

Preparing Organisational Culture for Shared Services Working

This discussion topic was chosen in September when North Herts was still in the process of considering sharing a number of support services with East Herts and Stevenage. Since then this project has been ceased. It was concluded by North Herts management team that they were unable to satisfy themselves that sharing services as set out in the Draft Business Case was the best option for meeting our local needs and they felt unable to recommend the shared services option to Members. The project was a complex one involving a mixture of services and some of the reasons to not proceed are probably listed below.

The council does however have a good track record of formal and informal partnership working. Some examples of this include; the sharing of individual officers with other councils, sharing contracts to get better value, sharing events such as training, the legal services partnership allowing the sharing of legal expertise and the most significant project yet, the shared internal audit service with Herts County Council hosting the partnership

Among the key challenges to any shared service working arrangement are the following issues:-

- Greater distance between service providers and customers i.e. call centres
- Different ways of working – new systems, processes and increased IT dependence
- Greater emphasis on partnership
- Difference in organisational culture between the users
- Perceived equal shares in the partnership
- Staff in shared services used to working in different cultures
- TUPE/outsourcing and perceived take-over's
- Service level agreements
- Partnership agreements
- Set up costs and get out clauses
- Broader range of priorities
- Increased lead time for the provision of projects
- Centralised services
- Increased workloads on managers

What can we do to prepare for these known changes/challenges?

- Regular open and informative communications
- Good change management including communication, advice, guidance and development and support
- Skills analysis and development activities
- Arrange team building activities
- Document 'as is' processes and current service standards in preparation for new design
- Establish current issues with these processes from a user perspective
- Set up user groups to try to encourage and agree common approaches
- Form cross organisational project teams
- Arrange visits, job swaps and secondments between councils
- Arrange visits to and speakers from existing shared service arrangements
- Gradually introduce new systems of working that will reflect the likely design of the shared service e.g. HR Helpline.