The Vale of Glamorgan Council’s visionary “OneVale” programme aims to transform the authority to achieve excellence in service delivery and customer focus, and become one of the best Councils in the UK.

This ambitious programme is driven by the national and local priorities to deliver better quality information, more empowered staff to act on that information, and a focus on delivering joined-up customer services. In addition, the budgetary pressures arising from the “Making the Connections” efficiency agenda require a greater focus on cost management, particularly on procurement and performance management. The Council’s current systems and processes can be significantly improved for all these purposes. The OneVale programme, is a fully integrated approach and an understanding that the “soft” issues such as Customer Services cannot possibly succeed unless accompanied by a “hard” approach to the systems and processes that enable them to be delivered effectively.

The essence of the OneVale programme is to put service users at centre stage, enabling customers to make sense of the maze that is public service provision by enabling them to deal with a variety of services in one contact - “one and done”. As a result, information and services will be consistent, faster and accessible to all their customers.

To ensure the programme succeeds and delivers all of the expected benefits, the Council appointed a strategic partner to provide the expertise the Council currently lacks. A very important element of this partnership was the transfer of skills to Council staff so that in the longer term the Council will have the capability to manage all aspects of the programme ourselves.

In practical terms, the Council has developed a number of core process streams that will shape the structure of the Council’s delivery of services. Key components of the programme are:

- The implementation of the Contact Centre and the One Stop Shops (underpinned by the implementation of the Customer Relationship Management system).
- Revised website and intranet content.
- Business process re-engineering.

The key aims are to ensure a single view of a customer, management information to analyse demand for services, queries and performance, efficient and fast processes to fulfil customer service requests and expectations, flexible communication methods that make the Council’s services more accessible, full systems integration between the Contact Centre (“Contact OneVale”) and the rest of the organisation.
However, for the Council, the OneVale programme is much more than a Contact Centre. It's about shaping its services and delivery mechanisms to meet the needs of its customers in the 21st century and building in processes to sustain the benefits, which includes effective resource management such as workforce succession planning. With this in mind, the Council have incorporated the lessons learned from other contact centres experiences in developing effective mechanisms for recruitment and training of staff to deliver the front end of the Council’s business. This in itself has been a pivotal learning experience that that will be shared across the authority to support the successful implementation of the OneVale vision.

The key challenges for the Council were:

- Stakeholder engagement and communication
- Training and development

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The impact of the OneVale programme on Council staff will be significant. Most staff across the Council will need to participate in changing working practices, by adopting new business processes and systems and, in some cases, different roles. The Council is however emphasising that the programme is being delivered in house, and is giving existing staff the opportunity of applying first for the new posts being created. They have also taken the view that redundancies will not be required to deliver the savings associated with the programme. As a result it is hoped that staff view the programme positively, and see the following benefits:

- Having less bureaucracy and administration.
- Being more productive and finding work more rewarding.
- Accessing reliable management information.
- Being confident of making sound decisions.
- Taking advantage of new career opportunities.
- Developing new skills.
- Having easier access to learning.
- Being able to share knowledge.
- Feeling valued and empowered under the new arrangements.

A structured communications programme was developed and some of the initiatives include regular staff briefing sessions by the Chief Executive and OneVale Programme Director, a OneVale Intranet page which hosted a significant amount of information to view, a OneVale staff newsletter (“The One”) e-mailed to staff on a regular basis, staff road shows on specific OneVale themes, OneVale features in the corporate “Changing Times” newsletter (issued quarterly) and regular presentations at management conferences.
The implementation of “Contact OneVale” was the first tangible sign of change that the OneVale programme would bring about for the Council and its customers. It is crucial that this implementation would be viewed as a success to maintain confidence in the programme as a whole. Critical to the success of “Contact OneVale” would be the readiness of Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) and back office staff.

The training team were presented with 3 main challenges:

- Scope and complexity of the subject matter to be handled by “Contact OneVale”.
- Implementation of new IT software supporting new business processes.
- “Contact OneVale” represented a change in the way the Council does business with its customers and with all of the initial staff of the Contact Centre being recruited from internal departments the values of the department and the Customer Service Representatives had to reflect this.

Recognising importance of the implementation, the Council invested in a seven week induction programme for new Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) to address, not only the hard IT skills and subject matter, but also the development of customer services skills and agreed values and behaviours that would form the foundation of delivery of customer service excellence. Key aspects of the induction programme were:

- Focus on the development of customer service skills.
- Development of agreed values and behaviours.
- Involvement of service area staff on whose behalf the services would be delivered.

The involvement of service area staff not only supported the development of product knowledge but also served to break down any barriers that might develop between front line and back office staff and reduce the risk of any friction developing during a period of rapid change.

Crucially the initial training would be supported by a performance management regime focused on Quality Assurance and skills development, with no productivity targets, such as Average Handling Time or Calls Handled. The focus is on developing the skills and behaviours, which enable CSRs to handle calls effectively and efficiently.

The training of staff in “Contact OneVale” was matched by an extensive programme of training for back office staff who would receive requests for services from the Contact Centre. The communications programme helped prepare the ground for the changes to be implemented. However, it was important for service area staff to be able to use new IT systems and understand new processes if service levels were to be at least maintained during the period of change and improved thereafter. The Council supported the change process in the back office through a mixture of classroom based and on the job training for all levels of staff.
Making a Difference

OneVale is a whole authority transformation programme aiming to deliver sustainable effective and efficient services to their customers and partners. From its inception, 2 years ago, it is becoming more and more clear OneVale is fundamental to how the Council modernises itself and delivers the Welsh Assembly Government’s “Making the Connections” agenda. These early years have been about engagement, development, consultation and delivery of the programme elements, and have yet to realise some of the overarching impact of the new ways of working. Having said that, the Council has hosted visits from local authorities, keen to see how the authority has addressed various aspects of managing a large scale e-government related programme such as One Vale.

December 2006 was a milestone month for OneVale where the authority:

- Went live with the Contact Centre (Contact OneVale), which is currently taking calls for all of Visible Services and Electoral Registration, and will be taking on more and more services throughout 2007;
- launched TransAct, using the new integrated Oracle HR System;
- launched the new bilingual website, which is receiving more than 20,000 hits per week.

The “Contact One Vale” pilot has delivered encouraging results so far. In December 2006 and January 2007, the contact centre achieved 75% and 83% response rates, respectively meeting the target of 80% of calls answered within 20 seconds. Feedback from customers about their dealings with the contact centre staff has been very positive.

Future Plans

The Council recognise that human resource management is a fundamental aspect to delivering the OneVale programme. In addition to the lessons learned through the engagement and recruitment of staff, there is an ongoing programme of actions that have been planned to ensure that staff are and will continue to be valued as the organisation’s key asset, these include:

- The Council’s Information Management Strategy will underpin the OneVale programme. Information will be standardised and digitised throughout the organisation, this will include the creation of a single, corporate, consistent and accurate view of human resources.
- More efficient business processes to support staff in utilising their skills more effectively.
- Upgrading ICT technology to provide staff with the best tools to do the job.
- Integrated human resources and payroll system to streamline employee administration. In addition, staff will be more geared to employees being able to access and amend their own records (self service).
- On-going training and development to ensure staff have the best knowledge to do their jobs effectively.
- On-going staff engagement and information as the OneVale programme evolves.
Lessons Learned

• Communication with and involvement of all affected staff at all levels in the change management process.

• Allowing sufficient time for training to maximise the opportunity for successful change implementation (including all relevant back office staff) - not to be underestimated.

• Ensuring a full understanding of the practical implications of new business processes by all affected staff.