Guidance for Improvement Teams

(Organisational improvements)

Introduction to Improvement Teams

An Improvement Team comprises a small, cross-functional team of people representing different parts of the organisation or partner organisations. Its role is to identify, plan and implement improvement activity or service developments. An Improvement Team is set up to work on a specific project to achieve a defined output.

This guidance relates to the type of Improvement Teams set up to work on improvement projects identified through excellence Self-Assessment and improvement planning (e.g. using the Culture & Sport Improvement Toolkit or TAES). Separate guidance (based on the same principles and framework)) is available for Improvement Teams established to work on process improvement (i.e. service delivery improvements) and service / product development.

Improvement Teams should include people from all levels of the organisation or from partner organisations who have knowledge, skills and experience which will be valuable to the project. The Team is given complete responsibility to implement the changes. Any issues relating to capital expenditure or changes to wider staff roles normally need to be reported to the senior management team for approval. The Team could meet on several occasions to ensure that the changes have been made. More than one team could operate at any one time; it must be disbanded when the project output has been achieved (it does not have responsibility for managing the new way of working).

Improvement Teams achieve the following benefits:

- They make good use of people's knowledge, skills and experiences
- They help to develop increased staff ownership of changes
- They provide a structured and comprehensive approach to planning and implementing sustainable changes

Improvement Teams should operate in a structured way, using a range of improvement tools and techniques. The following effective approach is based on the Coaching GROW Model:

Phase 1: Goal

Establish what the Improvement Team will achieve & when it will achieve this by

Phase 2: Reality

Analyse the current strengths and areas for improvement, beliefs, causes of the current behaviour and the barriers to change

Phase 3: Options

Come up with creative & innovative ideas for future practices and solutions to the barriers to change

Phase 4: Way Forward

Agree and plan the changes and the detailed actions necessary to make the changes

Implement the changes, monitor, review and adjust

Guidance for Improvement Team Leaders

The techniques and questions below will help you lead and challenge Improvement Teams in your own organisation or your peer organisation. With experience you will add additional questions and techniques to this guidance

Phase 1: Goal

Establish what the Improvement Team will achieve & when it will achieve this by

Following the Self-Assessment, the Self-Assessment Team or management team should define the improvement project and its output. This becomes the Improvement Team's goal.

1.1 During this phase, act with enthusiasm for the goal and crystal clear thinking. Avoid discussing areas for improvement, risks, barriers to change or solutions until this phase is completed.

1.2 Crystallise the goal, ensure that the Team has a shared understanding of the goal and develop commitment, enthusiasm & momentum amongst the Team in relation to achieving the goal. Stimulate and focus the discussions using the following questions as appropriate:

- What are we being asked to achieve?
- When do we have to achieve this by? When can we achieve this by?
- What will have changed when the improvement project is completed? Be more specific!
- What impact will this change have? How will it affect the customers? How will affect the wider community? How will it affect staff?
- What makes achieving this goal important for the organisation? What makes this goal exciting?
- What will happen if we don't make this change?
- How will we know when the improvement project is completed?
- How will we measure achievement along the way?

1.3 Write the goal on the flipchart and ensure that the team is completely clear about this goal.

1.4 Discuss and agree any boundaries with senior managers, using the following questions as appropriate:

- Is the team able to spend money? If so, how much?
- Can the team do something different from current corporate practice?
- Does the team have to propose changes to anyone? If so, what type of changes, and to whom?
- Does the team have to discuss the changes with anyone? If so, whom?

1.5 Discuss and clarify these boundaries with the Team and write them on the flipchart.

Phase 2: Reality

Analyse the current strengths & areas for improvement, as well as beliefs, causes of the current behaviour and barriers to change.

2.1. During this phase, be realistic and focussed on risk (now is the time when those team members who can appear to be 'negative' can have their say!). Think in terms of the factual evidence for the current situation. Everyone else should listen and develop an understanding of the issues. Avoid discussing solutions until this phase is completed. If any solutions come up, note them and move on.

2.2. Clarify and develop shared understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement relating to the existing practice, using the Self-Assessment Record as a starting point. Stimulate and focus the discussions using the following questions as appropriate:

- What is currently working well? What is not currently working well?
- In what areas are additional practices needed to meet recognised and relevant best practice?
- Which parts of the current planned practice are implemented systematically? Which parts of the current planned practice are not implemented systematically?
- Which current practices do not meet council policy or procedure?

2.3. Identify what evidence tells you about the current situation, using the following questions:

- What does the data tell us about the current situation?
- What is the perception of the relevant stakeholders (e.g. staff, partners, customers) about the effectiveness of the current practice?

If this evidence is not currently available or more evidence is needed, agree who will obtain this data, by when and when the Team will reconvene to consider it.

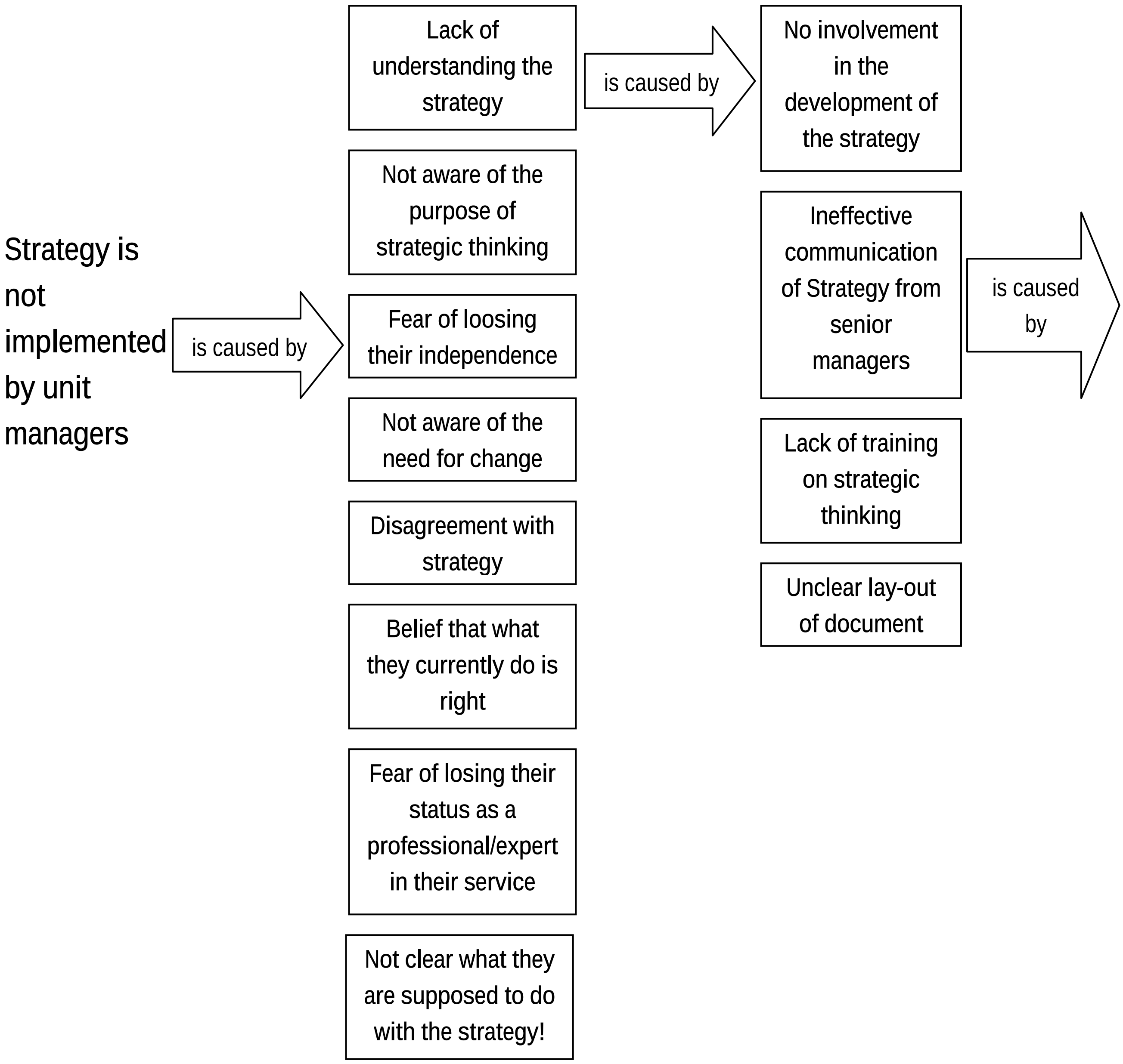
2.4. Summarise the agreed, evidence based strengths and areas for improvement on a flipchart

2.5. Discuss, analyse and note down the existing beliefs, causes of the current behaviour and the barriers to change. Stimulate and focus the discussions using the following questions as appropriate:

- What do people believe about the current practices?
- What causes these beliefs?
- Where have these beliefs come from?
- What causes the current behaviour?
- What are the barriers to making the changes?
- What do people believe about making changes to the current practices?

2.6. If you think it is necessary to analyse cause and effect further in order to establish the root cause, the following technique works well.

- Write the area for improvement on the flipchart in large letters
- Give each team member a pad of 'post-it notes' and a pen
- Ask them to think of possible causes and to write each one on a 'post-it note' – in silence
- When each cause has been written, stick the 'post-it note' on the flipchart – the team will then use these ideas to stimulate further thinking
- Continue this process until the team cannot come up with any more possible causes...ask them to think of some more!
- Rearrange the 'post-it notes' to demonstrate cause and effect, for example….



2.7. If necessary, go away and think further about the issues, discussing them with your colleagues. Bring these thoughts back to the next meeting.

Phase 3: Options

Come up with creative and innovative ideas for future practices and solutions to the barriers to change

3.1. This phase needs people to come up with creative and innovative ideas for future practices (in some cases outside of traditional ways of working), and ways of achieving the changes. There will be some team members who are inclined to think in this way – everyone can think in this way!

3.2. The trick with this phase is to allow people time to come up with the solutions – there are always solutions. Given time and help to remove interference, the team can come up with many solutions. Avoid analysing or commenting on the ideas. It is important that people are free to come up with anything.

3.3. Prompt and help team members to come up with many ideas, using the following questions as appropriate:

- What ideas do you have about this area?
- What else? What else?
- What *could* the new system be like?
- How could you overcome the barriers to change?
- How could the causes of the current behaviour be tackled?
- What could be done if there was unlimited time?
- What could be done if there was unlimited money?
- What is the recognised industry best practice in this area?
- What organisation would be worth learning from?
- Who is a role model in this area....what would they do?
- Who would have some good ideas about this?

3.4. 'Silent mindstorming' is a useful technique to help people to come up with a wide range of different options:

- Give each team member a pad of 'post-it notes' and a flipchart pen
- Ask each team member to think of lots of ideas; all ideas are allowed, however simple, complicated or 'daft' they may seem
- Tell the team to stay silent throughout this exercise and to maintain positive non-verbal language
- Ask the team members to write each idea in two or three words on a 'post-it note', still without discussing the ideas. After they have written each idea, stick the note onto the flipchart (anywhere on a blank sheet)
- The team members continue thinking of ideas, writing them down and passing them to you to stick on the flipchart, using the displayed ideas to stimulate further thinking. Build speed and momentum during this process. There must be no comment or analysis of any of the ideas
- When all the ideas have been exhausted, ask then to think of more! Then rearrange the ideas into themes on the flipchart.

3.5. A good way of stimulating further innovative thinking is to go and meet other organisations to share practices (possibly in different industries). This can be conducted on a formal or informal basis (for example, visiting a leisure centre as a customer). The formal process of sharing practices is known as 'best practice – or process – benchmarking' (see the guidance document on this subject).

3.6. Remember that some ideas might already been suggested (by the Self-Assessment Team, other staff or customers). Ensure these are captured before the meeting and feed them into the discussions.

3.7. If necessary, go away from the meeting and ask other staff members about their ideas (for example, during a staff meeting). Bring these ideas back to the next team meeting.

Phase 4: Way Forward

Agree and plan the changes and the detailed actions necessary to make the change

4.1. This phase is in two parts and requires two different approaches:

- all team members reach a consensus decision on what changes should be made (time for everybody to use their people skills)
- the team plans the specific actions needed to implement the agreed changes in a detailed, methodical way (some team members will be very keen to move onto actions; now is their time!)

4.2. All team members should be able to go away from the meeting actively and honestly supporting and promoting what has been agreed. Consensus is different from 'democracy'. It is also different from persuading everybody else that your ideas are right, or simply giving in to the strongest person in the team. A consensus decision comes from the following steps:

- *think win-win (recognise that you alone do not know the whole picture, and that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts)*
- *'seek first to understand then to be understood'*
- *seek to develop 'synergy' (sharing understanding and energy about the way forward)*

4.3 Help the team reach a consensus decision on what changes should be made, using the following questions as appropriate. If you have written the options on 'post-it notes', rearrange them into priorities, based on the responses to the questions.

- Which options would most help you achieve your goal?
- Which options would achieve the most improvements
- Which options feel best?
- Which options are most interesting?
- Which options would be most difficult to achieve?
- Which options would be the easiest to achieve?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how committed are you to these changes?
- What would take you to a 10?

4.4 There are two options to take if the team cannot reach consensus:

- Go away and think further about the issues, discuss them with your colleagues and bring back your thoughts to the next meeting.
- Give the manager or a nominated person responsibility to make the decision.

4.5 When the team has agreed the changes, describe the new process either on the flipchart or on paper.

4.6 Consider and discuss what actions need to be taken to implement the agreed changes, bearing in mind the 'cause and effect' discussed in Phase 2. Now is the time to be think and act in a very specific and detailed way! Prompt and challenge the team to plan the actions in a detailed way, using the following questions as appropriate:

- What do we need to do to implement the changes
- What do we need to do to overcome the barriers to change?
- What is the specific action?
- What is the next step? And the next? And the next?
- Who will complete each step?
- When will we start the action?.....day?.....time? When will we complete the action?
- What could hinder or prevent us from starting?
- What further support do we need with implementing actions?
- Who needs to know what these actions are?
- On a scale of one to 10, how committed are you to take this action?
- What would it take to move you to a 10?
- How will these actions achieve our goal?

4.7 Record the action, responsibilities and planned completion dates on an improvement action plan. Circulate this to all members of the improvement team and the management team.

Implement, Monitor, Review, Adjust

5.1 The Team members carry the agreed actions. The management teams ensure these actions are carried out (as with any other plan).

5.2 Arrange a follow-up Improvement Team meeting. At this meeting, discuss implementation of the changes. All team members should maintain awareness of the working practices to check if the changes are happening as planned.

5.3 If the changes have not been made systematically, agree and document further actions.

5.4 When the team is satisfied that the changes have been made and the output is achieved, the project is completed.

5.5 The Improvement Team is then disbanded (this is vital).