

# Case Study

## Canterbury City Council

### Transforming Planning Services

#### In brief:

- In an attempt to meet all the major challenges facing local government, Canterbury City Council established a transformational framework and created an internal team that would conduct future service reviews using Lean Systems Thinking methodologies.
- Alexander was selected as the preferred partner to support Canterbury's Transformation Programme; the internal team was trained on how to use Lean Systems Thinking methodologies and a project manager was then selected from the team to lead two review teams that undertook Lean reviews within the Planning Service.
- Planning application and enforcement processes had a large degree of non-value adding activities; the redesign of the above processes resulted in increased customer satisfaction, effective targeting of resources and enhanced communication between the separate teams with clear lines of accountability.
- The capacity created by the opportunities equates to over 5.5 FTE worth of staff time as well as around £30k of miscellaneous savings such as printing. This combined with additional revenue from charges (£21k) creates a total benefits value of £194,000.

#### Think with us ...

If you're reading this, then you're probably just like us, always curious about new ways of working.

The aim of our case studies is to promote sharing of knowledge and from it **thought leadership**. We hope this study helps you think through and explore some of the issues we now face.

**Your questions and feedback are welcome.**

**Call us on 023 8022 5020 or email [kay.bocock@alexander-ecc.com](mailto:kay.bocock@alexander-ecc.com).**



### Background situation

Canterbury City Council has established a transformational framework through which it will meet the major challenges facing local government. Their focus has been on effective resource management and the systematic review of services.

Central to these workstreams has been a programme to move to shared services and the comprehensive review of retained services. The key review aims are to:

- Shape services around what customers need and value – and hence improve their service experience.
- Introduce a wider choice in terms of customer access that is more efficient and cost effective.
- Reduce the overall cost of delivering services.

### Their approach to service review

Canterbury wanted to create an internal team who would have the capability to conduct future service reviews using Lean Systems Thinking methodologies. They intended to complete an initial programme of service reviews which would build this capability and capacity and also deliver some early successes for the review programme.

One of the first reviews would focus on the Planning Service and the project objectives agreed were to:

- Deliver an increasing number of services through the website or through the Contact Centre (channel shift).
- Design processes to allow faster determination of an application without affecting the quality of the decision and to eliminate duplication and delay.
- Reduce the annual cost of the service by £25k through improved productivity and mobile working.
- Increase income by £20k through new initiatives.
- Improve pre application advice.
- Agree a standard process for enforcement cases where resolution times were improved.
- Reduce the number of existing unresolved enforcement cases.
- Optimise the use of the existing ICT and mobile working systems.

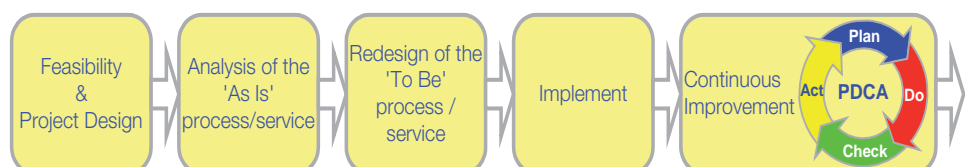
### Working with Alexander

Alexander had been selected to support Canterbury's Transformation Programme. The consultancy team provided Lean Systems Thinking training to the internal team at Canterbury, through a series of practical workshops and supported learning within a real service environment.

A project manager was then selected from this team and two review teams were established to undertake Lean reviews within:

1. The processing of planning applications.
2. Enforcement activities.

The participation of service staff members was central to the subsequent reviews which followed the key Lean phases as illustrated below:



Supported by the Alexander consultancy team, the review team members, during the Analysis phase completed the following:

- Workshops to map the 'As Is' process steps.
- Analysis of waste and demand for services.
- Completed customer journey mapping and gained additional customer insight by conducting a customer survey using RATER.

### The As Is findings

The application process was found to consist of 225 separate steps of which 50% were classified as waste/non-value adding. Findings concluded that:

- The validation process is long and has significant waste activities – over 35 steps are taken before a Planning Officer sees the application.
- There was a high level of checking throughout the processes.
- Systems were not utilised effectively.
- Current layout drives silo working and transport waste.
- The Committee decision process takes significant effort and resource.

Enforcement processes similarly had a large degree of non-value adding activities caused by:

- Significant time is spent checking officer decisions and direction – most cases have at least 2 reviews, some as many as 12.
- A lot of resource is used to process all cases. Around 60% of cases result in 'no action taken', but with typically 150 still live in the system for over a month, this 'work in progress' takes time to manage and prevents clarity of priorities.
- Measures are poor, there is little outcome data – the focus is on front-end turnaround targets, not resolutions. This is born out by the evidence which shows that 93% of complaints received an acknowledgement in 3 working days, but only 53% were informed of progress after 10 days.

Reflecting on the 'As Is' position, the team then agreed the principles they would use to redesign the process. These included:

- Use electronic means wherever possible, exploiting technology including website.
- Right first time to minimise reliance on checking.
- Tasks based on skills not history.
- Proportionate response with tasks completed in good time.
- Clear accountability/responsibilities with staff empowered to make decisions.
- Visual management techniques to support performance management arrangements.
- Cost effective, customer-focussed, consistent processes.
- One place for all information.

The team then moved on to complete the redesign of processes. These were examined to find where they could fail and what minimum set of control measures should be designed into the process where appropriate, including intelligent (mistake proof) web forms to capture information at the start and deliver clear policies around decision making.

Alexander provided a very professional and responsive role during the reviews. Their expertise in other similar situations provided a good mix of challenge and relevant approaches, which could be applied to our service improvements.

Ian Brown,  
Head of Planning and  
Regeneration Services

### Benefits of redesign

The benefits from the new processes included:

- Enhanced communication between the separate teams with clear lines of accountability.
- Increased self-serve facility for customers.
- Effective targeting of enforcement resource.
- A controlled point of access for customers via the internet and Contact Centre to reduce failure demand on officers and improve the advice given.
- The development of meaningful KPIs to drive the implementation of these improvements.

### Implementation and realisation of benefits

A detailed implementation plan was developed by the team and the Project Sponsor which will be overseen by the new Deputy Head of Service. The savings will be realised through changes to the process that focus on delivering value adding activities. In summary, the savings will be realised through the following changes:

- Planning Guidance – embed the channel shift to website (Anticipated savings of 515 hours of officer time).
- Fee income from new charges delivering £29k p.a.
- Earlier involvement of planners in applications resulting in a 50% reduction in error rate and a savings of 250 hours p.a.
- Fewer minor applications determined by committee resulting in a 10% time saving on committee preparation time.
- Improve online advice for customers resulting in improved application quality, less refusals and, as a result, a reduction in appeal management.
- Improved use of Accolade/Anite.
- More focussed neighbour letters resulting in a 50% reduction in the cost of letter production.
- Increased integration of Development Control and Planning Enforcement activity resulting in savings of 500 officer hours per annum.
- Stop minor enforcement cases saving over 980 hours of officer time.
- Improved caseload prioritisation and management:
  - o Close cases at right time – saving 104 hours of officer time.
  - o Remove case review/checking - saving 150 hours of officer time.

Additional non-quantified savings can also be driven by channel shift, reduction in failure demand at the contact centre and through the right first time focus. Customer satisfaction will also improve by eliminating waste, driving down lead time, focusing on expedient activities and driving appropriate and proportionate reactions to requests and complaints.

### Implementation and realisation of benefits

The capacity created by the opportunities equates to over 5.5 FTE worth of staff time as well as around £30k of miscellaneous savings such as printing. This combined with additional revenue from charges (£21k) creates a total benefits value of £194,000.

**Alexander is an independent change management consultancy that specialises in strategy alignment, performance management and improvement.**

**For further information, please contact Kay on 023 8022 5520 or email [kay.bocock@alexander-ecc.com](mailto:kay.bocock@alexander-ecc.com).**



Both teams rose to the significant challenge and through the hard work and real honesty of their effort were able to discover quite radical changes to how they deliver the service which they may not have achieved otherwise.

Alun Davies,  
Alexander Consultant



[www.alexander-ecc.com](http://www.alexander-ecc.com)

## Alexander People - what we believe

Alexander people are business people who are passionate about public services. We take what's good from the private sector and shape it to meet the demands and challenges of public service. So when we look at the world and see what's wrong, our instinct is not to complain about it, it's to do something about it. This means that, when we look at our own company, we don't just look at its performance as a business; we look at the difference we make to changing public services and society for the better.

The people who manage and deliver public services today face huge challenges. They deserve someone to think with and people who can help to do the things they haven't the capacity to do themselves.

That's why we **engage** and connect with the people at all levels in public services who face these challenges.

Then we help them **challenge** the way things are.

So that they can deliver real **change** for the better.

That's what we do: **Engage. Challenge. Change.**

There's a belief that, without a profit motive, there isn't enough to drive public services to be better. We say that the stakes couldn't be higher. For people who work in and with public services, if we fail, society fails. **We believe this is the most powerful driver there is.**

## We work with...

**Alexander works with people & organisations in the public sector, including:**

- District Councils
- Unitary Authorities
- County Councils
- Housing Associations
- Police Services
- Health Services

If you'd like to talk about how we can help you, call us on 023 8022 5520.

## Alexander People - what we do

### Knowing where to go and how to get there

- Strategic & organisational review and diagnosis
- Shared vision
- Transformation strategy
- Transformation blueprint
- Stakeholder engagement
- Change readiness
- Communications

### Delivering customer value with less resources

- Lean Systems Thinking
- Service transformation, design and improvement
- Shared services
- Function and service reviews
- Options appraisals and business case development

### Enabling change to happen

- Programme and project management
- Change Management and benefits realisation
- Building capacity to change
- Skills and knowledge transfer

### Making change sustainable

- Leadership development
- Management development
- Continuous improvement strategy and culture
- Skills and knowledge transfer

## Alexander - contact us

Telephone 023 8022 5520

Email [talktous@alexander-ecc.com](mailto:talktous@alexander-ecc.com)

2 City West

Millbrook Road East

Southampton

SO15 1HN