

case study



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Stevenage Borough Council

Topic: Investors in People Profile



Background

Size:	850 people
Sector:	Local government
Location:	Stevenage, Hertfordshire
Status:	Achieved the Investors in People Standard in 2000; achieved Profile in 2006

The organisation

Stevenage was established as the first 'new town' in Britain in 1946. One of nine proposed satellite new towns specifically needed to provide housing for post war Londoners, it was originally designed for a population of 60,000 within the boundary of 10 square miles. However, the plan was modified to allow for the expansion of the population to 100,000 by the end of the twentieth century. The current population is estimated at 80,000 and is served by Stevenage Borough Council.

Initially managed by the Stevenage Development Corporation, the Council took over the management responsibility in 1980. The Council currently has 39 elected members. There are four scrutiny and review panels along with the scrutiny and overview committee and five best value panels. This structure clearly reflects the Council's new town ambitions of responding to community needs by delivering a number of services beyond its statutory duties. It is supported by long serving members who are strongly committed actively engaged in the community.

- **Successful launch of customer service centre**
- **Continuous improvement of employees**
- **Operational costs have been reduced by at least £100,000 per annum**

"Investors in People underpins our efforts to become an excellent authority and is a key strategy through which the Council will become known as a 'good people' organisation."

Ian Paske, Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Council



The challenge

One of the authority's key challenges over recent years has been tackling the shortage of affordable local housing, and by creating an arms length management organisation, Stevenage Homes Ltd., the Council hopes to see an increase in the supply of social housing in the future. A third of Council employees will transfer to Stevenage Homes over the coming year, and this large scale re-deployment of staff to the new organisation will impact many areas of the Council's services. The Council's approach to people issues was therefore ready for further challenge.

Having successfully been through a number of reviews against the Standard, the Council concluded that they wanted to go further. Profile offered a way of benchmarking its approach to people issues against the best in the country.

Chief Executive, Ian Paske, is a strong supporter of the Standard and viewed it as a key strategy through which the Council would become known as a "good people" organisation. By opting for Profile, Ian was convinced that the Council's efforts to become an excellent authority would be realised.

The strategy

The comprehensive, business-focused appraisal an organisation undergoes as part of a Profile assessment appealed to the Council because it was looking for something that would get beneath the surface of the organisation. At the same time, it was felt that they would derive in depth feedback into strengths and weaknesses. Such understanding was seen as fundamental to prioritising actions effectively, within tight financial constraints, and then maximising the impact of any investment. The Profile framework was also seen as a way of linking the Council's overall HR strategy to what happens 'on the ground'.

The Council's Recruitment and Training Manager, Ian Cawthra, explains that "The current Investors in People Standard tells you if you have reached the level or not, it does not tell you whether you're moving forward. Over the next couple of years Profile will enable us to judge the distance we have travelled as an organisation."

According to the Council the post-assessment Profile report they received exceeded expectations. The information it contained related to clear and specific actions. Ian Cawthra believes that the assessment report made the action planning much more straightforward. "We now have a clear and actionable way forward.

With Profile the action plan almost writes itself. For example I could identify six quick wins that would take the organisation 75 per cent of the way to meeting the next Profile level. Also, as the indicators are interlinked, you could see how the actions recommended would have knock-on positive effects."

Profile also highlighted where employees knowledge of procedures and systems was weak and needed further support. This was specifically identified as something that would have been overlooked using the Standard.

The results

While difficult to prove a causal link between using Profile and improvements in service delivery, the Council strongly believes that Profile has helped the organisation to successfully implement significant changes such as the launch of its new Customer Service Centre. This innovation has in turn already improved customer satisfaction and reduced operational costs by approximately £100,000 per annum.

Using Profile has really helped the Council demonstrate to local authority inspectors and others its commitment to developing the Council's people. In particular it shows the organisation's commitment to systematic continuous improvement against a highly-regarded externally-accredited quality standard.

The Council firmly believes that Profile has already been helpful in identifying and meeting the challenge of migrating a third of employees to Stevenage Homes. While organisational change is always likely to cause concern to employees, the principles of Profile have helped demonstrate the Council's commitment to implementing change sensitively and keeping people fully apprised of developments.

"Not only has Profile given us some important insights into how we can improve as an organisation, the assessment has been excellent value for money," says Ian Cawthra. "I am aware of consultancies who would charge £25,000 to do the same type of assessment. Profile has now become part of our culture, I am confident that we will continue to learn from it and that ongoing assessment will be the key to our future success."

