

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30th MARCH 2017

Operation of the Vanguard Method

To consider and comment on the following issues:

- To consider how the Vanguard/ system thinking methodology operates and how it has been used within the Housing division and other areas to improve service delivery to Council tenants.

Reasons:

- This item was requested by the Committee at its meeting held on the 20th July, 2016 and will provide Members with information on the operation of the Vanguard System review used by the Housing Division to evaluate its performance in letting and returning Council housing properties to use.

To be referred to the Executive Board / Council for decision: NO

Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder:

Cllr. Linda Evans (Housing)

Directorate: Communities	Designations:	Tel Nos. / E-Mail Addresses:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 30th MARCH 2017

Operation of the Vanguard Method

What is the Vanguard method and how has it been used in Carmarthenshire?

- The Vanguard method is an approach now being used widely across the public sector as organisations seek ways of responding to the on-going challenges of shrinking financial resources and ever increasing service demands and expectations.
- The methodology and approach provides opportunities to create sustainable and transformational change in organisations through re-designing their services around the needs of the customer.
- As the method requires organisations to ‘think’ differently about how they deliver services and usually involves all levels of the organisation in this process; it also provides a powerful opportunity to create long term cultural and behavioural change within those organisations.
- Vanguard are an external consultancy who were initially engaged by Carmarthenshire in 2012 to support a service improvement initiative in the housing voids service. However, it was quickly recognised that this was a way of working that could be used to underpin the principles and approach being adopted via the Council’s newly launched TIC (Transform, Innovate and Change) Programme.
- The Vanguard method also involves the transfer of skills and building of capacity within in-house resources so that the method can be deployed to other parts of the organisations in a sustainable manner. Following two further interventions with support from Vanguard, the approach has subsequently been rolled out to other parts of the organisation via the Council’s TIC Team.
- To date, the team has supported on over 12 Vanguard style reviews across the authority which have realised significant benefits in terms of improvements to both the quality and efficiency of those services.

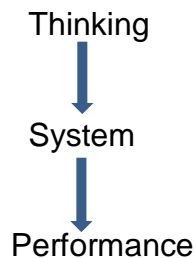
What does it look to achieve?

- Key to the Vanguard approach is ‘*understanding the needs of your customer*’ and then designing services ‘*to best meet those needs*’
- Doing ‘*what matters to the customer*’ and ‘*doing those things ‘right first time*’, improves the customer experience and quality of service, but costs can also reduce as time is not being spent dealing with customer queries/complaints and undertaking unnecessary re-work.

- The Vanguard method also requires managers and their teams to undergo a 'normative' experience, and in particular to experience the service from a customer perspective. This is an important stage in the process, as it helps staff to understand the need for change, so that they are then in a better position to develop and implement new ways of working.

What is the theory underpinning the approach?

- The method was invented by the occupational psychologist, John Seddon, who began his career researching the reasons for failures of major change programmes. Based on what he learned, he developed this method for change, which he describes as a combination of 'systems thinking' "understanding how work works" - and intervention theory – "how to change it".
- The Vanguard method encourages organisations to challenge their 'thinking' about the way services are designed and delivered, as a radical change of thinking is usually required to deliver fundamental, sustainable change in these services.



How does it work in practice?

Vanguard interventions usually involve 3 stages :

- 1) '*Check*'- to understand how the service is currently operating and why it's working in that way.
- 2) *Redesign* – involves a test/experiment of new ways of working
- 3) *Roll-in* – new way of working is made normal across the service.

The most important part of the process is usually the '*check*' stage – this usually involves groups of managers and staff who are encouraged to speak to staff and customers to find how the service is 'actually' operating, rather than how they 'think' it is operating.

The 'check' stage will aim to establish the following :

- *What is the purpose of this service in customer terms?*
- *What are customers asking of us (demands) and how often?*
- *How well are we responding to these demands?*
- *What is the flow of the work? How much is value and how much in the process is waste?*
- *What are causes of the waste (system conditions)?*
- *What was the thinking that created these system conditions?*

The outcomes of the check are usually the production of a new 'purpose' for the service and key operating principles that will underpin the development of some new ways of working which the service may want to test (re-design) before rolling in (making normal) across the rest of the service.

Impact in Carmarthenshire

- This approach and methodology is a significant move away from the traditional approach to undertaking service improvement/efficiency projects within the authority. Although resource intensive in terms of staff and time commitment, it has been proved to work and deliver results across all of the services where it has been deployed.
- Many of the staff involved in projects which have adopted this approach have found the experience to be highly motivating and rewarding. Some have also gone as far to say that they have found it to be liberating experience as it has provided an opportunity to challenge and review outdated processes and procedures which often compromised their ability to undertake their professional role.
- Over 300 staff across the organisation have now some awareness or knowledge of the principles that underpin this approach through the work of the Transform Innovate and Challenge Programme and Team.
- The approach has been adopted across 12 service areas in the Council to date and there is clear evidence to demonstrate that it is improving the quality of services delivered and enabling those services to be delivered in a more cost effective way.

Case Studies – examples of where we have used this approach.

1. Empty Council Properties (Voids)

- Vanguard Consultancy was initially engaged to support a review of the housing voids service during 2012. We reviewed the process from having a set of keys returned from a tenant to them being handed over to the next tenant to identify what could be improved in the way we worked so that a new process could be designed.
- A project team of officers from Housing Services, Building Services and our Customer Service Centres spent 5 days walking through the then process to see where there was waste and talking to existing and prospective tenants to see what matters to them.
- They identified the purpose of the process, *“To provide a home that suits my needs”* and agreed which steps were crucial to the re-letting process and how to measure performance in an effective way.
The Team designed a new simpler process which they tested on some new demands i.e. new empty Council properties for a period of 8 weeks. They then looked at what had been learnt, any problems, what had gone well and new performance measures so they could look at implementing the new process across all voids within the county.
- A New Homes Team was established in June 2013 which is working to the new process on a county wide basis. Prospective tenants now view a property as soon as it becomes vacant and are supported to make choices regarding decoration and adaptations before they move in. They are also offered welfare advice.

- This means a much better experience for our new tenants. We're also not wasting time and money decorating the home, only for the new tenant to move in and redecorate it to their own taste.

What impact has it had?

- Overall average re-let times have dropped from 120 days pre review to 60 days. Standard void turnaround is now under 25 days and last year 23 properties were let within a day. Rent loss has been reduced by more than £500,000 in the 3 years following the review (2015/16). Trends are continuing to improve during the current year and year end data will be available in April 2017.
- Last year around 50% of new tenants completed satisfaction surveys and 99% of them rated the service as good to excellent.
 - *"Had property 3 days after viewing."*
 - *"Service very good, very happy with help. Very helpful and very impressed."*
 - *"Provided a clean and safe house for my son and myself. Given me all the information I need to complete my tenancy agreement."*

What does it mean to the Team?

- *"The experience of reviewing the service was challenging but has been immensely enjoyable. Now that we are working in a new way it is great to be trusted to make our own decisions and to be able to use our initiative to meet tenant's needs. It is really rewarding to hand over the keys to a property knowing you have met that person's expectations and they are happy with their new home."*
- The TIC Team supported a further review of the new process in November 2014 with the new Team to "check" whether or not it was still delivering what matters to new tenants. The New Homes Team also re-check their process on a regular basis and the Team is looking to implement some further changes to drive further improvements over the coming year.

2. TIC Development Control Review

- Committee Members were given a presentation about the TIC Programme and the work of the TIC Team at the committee meeting on 3rd November 2016 (link below) which highlighted a review of Development Control during June 2014.

[Community Scrutiny agenda and minutes 3.11.16](#)

- The key drivers for the review were to reduce the number of complaints/upheld being received and to improve quality and customer experience.
- TIC supported a team to undertake a systems thinking review of the planning application process over 6 days during February 2014. The team included staff from administration, registration, planning officers, team leaders as well staff from enforcement, highways and transport. They looked at the process from a customer experience from receipt of an application to notification of the decision and spoke to agents, applicants and Elected Members about what matters to them.
- They learnt from previous applications – what worked and what didn't and identified the service's purpose, *"To provide a clear and valued service to manage development in a timely and consistent manner"*. They identified the value steps in the process – initial enquiry → case management → decision and realised the value in better communication both internally and with our customer and other stakeholders.

- The team started work straightaway on some “quick wins” they had identified to improve case management and remove waste. A re-design team was set up in Llandeilo which pulled in internal and external reps from Transport, Streetscene, Conservation, Legal and Natural Resources Wales. They took a case by case approach testing new ways of working on different categories of application, learning each time. The new process focusing on pre-application advice and customer engagement was initially piloted in the Llandeilo from November 2014 and subsequently rolled out across the county.

What impact has it had?

- End to end times for planning applications have reduced by half.
- The quality of applications has improved.
- Complaints upheld/Refusals/appeals have all reduced.
- Costs of the service reduced by over £65k.
- Customers/agents and staff are happier with the new ways of working.
 - *“Pleasure to deal with the officer, very helpful and he explained things clearly and responded quickly to my emails”*
 - *“The process was far quicker than I thought it would be”*
- A re-check of service undertaken in May 16. They found good progress made in respect of consistency, accessibility and quality of applications. They identified key risks impacting on service principles/performance. E.g. Affordable housing requirement, new pre-application legislation and staffing levels. A Service Improvement Board has been put in place to manage risks and drive further improvement.

TIC Programme

- For further information about other TIC projects using the Vanguard approach, the link below leads to the TIC Programme Annual Report 2015/16 and Business Plan 2016/17 presented to the Policy & Resources Committee on the 14th July 2016.

[Policy & Resources agenda and minutes 14.07.16](#)

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

NO

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed: Robin Staines Head of Housing & Public Protection (TIC Head of Service Lead)

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NONE	NONE	YES	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE

3. Finance – The benefits of the TIC systems think approach are being realised as many of the projects have started to deliver significant improvements in terms of service quality, customer experience and financial efficiencies. To date, the TIC approach has assisted in identifying, or is helping to deliver, approximately £6.4m of efficiency savings.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below:

Signed: Robin Staines Head of Housing & Public Protection

1. Local Member(s) – N/A
2. Community / Town Council – N/A
3. Relevant Partners – N/A
4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – N/A

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW:

Title of Document	File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
TRANSFORM, INNOVATE & CHANGE (TIC) - PROGRAMME UPDATE	Community Scrutiny agenda and minutes 3.11.16
TRANSFORM, INNOVATE & CHANGE (TIC) PROGRAMME ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16 AND BUSINESS PLAN 2016/17	Policy & Resources agenda and minutes 14.07.16