

Creating joined-up thinking and working

Transforming local government into a strategy-driven organisation...

The only way to deliver our vision is joined-up thinking and working, inside and outside the council. We need to tease out the genuine strategy and make sure it happens." Ben Ticehurst, the interim Assistant Chief Executive at Peterborough City Council, was clear what he felt would deliver it: a balanced scorecard approach.

Like many councils, Peterborough has long-term plans but its agenda was often dominated by operational measures and short-term actions. Its Corporate Strategy reflected tactical imperatives, such as achieving CPA targets and Best Value measures. However, Gillian Beasley, the Chief Executive, was clear that there were more fundamental issues to solve in the City that these did not address. In addition, both Members and Officers were frustrated with the thick reports they had: 'I sometimes glance at it and just put it in the bin. The information changes so quickly, it is hard to see progress.' They wanted something simpler, more informative and more relevant to see the bigger picture.

As Balanced Scorecard specialists, Excitant Ltd were asked to help the Council in a highly collaborative and consultative way, and so Managing Director, Phil Jones, sat down with Ben to design an approach that would solve the Council's needs.

The first milestone was to work with Directors and Cabinet Members, to develop a 'tangible' vision of the City through to 2020. This covered the six major themes of the City: the centre's redevelopment; housing and the environment; community safety and diversity; health; education; and economic diversity. It showed the major stages of development, the interaction between the themes, and dependency upon other public and private sector bodies to deliver

the vision. This was quickly agreed, and soon appeared in presentations, on notice boards and at the Local Strategic Partnership. It raised the level of debate and agreement over these important objectives.

The next stage was how to deliver it. Gillian Beasley, the Chief Executive, was converted to the approach when she saw how the strategy could be represented on a page and told as a five minute story. Excitant use 'strategy maps' to represent the trade-off that all councils manage: between community, financial and national objectives. They also show where the Council needs to focus to achieve results, and what needs to change to make it happen. "If you want to change performance, but don't make clear the change in capabilities and capacity needed, then you have strategy driven by hope and magic", says Phil Jones. If you make the objectives clear, the drivers of success explicit, communicate them, resource them, and focus peoples' hearts and minds upon them, then they will happen.

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Gillian's active support has been crucial at every stage. If the CEO loses interest or withdraws commitment, the Balanced Scorecard will, overnight, become a performance recording tool like any other. She wanted joined-up thinking and working across the Directorates, so the Corporate strategy map was designed to make this happen. Directors jointly own, develop

and work on the objectives. Cross-service teams create the actions to make it happen. As it is rolled-out, services look to see where they can contribute to other areas. For instance, 'tackling the sources of crime' involves community services working with the police, education in schools, Social Services working with families, environmental services planning out crime in areas and contract services making the place people can be proud of. Only when all work together, and partners are also involved, will the objective be achieved.

Ben Ticehurst described the key to the success as being the highly involving and consultative approach used by Excitant throughout the project: "Understand how your senior people like to work and match the project delivery plan to their preferred styles – do this explicitly and remind them constantly that you've done it, so they feel involved and responsible."

Ben summed up the Excitant Balanced Scorecard approach: "Only do it if you're genuinely committed to the high level goals of improved organisational capabilities and a strategy-driven organisation."



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