

**Regulatory Services
Leading the Way**



Bedford Borough Council

Background and context: Bedford Borough Council was formed from the existing Borough Council and Bedfordshire County Council.

Population: 156,000

Regulatory services – involvement in the change agenda

The decision to create a new unitary authority based on Bedford Borough Council was challenged by the existing Bedfordshire County Council. This caused delays in the ability to make decisions and affected timescales. Despite this significant setback and as the continuing authority the corporate planning process for the Borough Council continued and involved each service area managing the detail within specified timeframes. The relevant heads of service and service managers from both technical services and trading standards met and created a working group. This working group determined ways forward to create Regulatory Services (which combined the functions between environmental health and trading standards, resilience and corporate health and safety) as part of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Directorate.

Planning for change

The risks identified for regulatory services initially centred on creating a service that would be fit for purpose. As Bedford Borough Council was a continuing authority the risks relating to staffing resources, professional competences etc. mainly related to the trading standards service, corporate health and safety and resilience teams. Through working with the existing Head of Trading Standards, the risks were managed and determined in line with corporate resources. Working together the relevant heads of service and service managers were required to manage this process whilst also dealing with day to day management of their relevant service areas. Generally, the process was effective and resulted in the creation of a more cost effective and efficient regulatory service.

Transforming or transitional change

An initial decision was made by the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards to leave any innovation within the service areas to a later date. This decision was made in order to lessen the impact and disruption to staff and service delivery. In addition, it was believed that the focus should be on ensuring the effective delivery of key services from day one and that modernisation of services would come later.

It is felt that this proved to be a correct decision as it provided time for the new management to get a feel for the new services and, in turn, enabled discussion between different professional areas of work to take place. Areas of synergy were ascertained, between environmental health and trading standards in particular. As a result, a restructuring in June 2010 created better synergy between these two service areas. The aims are to improve service delivery, deal with staff recruitment and retention issues, streamline efficiencies and lead to better regulation. Staff consultation took place with regard to the restructuring of the department to form a more integrated service that delivers value for money.

Policies and procedures have been developed, and continue to be developed as an ongoing process.

Day one was prepared for through the Heads of Service Working Group. In addition, a working group was formed with the management of shared services between the Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire (Central Bedfordshire being the other newly created unitary authority from Bedfordshire County Council). This was necessary in order to create two shared service arrangements (one for laboratory services and one for the Financial Investigation Unit).

Elected members were engaged once the process of local elections had taken place and portfolios identified for the relevant service areas.

Key issues – HR and personnel

Once the appointments of Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) and Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards were made, staff visits and meetings were made to welcome the County Council staff disaggregated from the relevant services to the Borough. This ironed out a number of issues although it would be fair to note that despite all best efforts the disaggregated staff probably still felt vulnerable and uncertain about their future. The issues were further exacerbated by the fact that it initially took some time to co-locate the environmental health and trading standards staff. After this was achieved, it is felt by managers that the issues relating to vulnerability and uncertainty started to reduce significantly.

The process of bringing environmental health and trading standards together enabled the streamlining of existing management arrangements. This occurred in line with relevant process and legal requirements.

Key issues – communications

One to one meetings with staff and staff meetings were used as a communications tool.

Key issues – support services and other issues

The ICT arrangements are still ongoing in some areas. A single data management provider was implemented in mid-March 2010.

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