

The Southend Way Organisational Development Programme

Last autumn an independent group of local authority peers left our town reflecting on *'the most impressive employee engagement'* they had seen *'in over 25 years in local government'*. *'In awe of the breath taking culture'* they found here at Southend Borough Council this is the story of how that culture was created using two Organisational Development (OD) programmes.

Each beginning from extremely different starting places:

- 🚩 'At risk of failing' in 2006 – 2011 the only way was up!
- 🚩 Council of the year 2012 - the pinnacle of success.

Whilst delighted to be told we had achieved the ultimate accolade for a council, awarded **LGC Council of the Year** in 2012, an extremely rewarding outcome from our 2006 *'Inspiring'* culture change programme, starting from success still meant we began by listening.

Listening to our people, partners and stakeholders, for their ideas, thoughts and suggestions. In 2011 they had just made 2,700 suggestions, within 5 areas of focus to help:

- 🚩 Behaviours
- 🚩 Capability
- 🚩 Leadership
- 🚩 Shared Purpose
- 🚩 Values

The feedback and engagement with our 2nd culture change programme practically **overwhelmed** us. Collating these suggestions into a coherent plan, of affordable and appropriate interventions, was assisted by the very people who had supported our 1st programme and the workshops that generated these ideas. Our *Change Instigators*.

These volunteer *'change champions'* were used with great effect in our 1st *'Inspiring'* programme, acting as narrators and story tellers. Explaining with credibility the *'heritage'* of the programme and maintaining the continuity of our story. Change Instigators were integral to culture change success, as ambassadors, critical friends and in testing ideas.

As operational people, from both 'front-line' and 'back office' roles, usually not in a management role either, they are always keen to demonstrate *leadership*. Their integrity, authenticity and passion for improvement has always defeated accusations of ***'this is just an HR initiative'*** or ***'this programme won't actually change anything'***.

They sieved through the thousands of suggestions and identified work streams, goals and interventions to move performance forward, *again*.

This draft programme needed support from both Councillors and our senior leadership team, and aligning to our strategic priorities. Our Inspiring programme had created a new 5th aim, to become ***'An excellent organisation'***. A useful and ongoing debate that follows that is, *'Well what is excellent then?'* That question continually drives our OD programme and performance improvement.

The OD programme designed would need to meet the needs of all our stakeholders, it would also need to challenge our strategic leaders and politicians, whilst also engaging them. All during a period of the greatest reductions in budgets ever to occur in local government.

Designing a programme against this complex strategic backdrop was a challenge, when you are already successful the risk of inertia taking hold is also constant.

Three culture change themes emerged, embodying key aims critical to our ongoing success, they were:

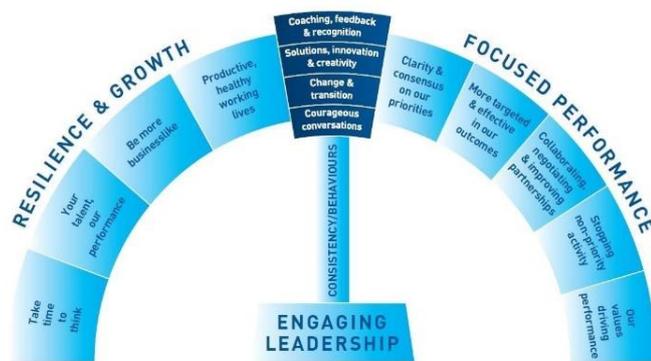
-  Resilience and Growth
-  Engaging Leadership
-  Focused Performance

Our Model

These themes and supporting workstreams, formed a comprehensive programme.

A model to support understanding and engagement with it would enable people to appreciate the synergies of the themes – a strong, highly engaged and skilful team, meeting new performance challenges, with high quality leadership being a ‘keystone’ linking the two.

The Southend Way:
A cultural change programme



Our Brand



Our branding used an air/travel theme aiming to stimulate imagination and create an easily understandable identity for the programme.

Building on the growing success of our partnership with London Southend airport, it focuses us on:

-  Being customer friendly
-  Economy
-  Using technology
-  Getting people ‘where they needed to go’
-  Embodied the transformation our airport achieved

1) Resilience & Growth

Ensuring our people were engaged, strong, flexible and 'developed/grew' at a rate greater than that of the change, was going to be critical:

Take Time To Think – encouraging our people to not just 'run on the hamster wheel' to stop, reflect, review, to access our award winning internal coaching programme and make use of a new intervention of action learning groups. Workshops on Systems thinking, the 21st Century Public Servant and the MD of the Metro Bank talking to us about 'creating fans not customers' were also used as provocateurs.

Your talent, our performance – the workforce development cycle and how performance management supported individual's development were reviewed. The need for a new Learning management System commissioned for all stakeholders has been actioned with new systems to monitor and support L&D.

Be more business-like – Supporting services to reduce costs (£56m 2011-15 in the context of a £124m revenue budget), also improving income to become more entrepreneurial. Identifying opportunities for partnership working and shared services also generated significant procurement savings.

Productive, healthy working lives – We introduced a new resilience programme using a holistic personalised profiling tool, with sessions for Managers and our people. Our public health colleagues contributed their own contributions with Mindful Employer status adopted – staying healthy and well both physically and mentally was critical.

2) Engaging Leadership

We knew that Engaging Leadership had been critical to our previous success. A new leadership development programme with the Real World Group using their 360° feedback tool was introduced building even further on the high standards of leadership we expected.

Managing downsizing (now in a 6th year) risked devastating our employee engagement, four critical workstreams sought to ensure that didn't happen:

Courageous conversations – leaders would need to challenge previous practice, addressing the 'elephants in the room' and dealing with the most difficult business environment facing local government ever would mean addressing difficult issues.

Change & transition – those courageous conversations would focus on change, and critically supporting transition – ensuring our people successfully adapted and managing the impact it would have on them were priorities of our leadership model.

Coaching, feedback & recognition – leaders needed to develop and grow our people, recognising their talents and contributions and focusing them on those areas where they needed to set new goals, develop new skills and recognise new behaviours.

Solutions, innovation and creativity – all of the preceding enablers needed to reinforce that our people would have to create innovative solutions to not only maintain our services, but improve them.

3) Focused Performance

Our final theme needed to wed our changing business strategy, to our people. Informing what needed to be different and how. Arguably the most challenging theme it needed to encourage:

Clarity & consensus on our priorities – SBC was re-aligning reduced resources whilst ensuring those in greatest need were supported. A new conversation was begun with our community titled ‘**Our town our future**’ we are identifying key outcomes for the town going forward.

More targeted & effective in our outcomes – Every act, intervention, service or relationship has been reviewed, ensuring our focus is impact/outcome not procedure. Coaching to outcomes was key - not the process and bureaucracy on the way!

Collaborating, negotiating & improving partnerships – Partners were involved extensively in both programmes, statutory and 3rd sectors were simultaneously undergoing their own resourcing reductions requiring tact and thought.

Stopping non-priority activity – It was inevitable that SBC like all other UK councils may have to stop some services. Innovative practice, increasing income, wider use of volunteers and closer partnership working have all been used to minimise service closures.

Our values drive our performance

Identified in our first culture change programme our values were reviewed in 2011 after being firmly re-confirmed as still relevant.

Programmes promoting ‘**Doing the right thing**’ and team Values workshops were introduced to act as a safety valve to the emerging risks that occur in a downsizing organisation.

Our people repeatedly expressed that if in changing the council, we left behind our values and what they represented, then we would have not succeeded.



Our Values



Outcomes

We like to measure our culture change outcomes from what we actually achieve for Southend, 'Creating a better Southend' is of course our point. Our 2015 LGA *independent and external* Peer group review noted the following:

- 🚩 "The Council has a track record for achieving – **it has a 'can do' attitude**"
- 🚩 "Enduring and purposeful senior management leadership – STOP PRESS we have just won [MJ Senior Leadership Team](#) of the year 2016"
- 🚩 "Successfully managed £66m of reductions (from 2011/12 to date) with minimal negative impact on services"
- 🚩 "Managed a complex political administration offering stability through change"
- 🚩 "Delivered critical service improvements e.g. new waste contract saving £22m over 15 years **and** achieving improved outcomes"
- 🚩 "Some truly amazing achievements through effective partnerships – University & college The Forum, Stobarts and the Airport, local businesses and the Hive etc."
- 🚩 "Creating a clean and prosperous Southend: Hive, Cliffs Pavilion, Chalkwell Park, Cycle network, Garrison development, railway stations, improved road network, forming our own energy company."
- 🚩 "Investors in People Gold achieved in 2015."
- 🚩 We launched our own L&D venue in 2011, **as other authorities were cutting L&D we *invested in ours.***
- 🚩 SBC formed a new partnership with the Pre-School Learning Alliance successfully attracting **£40m (from the Big Lottery Fund) over the next 10 years.**
- 🚩 We have now started work on our £210m Airport Business Park which will create over 7,000 new jobs and transform the surrounding highways and infrastructure over the next few years.