

Increased capacity at London Borough of Merton

Results & ROI

- Adoption & Permancy Team - team capacity increased by 15% and the Placement Process end-to-end time reduced by 8 weeks
- Fostering Team - cycle time in the recruitment process cut by 20%, alongside a 10% increase in team capacity
- Children in Need Team - interactions with partner organisations streamlined, with all duplicated activities removed

The client

The London Borough of Merton Council (Merton) is one of 26 4-star councils in England and Wales. It has an annual budget of £230 million and employs over 5,000 staff. To maintain its financial position, Merton had to annually close a gap between its resources (council tax and central government funding) and its commitments. Despite achieving its yearly 4% efficiency savings target, Merton needed to make a more radical change and thus embarked on a Lean transformation programme to make the required reductions in spend.

The challenge

Diagnostic work earmarked Children, Schools and Families (CSF) as a target area for improvement. The main examples of process waste found within the service included:

- Rework: reports rewritten due to failing the quality assurance checks and standards not being clear for report writing
- Overproduction: inappropriate referrals
- Over Processing: management checks of decisions made and duplicate recording
- Waiting: scheduled allocation of work and hand-overs between admin workers and social workers
- Inventory: batching of systems recording of data and reports waiting to be checked and amended
- Movement: travelling to and from customer meetings / interviews

The approach

A diagnostic, across the whole council, was used to help clarify the main project themes and begin engaging with senior managers. From this, different areas were selected for more detailed service reviews. The CSF Directorate was selected as it was viewed as a 'difficult' service.

The CSF teams focused on high volume or poor performing processes where improvements would have the biggest impact. The Adoption and Permancy team chose to look at Domestic Adoptions and the family finding process. The Fostering team worked on the recruitment of foster carers' process.

Newly mapped processes were developed and subsequently transformed into implementation plans. These were then rolled out with Lean foundation tools such as Information Centres, 5S (a workplace organisation tool) and standardisation to support and sustain change within the teams.

The benefits

By agreeing a standardised report format with all relevant parties and replacing the checking stages with individual performance management, the Adoption & Permancy Team were able to increase its capacity and improve the quality of reporting. In the Fostering Team, the redesigned process allowed waiting times to be eliminated (through incorporating more assessment of individuals and information for potential foster carers up front). This is all in addition to the ROI headlines outlined above.