



Property Division Rates Customer Satisfaction as Top Performance Indicator

Summary

The Audit Commission says the way Derby City Council is run and its services are “Excellent”. Thanks to improvements in its Environment and Culture functions, Derby earned a rating of four stars in its 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

One of Derby’s top-performing divisions is Property Services whose multi-disciplinary team offers a one-stop service to clients who operate and use the Council’s properties. Property Services covers corporate, education, cultural and leisure facilities as well as housing via the Council’s Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO).

The Property Services Division uses a small set of Performance Indicators (PIs) to track key measurements, their PIs show whether they are delivering on their business plan objectives.

Quote

“It’s important not to have too many indicators. You can end up putting too much effort into measuring and not leave enough resources to analyse and act on the results.”

Derek Jinks,
Design Services Manager



Project background

The Property Services Division draws on in-house knowledge and experience to provide design services, property maintenance, estate management, markets, administration and finance.

Its 2006/7 Business Plan covers core and improvement objectives, achievements over the previous year, indicators to meet the main challenges, and an analysis of opportunities and risks. Objectives are drafted following management and staff workshops, held in January.

Property Services takes care to ensure the objectives and targets for each work section are aligned with the 'headline' objectives in the business plan. Monthly section management meetings review progress and individuals are briefed on their role in achieving targets at their appraisals.

Although PIs are widespread where partnering agreements are used in the property industry, Derby has found that its new-build portfolio does not lend itself to partnering. This is because projects tend to be 'one-off' and of insufficient scale to justify the heavy front-end workload and cost of partnering.

What they measure

In addition to its responsibility to report national indicators (such as predictability of cost and time) the division tracks indicators that show how well the business objectives are being achieved.

Benefits achieved

Managers view the customer satisfaction indicators (satisfaction with product and service, derived from the Construction Industry KPI suite) as by far the most important. They measure customer satisfaction in three ways:

- Client satisfaction at handover
- Occupier satisfaction at handover
- Client satisfaction reviewed annually.

The Property Services team is pleased with steady improvements in satisfaction indicators. For example, the indicator "Satisfaction with product" improved from 70% to 85% over the past two years. This PI measures the percentage of customers with a given degree of satisfaction.

It is not unusual for PIs to sometimes falter and the team reads to a dipped score as an alert. Completion of final accounts within 18 months of practical completion is typical of the PIs that trigger allocation of more resources to achieve an acceptable level of service.

Conclusions

It became clear that a lot of PI data was missing or unavailable because:

- Definitions of PIs were inconsistent from one authority to the next
- Managers were not giving PIs a high enough business priority
- Officers perceived that the collection of PI data was just another burden because the business case for PIs was not fully understood.
- Lessons from both good and bad experiences were not shared.

Lessons learned

- Be consistent with data and how you process it.
- Pick a few key indicators that measure your critical success factors and work on improving these. Success with the statutory indicators will follow.

Transferability

Derby is represented in COPROP (Chief Officers in Property) and Octopus (a forum for eight unitary authorities). These are the channels for sharing good practice with officers in other similar Councils.

Recently Derby has benefited from sharing a 'suitability' survey devised by a member of the Octopus forum. The planned outcome is a common methodology that will lead to comparable data, which opens the door to learning from one another.

The future

As an 'Excellent' Council, Derby qualifies for membership of the Innovations Forum. Launched in 2003, the Forum promotes dialogue between central and local government on new ways to deliver better services to local communities.

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