



ENVIRONMENT

Improving Ashfield's Street Cleansing Services Achieving APSE Performance Networks Best Performer Award 2005

Summary

The Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) process advocated in the early 1990s saw a remarkable process of transformation commence in local government. CCT allowed Ashfield District Council to cast off the unnecessary bureaucracy that hampered the delivery of key street cleansing services. Unfortunately, such was the competitive nature of the CCT process that valuable front-line resources were lost and council resources rationalised.

During the period of 'Best Value' philosophy Ashfield sought to re-invest in street cleansing, but wanted to ensure that efficiency remained a primary consideration. Since the start of the new millennium Ashfield have used increased resources to tackle key neighbourhood and environmental issues like litter, fly-tipping and dog fouling.

Quote

“Clean streets in Ashfield are a high priority for local councillors; this also reflects the wishes of our residents. We are very proud that we can deliver very good services based on an effective and efficient use of resource.”

Cllr Alan Price,
Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods

Improvement through efficiency



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Project background

Ashfield District Council struggled to meet the increasing challenge of street cleansing following the Compulsory Competitive Tendering process. Litter and fly-tipping offences were increasing and there was a growing demand for additional litter and dog waste bins. Furthermore, satisfaction with cleansing standards remained low and showed little signs of improvement.

Ashfield District Council set out to discover the specific causes for the increase in these issues, and identified the following:

- Restrictive practice at public tips made it hard for people to dispose of their waste responsibly
- The introduction of a £10 charge by the council for the collection of large bulky waste items was not well received
- Lack of public education regards environmental issues
- Poor enforcement protocol
- Low staff morale
- Low funding
- Pervasive lack of respect for the environment, given greater issues with employment etc.
- Major changes in the built up environment, e.g. street furniture making cleaning more difficult and less effective.

Key drivers for service improvement

Knowing the causes of their problems enabled Ashfield District Council to document the following key drivers for service improvement:

- Raise the profile of the street cleansing service
- Make the operatives and machines visible to the community
- Prosecute and fine those who do not respect the law
- Involve the community in respecting the environment - instil ownership in their areas
- Aim to clean resolve issues first time
- Set realistic targets and achieve them
- Inform operatives of work that's done well (and poorly). Infuse ownership.

Objectives

In order to implement the key drivers and improve their service Ashfield deemed that the following changes to their infrastructure and work plan were vital.

- Improve accessibility by introducing a dedicated hotline number
- Improve infrastructure and backend systems
- Increase ownership and accountability for areas of the district
- Increase front-line resources
- Improve equipment and plant used
- Develop education and enforcement strategies
- Increase flexibility of the workforce.

Timetable of improvements

Ashfield District Council implemented their service changes over a period of several years; the following is a list of key dates and achievements.

- Employed more operatives (2000-2005)
- Created a rapid response team to deal with complaints (2001)
- Launched efficient new Mini Sweepers, this was a high visibility improvement that helped raise service profile (2001- 2005)
- New operative uniforms increased our visibility within the community (2002)
- Established a dedicated Street Cleansing Hotline Number (2003)
- Appointed an Education and Enforcement Officer (2003 - 2005)
- Introduced 'Flare System' for monitoring service requests, set completion targets for jobs: 2hr for syringes, 1 day for fly tipping, 2 days for sweeping (2004)
- Defined local areas and appointed teams of operatives to take ownership and responsibility for respective areas (2004)
- Implemented a multiple shift staff rota to ensure equal coverage throughout the week and at key times/dates
- Combined working practices with different sections of the authority to allow for greater co-ordination of services
- Adopted covert camera technology to gather evidence for prosecution
- Organised an enforcement day and issued fixed penalty notices for enviro-crimes
- Developed education packs for local schools and conducted local road shows
- Retrained our workforce NVQ training for workforce
- Developed communication links with local community groups and allowed them the opportunity to contribute to decision making
- Co-ordinated school and community volunteer litter picks.

Benefits achieved

The response to issues such as fly-tipping and syringes has improved dramatically, Ashfield District Councils Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) rating for street numbers below acceptable standard is down to just 10%, far better than the national average of 22%.

Whilst Ashfield have increased their resources, they have remained extremely efficient in doing so and have kept their cost per capita low, whilst maintaining a high level of cleanliness. In 2005 Ashfield were recognised as the APSE Performance Network's Best Performer.

Ashfield's impressive performance was also recognised in a recent Audit Commission inspection, which found that their Street Cleansing Services offered a 'good, two-star service with promising prospects of improvement'.

Critical success factors and lessons learned

The decision by Ashfield's elected members to make street cleansing a top priority in the authority was key to their success. Member support, as well as that from senior management, ensured any barriers to service improvements were temporary. Understanding the key problems and identifying how they could tackle them was also key to their significant improvement. Clearly, the urge to increase investment could have allowed inefficiencies to creep in, but a focus on pushing resources to the front-line, where they were needed most, allowed Ashfield District Council to keep their cost base in check.

Ashfield District Council refuses to rest on its laurels and has identified further opportunities for improvement. Client satisfaction with service delivery remains below their target, accordingly a focus on marketing the service is required. This has been made a key priority for the authority and they will be approaching this issue in a methodical fashion as per their previous achievements.



Pictured from left to right are:
Will Huggins (Ashfield District Council),
Richard Sheward (Ashfield District Council),
Edd de Coverly (Ashfield District Council),
Adrienne Lawler (Sky News),
Cllr Alan Price (Ashfield District Council),
Andy Diver (Ashfield District Council),
Bill Buckley (Ashfield District Council).

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