

TRANSFORMATION AT SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

A CASE STUDY
COMPILED BY

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Facing an unparalleled chapter of change at the council, I decided that we needed to be proactive and innovative in equipping our people for the future. Collaborating with Windmills, which has a widely-acknowledged track record and credible body of work in this field, has enabled us to meet our key objectives. The Windmills portfolio of tools and programmes is highly creative, quite different from the norm but pragmatic and easily understood. The Windmills team of professionals is passionate about what it does and its key individuals are always flexible in their approach; offering a high degree of adaptability that meets our specific needs. This partnership project is already reaping rewards.

JACKIE KELLY
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PROJECT RATIONALE

Shropshire Council, like many other local government authorities and services, is facing up to a challenging period of change.

With a reduction in spending of some £80m over the next three years, its aim is to ensure essential frontline services for local people are safeguarded. To achieve this objective Shropshire Council will need to transform the way it operates both internally and in the delivery of its services.

In the first instance savings will be achieved by cutting waste, bureaucracy and management costs. Over £4 million a year will be saved by reducing management staff numbers by 20%, with one in three senior management posts being cut. A similar amount is to be found from proposals to change terms and conditions of employment of the council's current staff of 11,000; protecting the frontline jobs which provide essential direct support services and avoiding costly redundancies.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Keith Barrow, said of these changes:

"We have already made significant steps to transform Shropshire Council, but have now set out a clear path for more innovative ways to run local services in a few years' time."

He adds, "Now is the time for fundamental change, time to make that shift, time to focus on empowering our towns and villages to help shape the future of Shropshire.

I cannot understate the size of the journey we have in front of us, nor the hurdles that we will encounter along the way. But by careful planning, working closely with our partners and adopting innovative ways of working, I am sure that, together, we can continue to provide good services that improve significantly the quality of life for Shropshire people."

With this as the objective of the three year major transformation project the senior management team at Shropshire embarked on an innovative way of responding to these challenges with priorities for 2011 and beyond, identified as:

- DRIVING SAVINGS
- SHAPING THE NEW ORGANISATION
- DEVELOPING A "NEW COUNCIL"

Windmills is part of this transformation project.

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KEITH BARROW
LEADER OF SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

WHY WINDMILLS?

Working with individuals, organisations and communities, Windmills supports those who are ready to meet the challenge of helping themselves and others to fulfil their potential.

Its support encourages individuals to think creatively and adopt a new mindset, empowering them to be passionate about taking steps to make a difference. Windmills was delighted that Shropshire Council was ready to embrace this challenge.

Working with Windmills guarantees collaboration with a group of innovative and creative individuals who are passionate about the work they do. Established in a Higher Education environment at Liverpool University, innovative home grown research and development has firmly established Windmills' UK-wide reputation for successful long-term client partnerships. The resulting portfolio of resources, activities and programmes provides a flexible framework upon which individuals, organisations and communities can develop creative solutions to meet a diverse range of agendas.

This flexibility of approach is crucial to Shropshire Council. Its transformation journey is just beginning and whilst some immediate priorities are clear, others will undoubtedly emerge throughout an anticipated three year time-frame. By selecting a "tool-kit" of Windmills' tried-and-tested resources that can be adapted and developed – the council maximises its ability to respond creatively to the issues faced as a result of ongoing changes to both structure and operation.

Another key factor for using Windmills is the sustainability of its "Champions" approach. Rather than simply training deliverers of pre-packaged programmes, Windmills believes in creating capacity builders or Champions; a cohort of up-skilled internal staff coached to utilise the tool-kit on two levels.

Firstly for themselves – "how do I respond to change?" and secondly, in the confidence of their own understanding of the process, support others to positively engage in the change process.

The behaviour, approach and mind-set of these internal champions (or Change Agents as the council calls them) provide a number of advantages to the Council. It now has a committed team which demonstrates an appetite, and the functional capacity, for helping the Council to effectively transform itself.

The Change Agents' skills are genuine skills-for-life which will help build confidence and commitment in others as changes of structure and delivery become a reality. Change Agents are competent in using the tool-kit of resources intuitively and imaginatively – they see the need – they don't need to be told. They are equipped and confident in providing group or one-to-one support across all directorates and at all levels, offering essential flexibility in an evolving change journey.

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WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT?



Beginning in May 2010 Windmills underpinned a key strand of the change transformation work by supporting the development of what Shropshire Council term a “Change Agent” cohort (effectively the same role as a Windmills Champion). Promoted within the council workforce, the opportunity to become a Change Agent was offered to staff from all directorates.

Over 100 employees expressed an initial interest with 45 finally being selected to be part of the Change Agent cohort. These 45 split into three cohorts and from October 2010 until June 2011 went through the following three-stage process:

STAGE 1

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT THREE-DAY WINDMILLS PROGRAMME ‘NO REGRETS ON SUNDAY’

The objective of this was to introduce tools, techniques and behaviors that will be essential as part of the transformation process.

“I feel now that I accept really that I’ve got to act and think differently if I want to create an inspiring future for myself. I feel more in control of knowing what I can do, to do something to change my situation.”

“At the beginning I said I am in control. The programme helped me to realise that I am not and I have to put in a lot of work and strength and commitment to be where I want to be. Thank you for this!”

Having taken part in the first cohort of Windmills training, I have seen the benefits from both a personal development and organisational impact perspective. It gave me the opportunity to hone my professional skills and experiences to best position myself within the new organisation. In terms of the wider service redesign work underway as part of the transformation programme, Change Agents are becoming uniquely placed to help facilitate the change process.

WENDY MARSTON

CORPORATE HEAD OF BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT, SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

STAGE 2



CAPACITY BUILDING TWO-DAY CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME INTRODUCING CHANGE AGENTS TO THE TOOL-KIT OF WINDMILLS RESOURCES THAT CAN BE UTILISED THROUGHOUT THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS.

The objective of this was to introduce tools, techniques and behaviors that will be essential as part of the transformation process.

“It’s having a tool-kit of resources rather than just talking generally about things that focuses minds and makes a real difference. These are resources that encourage individuals to assess their own skills and which help to explain how they can pass that experience on to others who fear redundancy or an uncertain future. The Windmills resources stimulate positive thinking about what lies ahead, and offer strategies for coping with inevitable change.”

A key facet of the programme design allowed personal experience of the change process as part of the capacity building journey; giving individuals breathing space to experience the challenges and opportunities that the change process gave them and enabling them to support others as part of the council’s transformation journey.

It provided them with time, tools and thinking space to build confidence, increase resourcefulness and develop resilience before helping others within the council to do the same and then to take the positive steps needed to engage in the change process for themselves.

The Change Agents utilised a tool-kit of resources from the Windmills portfolio with which they could support others. In both electronic and hard copy formats this consisted of:

- NO REGRETS BOOKS
- FOOD PLATES ACTIVITY
- WLPQ QUESTIONNAIRE
- SKILLS CARDS
- GOLDEN TICKET ACTIVITY
- WALLS & WINDMILLS ANALYSIS
- CHANGE CURVE MODEL
- ANIMAL CHARACTERS – CHANGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY
- ACTION PLANNING CARDS
- PAYOFFS QUESTIONNAIRE

Anticipating the likely scenarios yet to be encountered within the transformation journey, the Change Agents were able to question and practice using the tools, in readiness for their first interactions with colleagues.

At the beginning I said I am in control. The programme helped me to realise that I am not and I have to put in a lot of work and strength and commitment to be where I want to be. Thank you for this!

STAGE 3

1 DAY REVIEW SESSION – THREE MONTHS AFTER THE CHAMPIONS CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME AND AFTER THE CHANGE AGENTS HAVE BEEN OPERATIONAL IN THE COUNCIL SUPPORTING THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS USING THE TOOLS AND SKILLS THEY WERE INTRODUCED TO AS PART OF THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME.

“I think this is the key to the Windmills programme – that it is not about providing the answers but about empowering people to take the time to think about themselves and the position that they are in.”

“I am making the most of the Change Agent Network and it has opened doors for me in that I have now got involved in work activities that I would not have otherwise had the opportunity to or even known about”

“I feel confident that the tools really do help people going through change. I can now talk with knowledge and confidence about the Change Curve and can identify where other exercises can be of use”

WHAT IMPACT DID THE PROJECT HAVE?

Shropshire Council needed to measure the impact of the project on the following bases:

1. Impact on the business needs – could it see a difference for its investment?
2. Up-skilling the Change Agent cohort – can individuals' improved approaches, behaviours and skills be recognised in the workplace? Does the cohort use its new skills for the benefit of others in the council?
3. Effectiveness of the tool-kit – was it fit for purpose?

To assess these three elements a variety of different methods were put in place as part of the evaluation process collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at both an individual and organisational level.

These included

- Self-perception questionnaire assessing 10 factors for a positive and proactive mindset. Completed before, during and after the No Regrets on Sunday programme.
- Feedback questionnaire and ratings at the end of the 3 day No Regrets programme.
- Interview and feedback to camera
- Case studies – personal impact and organisational impact
- Reflective summaries following champions training on first use of Windmills Skills cards in the workplace
- Review session for Change Agents

Responses at the end of the review session (day 6) confirmed that the programme had a positive impact on individual Change Agents' perceptions of their ability to support others through the change process.

I feel confident that the tools really do help people going through change. I can now talk with knowledge and confidence about the Change Curve and can identify where other exercises can be of use.

More generally, the assessments demonstrated growth in confidence by the Change Agents, firstly in using the Windmills approach and tools in a variety of situations and, secondly to begin to make an impact on key change initiatives.

Interventions have ranged from formal presentations to 100+ managers, group sessions and one-to-one coaching, through to more informal and intuitive chats with colleagues and friends. More recently the Change Agents have been offering skills identification support to colleagues in the redeployment pool; preparing these individuals for the next steps in the redeployment process.

“I met with a team of 4 staff who were interested in finding out more. I chat to their team leader occasionally so I’d already done a soft sell. I went through the tools and asked them if they wanted to do any. They have booked to do the skills activity and the animal cards a week later – I will include a couple of shorter activities too. Perhaps I was lucky, but I just showed them the tools and they were interested and asked lots of questions – hopefully feedback from their sessions will encourage others to come forward.”

“From an organisational perspective the benefits are beginning to be realised. I’ve worked with colleagues individually and in groups. Some of the tools have been really well received by small teams within the organisation... it seems to have given people a new boost and a new energy to move forward with, and cope with, the new changes that we’re all being faced with at the moment.”

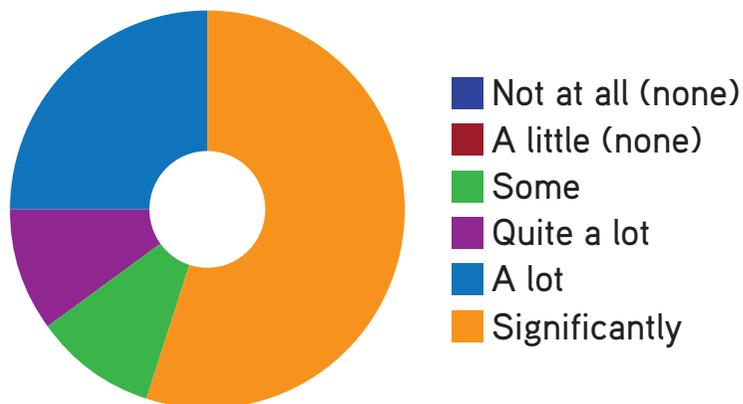
Fifteen Change Agents reached 100 Council employees using Windmills’ activities in the first month. Individuals have worked together to give each other support and encouragement in developing the Change Agent role and their use of the Windmills materials.

Change Agents have been quick to recognise the impact of Windmills-based interventions on others. Encouraged by wholly positive feedback, the Change Agents have become even more active and adventurous in adapting their approach to meet differing needs.

They are unanimously keen to promote the positive benefits their involvement can bring both within the Council and externally.

WE ASKED CHANGE AGENTS:

How has your ability to support others through change increased as a result of the programme?



It's been fantastic to see the 'light-bulb' moments on their faces, and the smiles, and the affirmation that they receive from taking part in what can be a really quick and simple session or conversation.

Interestingly the benefits from a personal perspective for the Change Agents are still being felt as they themselves deal with the challenges and opportunities the transformation process presents.

Change Agents – leading by example – are continuing to use the Windmills resources and approach to manage the impact of the organisational change more effectively on a personal level. A change agent commented that it had given them the “motivation and courage” to hold out for role they really wanted.

Against the advice and influence of others they didn’t “hedge their bets” and were successful in securing the role they knew they were most suited for.

Again two of the Change Agents had informed their managers not to include them in the restructuring of their department. Having been involved in Windmills and the Change Agent role they wished to use this as an opportunity to move elsewhere within the council to a role they felt they were better suited for.

“Thanks to Windmills I feel much more confident in my ability to position myself in the new structure and ensure that I play a key role where I can.”

“The staff member I have been working with has showed a renewed level of energy and positivity about her work.”

“I will also be using much of what I gained personally in my PA application & interview which will happen over the next month, watch this space.”

“The Windmills tools, techniques and thoughts that were shared seemed to have become part of the common language... it is not unusual to hear reference from staff to the change curve or WLPG in our conversations which I feel is testimony to the strength of the programme.”

“In hindsight, despite thinking this was “fluffy stuff” it has prepared me for the restructure and interview process I am about to go through.”

“I have ensured I have researched and planned before my meeting with new senior managers I may be working with in the future. I have taken my solutions and ideas to them, which have been received positively. I found this very empowering and reinforced the message that I can take control and map out my personal journey.”

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CURRENT STATUS

This project is still work-in-progress with the final cohort having just completed its Change Agent training: Discussions are already underway to extend the project to train an additional cohort.

Cohorts one and two continue to make a valuable impact, utilising their new skills to support key change initiatives.

The Change Agents are all fully supported by the Windmills team and are now part of the wider network of Windmills Champions which includes organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

As part of this network the council and its Change Agents will enjoy personal and professional support, as well as access to new ongoing developments within the Windmills portfolio and the opportunity to pilot and co-create with the Windmills team.

Windmills has eagerly supported the development of the Federation of Learners; established at the council in an effort to share their experiences and best practice with other providers. By developing connections to other initiatives and learning from these, the Change Agents can more effectively support other colleagues as part of the transformation process.

Additional support is currently under consideration for HR partners required to support the line and change programme currently underway.

Windmills continues to support the work of the council through the Federation and support for the Change Agent cohort. Collaboratively, Windmills is now working with the council to share the best practice of this initiative with others.

The decision to develop our own staff to work with their colleagues to support them through substantial change makes absolute business sense. In a public sector environment that is fluid, complex and a little scary to some, the Windmills training offers the Council ways to introduce a new skill set that will build our capacity, capability and confidence to meet the challenges head on.

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