

Newham Council empower contact centre staff

Results & ROI

- Staff empowerment has increased – more than 20 service improvements have been identified and implemented by team members through the use of the Information Centres
- With the added responsibility and freedom to run their own Information Centre briefings, staff morale has considerably improved
- A better grasp of calls data and failure demand along with an understanding of problem-solving approaches has led to improved relationships and joined up working with corporate partners
- The contact centre has been hugely successful in shifting customer activity on-line and reducing the overall volume of calls coming into the contact centre, with a 50% reduction in call volumes compared with this time last year. The call waiting times are now consistently less than 30 seconds and more than 97% of calls are answered
- All of these improvements result in a better service for Newham Residents

The client

Newham Council is one of the London Borough councils, sitting on the north side of the Thames in East and West Ham. It has the youngest borough population and the second most ethnically diverse after Brent. It hosted much of the 2012 Olympics and has seen significant regeneration. Despite that it has numerous challenges and the Council's corporate contact Centre receives many calls and enquiries.

The challenge

The Contact Centre had increasing call volumes and capacity issues with a call answering target of '90% in 15 seconds' which was putting immense pressures on the staff, having a negative effect on morale. Combined with an 'us and them' back office relationship, the Culture and Performance in the team had hit a low-point. All of these issues impacted on the quality of in service delivery and meant that customer satisfaction was poor and the Council's reputation was at risk.

The service wanted to introduce Lean principles to achieve three main objectives. Namely to: improve the operating culture, improve quality in customer service, improve performance.

The approach

In order to improve culture and performance we needed to involve staff in redesigning their work and agreeing better measures over which they had some sense of control.

1. Two Information Centres were set up, one for front line staff and one for managers. Both are supported by briefings three times a week, managing performance, capacity and concerns

2. A Master Schedule was developed to facilitate better resource and project planning – giving the Contact Centre greater visibility of activities that could increase the demand on their service
3. A measure was introduced for calls demand data, distinguishing between value and failure demand
4. A staff skills and training matrix has led to a detailed training plan, to reduce the staff skills gap
5. A PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) workshop was held with staff to identify root causes of high volume failure demand calls particularly around the Lettings service
6. Quick wins and long term improvement actions have been captured and managed via an action plan
7. Two 'Lean for Leaders' workshops were completed

The benefits

Team performance, since the introduction of the Lean Foundation tools, has shown improvement and stability. Comparing February (which had the best abandonment rate and wait time of any month previously) and May's performance, that staff are handling 19% more calls per FTE, which means there has been a 19% increase in staff capacity. At the same time, abandonment rates are the lowest since January and average wait times still less than 45 seconds.