

Good Practice Case Study

Rushcliffe: One of the top four councils in the UK ▼



Rushcliffe is an 'Excellent' place to live ▼

Rushcliffe Borough Council is officially one of the top councils in the UK. The Council was rated as 'Excellent' with a top score of 4 in the nationwide organisational assessment which was the major part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in 2009. Rushcliffe was one of only four district councils to be given this top grading out of 236 councils nationally.

The Council embarked on its improvement journey in 2006, after being rated as 'Good' under Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Another milestone along the way of which the Council is justifiably proud is gaining 'Excellent' under a reassessment of CPA in 2008. Also in 2008, another significant achievement was their outstanding Place Survey results - Rushcliffe was first for customer satisfaction and value for money. The Council was also 2nd for treating customers with respect, sports and leisure facilities and keeping land litter-free.



Rushcliffe's 'Growing and Thriving Together' brochure for residents

Rushcliffe has achieved this success by adopting four Ps - People who are committed to being the best, Productive Partnerships, Passion and Performance management.



"It's all about great people, working together passionately and taking proactive action to make sure plans are implemented and people's expectations are met and often exceeded. Rushcliffe is a great place – residents love living here and our job is to make things even better."
 Allen Graham, Chief Executive,
 Rushcliffe Borough Council

The four Ps: People, Partnerships, Passion and Performance ▾

People and Partnerships

Rushcliffe works very well with others – doing this brings real benefits in terms of value for money; reducing duplication, improving efficiency, saving money, sharing resources and pooling expertise - basically providing an exceptionally high standard of service. Just two examples of successful partnerships include:

Trent Bridge: A 5-way partnership between Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, emda and Nottinghamshire County Council Cricket Club, created a new state-of-the-art stand at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, ensuring its world class status and securing its future for international matches. As a result it attracted the Twenty20 World Cup in 2009. Rushcliffe also works with the Positive Futures Project to encourage cricket uptake, tackle anti-social behaviour, improve young people's qualifications and improve their health.

Weeks of Action: Rushcliffe has the lowest crime rates in Nottinghamshire. The Council and its partners have adopted a targeted approach, listening to residents' concerns in specific areas and responding quickly. For example, in July 2009 the village of Keyworth had an unusual spate of burglaries

resulting in residents reporting concerns about crime in the area. Weeks of Action reduce crime and the fear of crime longer term and encourage people to get involved and keep crime down in the longer term. The outcomes are directly as a result of working with other 'partners in crime.' Just a few of the things that were carried out in the week included:

- Coding 150 bicycles
- Distributing 250 smart water kits
- DVLA checking 12,486 vehicles with 75 found to be untaxed
- Trading Standards checking 25 premises
- Revenue Team inspecting 45 domestic and commercial properties
- Road Safety Teams presenting to 479 Primary and Secondary school children

Passionate Communication

Rushcliffe is passionate about communicating. Everyone understands what the Council has done, is trying to do, its successes and what needs to be done to improve. The Council communicates in plain English – and gives people

the right information, at the right time, in the right way – so everyone knows what they are doing and why. An innovative approach is Rushcliffe’s ‘Find out Fridays.’

Find Out Friday: is a monthly event where different services showcase their work to other colleagues. These sessions have proven to be a fantastic way for staff and Members to network, forge relations and build team spirit. This transparent approach to communication extends outwards to the community as well and has delivered some inspiring results - residents read what they write, listen to what they say and get involved when asked for feedback.

For example, when a £1.2 million shortfall in the budget was identified, a group of local residents got their say at a budget consultation event. When given some difficult budget choices, they chose the cost-cutting ideas they would be most happy to accept. Once agreed by Members, their ideas were considered and actioned where possible. These residents were updated regularly through attending cabinet and council meetings - and the required £1.2 million was saved.

This open and honest style of communication has also attracted recognition from official bodies via:

- The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Local Government Group’s Excellence in

Communications Award for internal communications

- Global Standard for customer services from the Customer Contact Association (CCA)
- CCA award for best customer experience in local government
- Excellent council status in 2008 under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) – achieving 56 out of 60 – only 4 away from perfect.

Communications Manager Nicky Mee says; *“Our success lies in our passion, determination and drive, matched by a ‘can do’ attitude. We know that people like living in Rushcliffe, partners like working with us in Rushcliffe and staff like working for Rushcliffe. We believe this is down to the whole team being prepared to go the extra mile and celebrating successes when we achieve them.”*

Performance Management

There were already pockets of excellence in Rushcliffe’s performance management, but the Council wanted excellence across the whole organisation. To drive this improvement, it developed a new Performance Management Framework (PMF) in 2008.

Performance was then monitored monthly, rather than quarterly, so that corrective action could be taken

quickly to ensure plans remained on track. Heads of service were given responsibility for their team's performance and with responsibility came accountability, resulting in performance being embedded in the culture. Performance drove outcomes and this improvement makes a visible difference to residents. Performance clinics were introduced where heads of service had to justify what was happening in their service area to the senior management team – so they had to be 'on the ball' at all times.

A new performance management software package enables Heads of Service and Performance Champions to enter and monitor performance indicators on an ongoing basis, set tolerances for performance standards and see how individual indicators impact upon the Council as a whole - whilst still focusing on 'value for money' stance. Furthermore it;

- Reduces reports, saving two days a week in officer time

- Combines three systems into one, preventing duplication
- Allows Rushcliffe to share information with four other districts without having to recreate data which is vital for partnership working
- Creates an audit trail of amendments and ensures data sign off by management to improve ownership
- Scrutinises the whole service plan, including finance and budgets, equality and diversity, sickness and training

Monitoring performance monthly has reaped real benefits. For example, when Environmental Health identified a noticeable drop in recycling in the area, an action plan was outlined to tackle the problem, including issuing over 140 recycling bins and 'saving' four 1100 litre bins of waste.

Building on excellence ▾

The future is bright – but the future is never complacent. Despite being excellent, Rushcliffe is never one to rest on its laurels. As Chief Executive Allen Graham says: *“Complacency is the enemy of success.”*

With a focus on continuing to increase customer satisfaction and making sure Rushcliffe continues to be a great place to live, three key projects have been launched to take the Council forward in the future:

The Big Picture

Rushcliffe has to find room for 15,000 new homes, facilities, shops, schools and much more over the next fifteen years. Rushcliffe's Big Picture campaign which started in February 2009 is the Council's way of starting a big conversation with as many groups and individuals as possible. Getting people's opinions and getting them involved is at the centre of the Council's ethos.

The Council has gone out and about telling its story and inviting people to tell theirs and has now identified three large areas for potential development. Consultation events are being held round the Borough and people are now dropping by to find out more and tell the Council about their concerns and hopes for the future.

The Council has also introduced three video kiosks, two of which are mobile kiosks taken to community events, villages, schools and parishes for people to create their own videos.

Rushcliffe BC's website also accepts people's videos. Jo Barker, Performance Manager feels that young people particularly engage with this visual approach, "It is vital that young people have their say,

and are heard; after all, the decisions we make today will directly influence their future."



Just one of Rushcliffe's Big Picture events

Fit for Purpose

After a planned shared services project with Charnwood Borough Council was unfortunately not able to go ahead given the economic climate. Rushcliffe used what it had learnt from this project to create the Fit for Purpose scheme. Fit for Purpose is a 3-year corporate-led initiative set to generate savings, whilst still maintaining high levels of customer service.

The project will:

- Encourage staff to make savings, while still putting the customer at the heart of everything it does.
- Identify opportunities across the Council for leaner operations and improved efficiency.

Fit for Purpose is led by a three-strong internal, yet independent project team. One project completed since its introduction in September 2009 is the Admin Review, saving £70,000 per year through streamlining and standardising administrative duties across the Council.

- ‘Growing its own leaders’ via leadership training, forums, shared knowledge, mentoring, coaching, shadowing and offering each other respect and mutual support
- Giving staff the basic skills such as literacy and numeracy so they can improve their jobs and their lives



Some of Rushcliffe BC team

People Strategy

Rushcliffe’s greatest asset is its staff. They are great ambassadors for the Council and Rushcliffe’s investment in people reflects this. An Investor in People is not about gaining the ‘badge’, it is about recognising, rewarding and nurturing talent. People are the heart of Rushcliffe and staff’s can-do and will-do approach means going the extra mile is standard. In the 2009 staff survey, 97% of staff said they were willing to go the extra mile. Rushcliffe Council’s People Strategy involves:

- Carrying out regular staff surveys to gain insights into employee satisfaction
- Holding regular ‘tea and biscuit’ or ‘bacon butty’ sessions with the Chief Executive
- Distributing ‘Staff Matters’ newsletter updating staff on all developments and achievements

Jo Barker commented; *“Our aim is to create one united team with the right skills to achieve the levels of excellence we demand of ourselves and which our residents expect. This means everything from helping people within the Council*

with literacy and numeracy where needed, through to leadership and management training at a more senior level, as well as encouraging networks and friendships, making Rushcliffe a great place to live and work.”

Rushcliffe’s ‘Excellent’ performance is as a result of a focus on shaping a positive environment for its people – customers, partners and staff,

through engagement and open, clear communication to drive meaningful results. Rushcliffe’s impressive achievements have led to them being nominated for the Local Government Chronicle’s Council of the Year 2010. However, whatever the outcome, Rushcliffe will continue on its journey of excellence by always looking for opportunities to improve and keeping customers satisfied with its outstanding services.

Notes ▾

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East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP) is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EM IEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

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