourite activity, in terms of effectiveness, must be the use of concern – cause – counter-measure charts. It has spread like wildfire throughout the organisation. It is a fantastic way to capture and manage the pent-up ideas that exist in people's heads, but never quite make it on to suggestion forms.'

He adds: 'The voice of local residents is captured as part of the lean intervention. Question one is always, "So what does the customer want?"'

'Sometimes they will articulate that in terms of an outcome, and on occasion,

Rob Whiteman looks at why 10 countries recently tuned in online to share experiences on how the UK is delivering cuts and efficiencies

in terms of a process. We have found, though, that most people are clear what they want to see happen, and the bit in between – process – is just in the way. Lean is about minimising this bit in the middle.

'We haven't really got a separate process for citizens. They are part of the core service design activity.'

Throughout the next period of change, when all public bodies are looking to reduce not just costs but staffing levels, the impact on those currently employed cannot be under-estimated.

Dr Bernd Vogel, from Henley Business School, says: 'If you want to stay highly energised as an organisation, you need to become less dependent on the top. Initiative, taking charge and innovation must not be fed from the top all the time.'

'That means you need to have an environment which creates a proactive sense of urgency everywhere in the organisation. Then institutions will have energisers distributed in the organisation, so it will not be easily drained.'

'How do you do that? A big question. I would suggest you work in three areas of action in your management system – simultaneously.'

'Think strategy. Who is involved in the strategy process? Do they have a system that reveals weak signals in their internal and external customer base? If they in-

volve many people, they will know where the organisation is going.

'Think leadership. Create leadership capacity at all levels not only at the top.

'And think culture. Do you have values which help people to take initiatives, innovate, create flexibility and accountability, or not?'

Paul Tonks from Peterborough City Council looked at portfolio management. He says: 'We map all projects within the council, both those classed as business as usual – run by departments as part of their core work – and those deemed transformational.'

'When we originally mapped all the council's projects a few years ago, it ran into the hundreds, many hadn't been reporting with any frequency, and many had no real measures of success. The resources being deployed against them ran into millions of pounds, so we needed a more effective governance process.'

'We focused on the key projects and some [projects] ended at this point. We reviewed the resource allocation against each project and, in some cases, switched resources around to get the best out of what we had.'

'We moved all of our projects off excel and on to a web-based system so we could have access across the council, and could easily manage and share project updates. All the benefits are set out at the beginning of the project, whether finan-

cial or not, and then managed as an overall portfolio so we can hit our financial and non-financial targets.'

The conference also raised issues relating to 'the old way', in which services were 'commissioned' which was synonymous with buying. However, the new policy, better thought of as 'strategic commissioning', is about agreeing the needs of the area with those in the area, then pooling resources to get those services.

In strategic commissioning, the services aren't necessarily procured but could be delivered in-house. Strategic commissioning provides plenty of scope to deliver cost reductions and improve services. Strategic commissioning also has a massive link with Big Society.

Now, we're looking forward to our next Efficiency Exchange knowledge sharing – giving the community an opportunity to listen to and probe leaders from Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada.

Everyone loves a sharer, why not join in?

The conference can be viewed at www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/436525/home.do. Also see http://www.localgovernmentchannel.com/news/v/the_efficiency_agenda_driving_value_for_money/to/latest_news. Once registered, you can also access the conference via the EFX home page. ■

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