

# Decision Making Accountability In Castle Point (Essex!)



# Castle Point's experience of DMA

## Evidence based

- 30 interviews and 2 drop-in sessions were undertaken based on the 7 DMA Elements.
- Services which were non-DMA compliant were identified and a range of roles were interviewed including front line staff, officers, team leaders, service managers, heads of service, strategic directors and the chief executive.
- These services included Customer and Digital Services, Housing, Place and Policy, Environment, Corporate Services and Resources.

## Inclusive – “bottom up”

- Confidential interviews were conducted by two independent DMA experts (from the LGA) during from November 2022.
- Colleagues were also invited to have their say via email and telephone as well as attending the virtual drop-in sessions.
- Members briefed before, during and afterwards

**'Our levels of management are not clearly defined'**

**'Nice place to work but the council is stuck in the past'**

**'People are pulling in different directions'**

**'The council is quite insular in approach'**

**'Culture of we have always done it that way'**

**'It's like walking through quicksand'**

**'Decision-making is clunky and needs streamlining'**

**'The lack of clarity around Officer roles and responsibilities creates confusion for Members and results in them getting involved in the weeds'**

**'We have a really good core of staff'**

**'Lots of goodwill'**

**'Trying to do what we can with what we've got'**

**'What are we waiting for?'**

**'There's a culture of cc'ing and double-checking'**

**'Castle Point needs to radically modernise'**

**'We come up against brick wall, brick wall, brick wall'**

**'The council has been led by personalities in the past and has been toxic for far too long.'**

**'We go round the houses for an answer'**

**'Staff don't want to make a decision in case they make the wrong one'**

**'The council is very disjointed and dysfunctional'**

**'No one ever talks and there is siloed working'**

**'The council is old-fashioned and too accessible'**

**'Very behind on technology'**

**'Departments keep themselves to themselves'**

**'I could do so much more if I had the tools'**

# Important messages for members

- The Council is ready for change and ‘would like to be more proactive, after a long period of ‘doing the same’ and has a genuine commitment to engaging and empowering staff on its journey.
- Employees of the Council have a keen appetite for change but are held back by a hierarchical culture, lack of confidence and a lack of transparency and fairness regarding roles and pay.
- The Council’s culture from the past also means that people work on their own projects rather than as One Council and this is evident from a fragmented leadership team to the fragmented frontline.
- The DMA review found a lack of cohesive working at leadership team level, which results in different agendas and frustrations, and addressed this by proposing two alternative top organisational structures.

# Clear findings and recommendations

- The DMA review identified 7 layers (6 levels) of hierarchy in some areas of the organisation, where 5 layers (4 levels) is good practice for a local authority of this size.
- This means that frontline staff are too far removed from the Chief Executive role with up to 6 layers between them and the Chief Executive.
- The Senior Leadership team is fragmented, with a combination of Strategic Directors and Heads of Service reporting into the Chief Executive role, which creates confusion and siloed services as well as a lack of leadership.
- The council has a top-heavy management structure and would benefit from directing more of this resource to the frontline to deal with increased demand.
- Operational services do not feel adequately supported by the corporate core which is under-resourced and this leads to an organisational culture of two halves.
- Despite a genuine commitment to deliver to residents, the lack of clarity around responsibilities and accountabilities results in a fragmentation of the council and culture from the top, down to the frontline and this also affects service delivery and contract management.
- Over-layering in some areas is creating bottlenecks and silos, leading to slower decision-making and reduced efficiency. There is 'lots of red tape' and 'things get blocked'.
- The structure is very hierarchical and as a result, staff do not have the confidence to make decisions.
- Spans of control range from 1 through to 19, which are inefficient. Consider implementing spans between 5 and 9.
- The current structure is designed around individuals and services rather than the customer and feels 'disjointed'. 'we are working for the same organisation but end up fighting.'

# “Transforming Together”

## What did we do?

- Whole organisation redesign with a new TOM for Tiers 2 & 3
- Job evaluation (finally!)
- Funded business case for change - c£2m with <3 year pay-back period
- 12 month programme of OD implementation with bespoke and focussed internal comms
- Changes to the constitution and financial delegations to improve accountability and clarity
- Kickstarted approach with KCCs to design NWOW, concept model office and new Values & Behaviours

## What has been the impact?

- Service reviews based on DMA findings will drive transformation for Tiers 4 and below
- Proposed c£1m investment in digital infrastructure to support alignment of services to customers and to take the weight out of manual processing which will also deliver efficiency savings
- Engaged and informed workforce with emerging cultural shift – staff survey to come....
- The right people in the right place doing the right things

# Questions

