



CONSTRUCTION

Improvements to Services in Midlands Inspired by Mapping Processes

Summary

Midland Service Improvement Group (MSIG) advocates process mapping to help members identify, step-by-step, the activities they need to improve. Meaningful Performance Indicators (PI) can be measured after each process is mapped, understood and agreed by the member authorities. The 13 members share the services of a full-time support officer.

The group sees more consistent internal systems and administration procedures across member authorities, together with comparable PIs, as the key to becoming more efficient. It also uses its collective strength to respond to consultation and it has procured a consultant to prepare a generic Asset Management Plan.

Quote

“The Group aims to share data and best practice between member authorities, and allow officers to use member authorities' ideas to improve their own services.”

James Adams,
Midland Services Improvement Office

Improvement through efficiency



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Project background

MSIG works closely with the County Surveyors Society and has members from some 13 authorities across the Midlands.

A Steering Group, comprising senior officers, provides the direction and the strategic support for the Task Groups to undertake their work. Each Task Group has an Action Plan for identifying performance indicators, areas to process map and examples of good practice. The Task Groups maintain Improvement Logs to identify authorities that make changes to their working practices as a result of being a member of the group. Members share data and outputs via a website.

The Group pays for a support officer. This post frees members' time so that the Task Groups can focus on the key issues. The support officer facilitates detailed comparisons and encourages officers to take good practice back to their own local community. The Steering Group is chaired by Derbyshire, with the chairs of the other Task Groups shared around the authorities. Participation is driven by clear corporate and divisional visions of the member organisations.

The Steering Group's role is to:

- instigate common methods of data collection and analysis
- develop best working practices
- provide a regional input and contact group for other best-value forums at national and regional levels
- assist members to map and improve their processes.

What they measure

The Group collects Best Value PIs and also PIs devised by the Highways Design Club. Members generally consider the current suite of Best Value PIs as a reasonable measure of what highway authorities are doing. There are also some local PIs such as the level of third-party claims. National PIs are easy to collect because authorities have systems in place for the collection of 'statutory' PIs.

The key issue is getting everyone to agree the definitions and methodology. This is generally done by asking a question and getting authorities to answer that question locally. The group then has 13 sets of parameters which are compared and refined into a general set that authorities can collect data against. Evidence supports any differences between authorities. Data is collated in the same manner leaving no doubt over its authenticity.

Process approach

MSIG realised that PIs alone would not be sufficient in making progress, and also use process maps to identify and understand service blockages. MSIG believe that this procedure is the key to improving efficiency.

The diagram overleaf illustrates the processes involved in obtaining and implementing a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). It is surprising to discover that there are 24 activities involving people from eight levels or organisations.

Benefits achieved

Adopting the 'process' approach has enabled the MSIG to review and develop:

- best/good practice processes and narratives
- more consistent internal systems and administration procedures across member authorities
- comparable PIs
- a website where everything they collect and compare is available for officers to check and use
- evidence to support the way an authority works
- active ownership and involvement from all members
- benchmarks and improvement plans.

Lessons learned

The support officer is a vital role because it can facilitate change where it might otherwise not happen.

There seems to be too many PIs at national level and some are not apparently adding value.

While measuring PIs is important, improvements are more likely to occur when the process is mapped and understood.

Participation in improvement groups succeeds where there is a culture of debriefing and internal improvement.

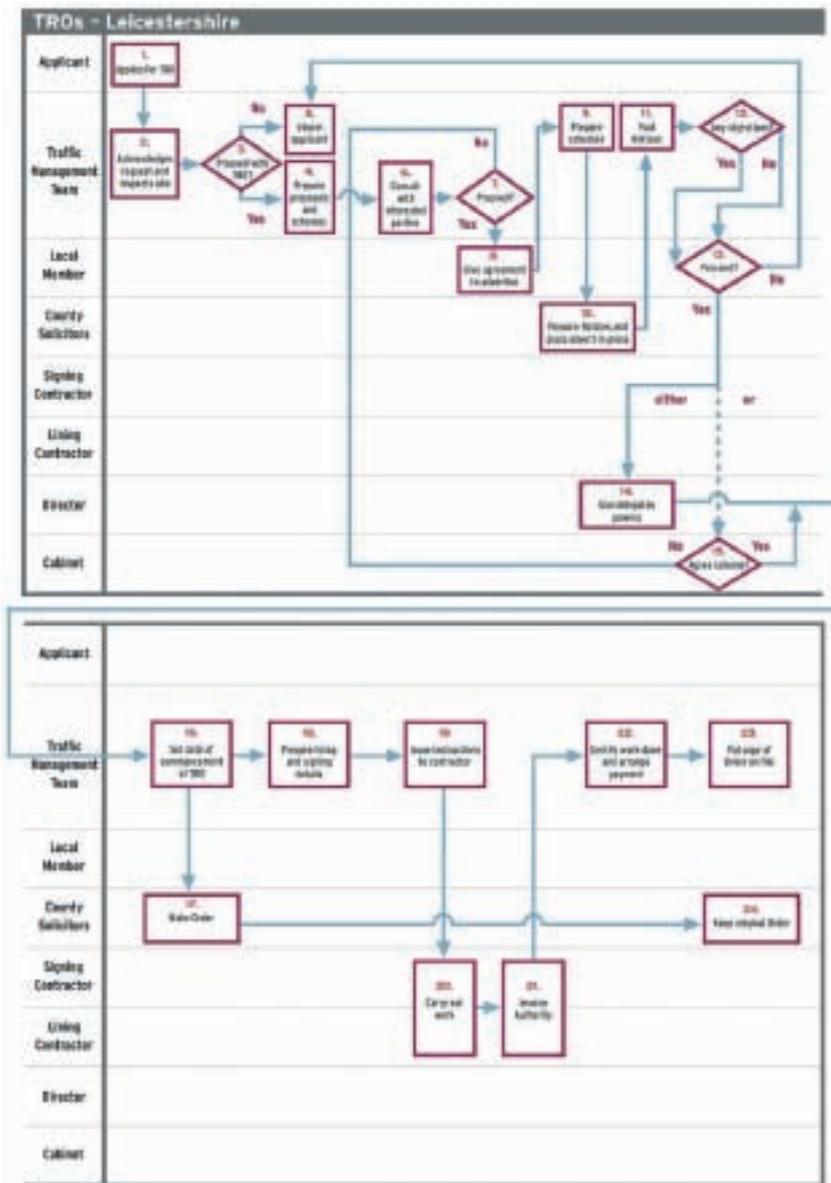
Transferability

Examples of ideas transferred between members are:

- Lincolnshire has based its Puffin Crossing pamphlet on one designed by Warwickshire.
- Cheshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire have adopted Hull's "Condition Survey Techniques" for deciding their replacement programme for traffic signals.

Process Map Example

Process Map for Obtaining and Implementing a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO)



This map is available as a separate download to aid clarity.

The future

MSIG's work continues apace, adapting to members' wishes. Trends are emerging over time from Process mapping and comparative data collection. Members expect to see a greater use of the Group's data and resources over the next few years. MSIG is reviewing Gershon, procurement, the balance between policies and financial backing, and how knowledge of MSIG's work can be better disseminated. It is also driving the development of Asset Management Plans within authorities.

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