

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell has used a DMA review to create a more balanced management structure, speed up decision making and find new ways to empower staff.

Frances Rutter, the council's Chief Executive, had heard about DMA being used to good effect in other local authorities. Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chairman of the majority group on the council, came across it when he was a member of the LGA's workforce board. Both recognised that it could be a perfect fit for Epsom and Ewell, which had not had an organisational review for many years, and senior members agreed.

The council began to set out exactly what they wanted from the process: to create a more streamlined organisational structure that was leaner, more agile and more responsive, where decision making was rationalised and people were empowered to make decisions within their remit. Saving money would be a bonus but was not the primary aim.

A team from the LGA came in to conduct the DMA, interviewing staff at all levels of the council over a two-week period. This was well received and other employees came forward asking if they could be interviewed too, seeing it as a chance to have their say. Feedback was positive and staff welcomed their involvement in the process.

The options for the council were set out in a detailed report which included observations about its structure and about longer term 'direction of travel' issues. The conclusion was that the council was already lean in terms of structure but long in terms of processes.

They decided on an option which included streamlining at senior management level and new pathways to ensure faster decision making and greater ownership at senior head-of-service level. The new structure includes a top layer with the roles of chief executive and director of finance and resources; heads of service report directly to them.

While the changes are still bedding in, managers have been positive and recognise that the organisational structure is now more efficient. Officers have been empowered to take ownership of decision making at a greater level than before. There have been challenges, as is inevitable with any change process. Councillor Woodbridge says: "We are already seeing less silo-based working and more flexibility. We had some quite entrenched divisions but the new structure encourages people to work across those divisions." A light-touch review is planned in a year's time to see if the process has delivered on the original aims.

Frances Rutter says: "We are very pleased with the outcomes, and six months further down the line I've got a senior management team who have the 'head room and elbow room' to do their jobs. I think the review was excellent value for money. There has been a financial saving for the council, although that was not the main purpose of the exercise."

The review was delivered on time and within budget, and Councillor Woodbridge says the LGA delivery team kept everyone informed and were positive, efficient and accessible. He describes DMA as providing a "reset button" for the council to press and move forward. "It's not for everybody but it worked for us. If you have a clear idea of what you want to get out of it, DMA is a very valuable tool."