

Performance Breakthrough

Report from research
carried out on behalf of
LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
September/October 2005



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Discussion guide for group discussions, including diagrams of stimulus cards

Appendix 2: Discussion guide for in-depth interviews, including diagrams of stimulus cards

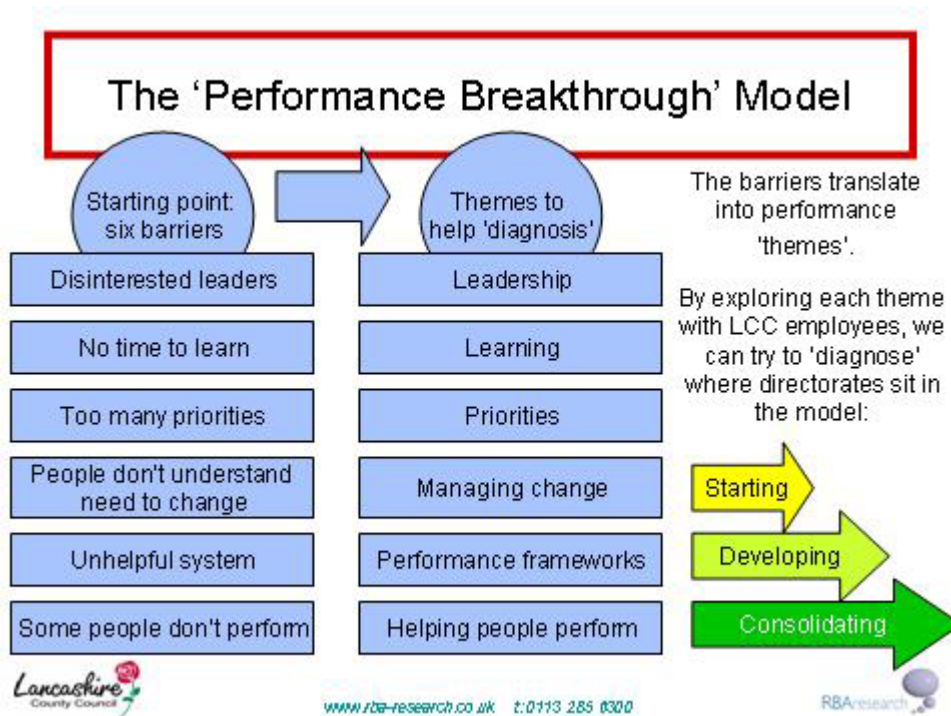
1 INTRODUCTION

This report by RBA Research contains the findings of the Performance Breakthrough study commissioned by Lancashire County Council.

1.1 Background

Lancashire County Council (hereafter referred to as LCC) wishes to adopt the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough model as a basis for driving improvements in employee performance across the organisation as a whole and specifically within its five directorates. The Performance Breakthrough model is summarised in the chart below.

Chart 1: 'Performance Breakthrough' Model



The starting point for this model is six barriers to performance excellence. These then translate into themes which can be used to diagnose how an organisation sits within the model. The diagnosis of an organisation can assess which of three positions it is at, in relation to each of the themes.

The three positions on the journey to excellent performance are starting, developing and consolidating. As this chart shows, we have given each position a colour coding: this is continued throughout this report.

1.2 Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to support LCC's plans to adopt the model, by assessing:

- How the above model applies to LCC.
- LCC's current position within the model, in terms of the barriers that are present and the degree of progress towards overcoming these barriers.

Within this, the research objectives are to:

- Explore the nature of barriers to improving performance within LCC.
- Explore how these barriers map against the model, ie how far LCC's directorates have progressed towards overcoming each of the six barriers: are they at the stage of starting, developing or consolidating?
- Highlighting examples of good practice.
- Exploring ways in which LCC employees could overcome barriers, and comparing these employee-generated solutions to the Audit Commission's eight breakthroughs.
- Exploring the nature of LCC's culture in terms of the management of employee performance.

In addition, this study aimed to support the findings of LCC's quantitative employee survey where they are of relevance to the Performance Breakthrough model.

1.3 Method

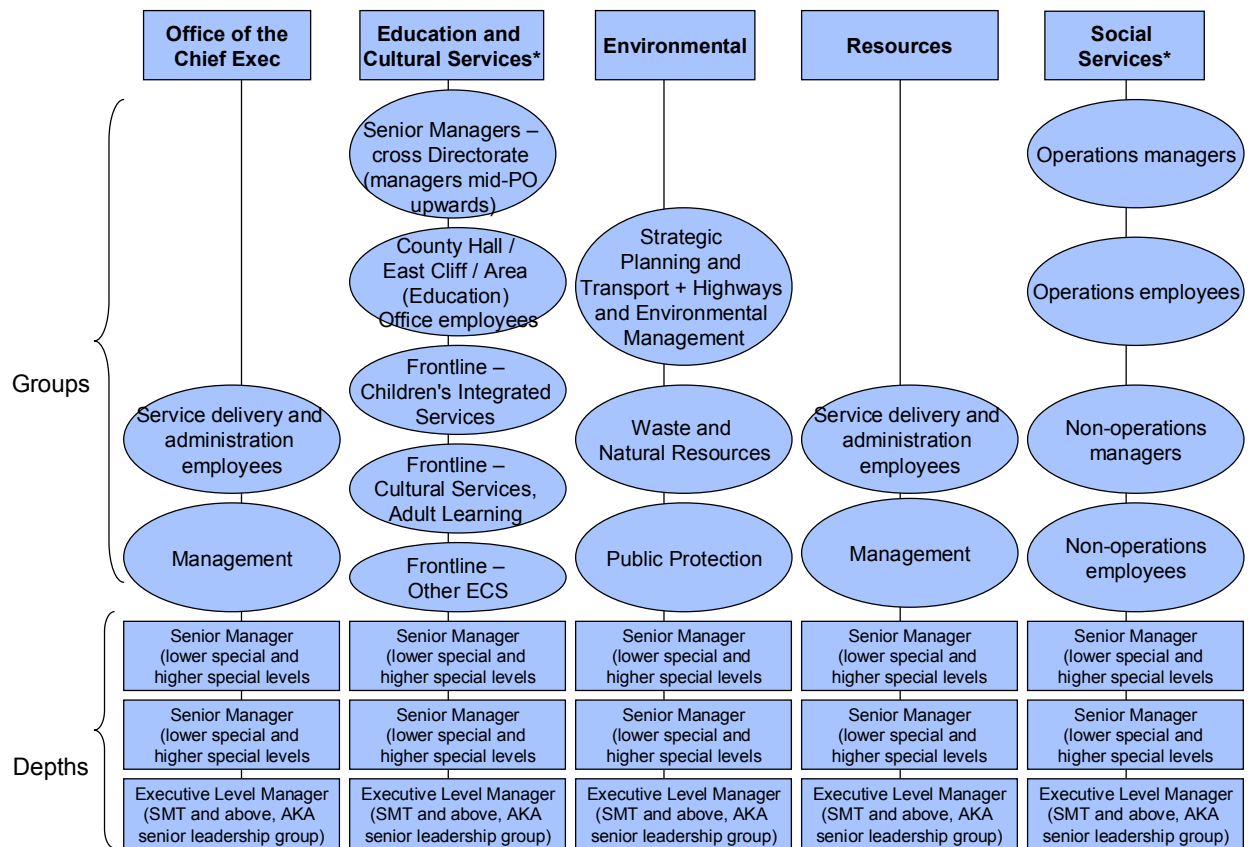
Our methodology was designed to achieve openness and honesty. A qualitative approach was best suited to exploring the reasons behind people's behaviour; getting beyond surface opinions in order to really understand the nature of the performance barriers that exist within LCC.

To do this, we used a combination of group discussions and depth interviews:

- Group discussions with employees from similar departments or at a similar level within LCC, aimed at creating a safe environment for discussion.
- Depth interviews with senior managers and executives, since their presence in the group discussions would deter honest and relaxed responses from their employees.

Our sample structure is detailed in the chart below.

Chart 2: Sample Structure



*The Education and Cultural Services and Social Services directorates, still in existence at the time of fieldwork being carried out, have now been re-organised into Adult Social Services, the Directorate for Children and Young People and Cultural Services. As far as possible, the feedback has been re-structured to reflect this. .

The Education and Cultural Services and Social Services directorates, still in existence at the time of fieldwork being carried out, have now been re-organised into Adult and Community Services and the Directorate for Children and Young People. As far as possible the feedback has been re-structured to reflect this. Cultural Services have been kept separate from Adult Social Services to allow individual analysis of these two services.

In advance of each session, participants were asked to complete a pre-session task, which they were asked to bring with them to their session. The participants were asked to informally chat to a colleague before they came to the session, about work-related things that lead to a good day at work or, on the other hand, to an unsuccessful day at work. Participants were prompted to reassure their colleague that whatever they say is confidential and to cover a number of broad points regarding what's going well and what's not going so well where they work.

Employees in general were also invited to contribute by anonymously posting comments on the same topics either online (in a form hosted both on RBA's website and on LCC's intranet) or into a sealed ballot box within the directorate premises. RBA provided four ballot boxes which were rotated between premises in accordance with research session timings. The moderator was given these comments to read in advance of their group discussions or in-depth interviews in the same directorate.

The discussions themselves were guided by a discussion guide. Within each session, a series of sort cards were used to represent both the themes of the Performance Breakthrough model and different behaviours within each theme. A copy of these materials can be found in the appendixes.

The research sessions were facilitated by experienced RBA moderators Angus Tindle, Caroline Hughes, Nick McNamara and Alan Priest. Sessions took place from 30 August to 4 October 2005.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Performance Breakthrough study, carried out by RBA Research on behalf of Lancashire County Council (LCC), aims to explore how the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough model can be applied to LCC as a means of driving improvements in employee performance across LCC's six directorates and the organisation as a whole.

The research with employees at various levels of LCC's directorates explored the nature of barriers to excellent employee performance and diagnosed how far each of LCC's directorates have progressed towards overcoming each of six barriers to performance excellence identified by the Performance Breakthrough model: are they at the stage of starting, developing or consolidating?

At a corporate level, ie drawing together the diagnoses for the five directorates:

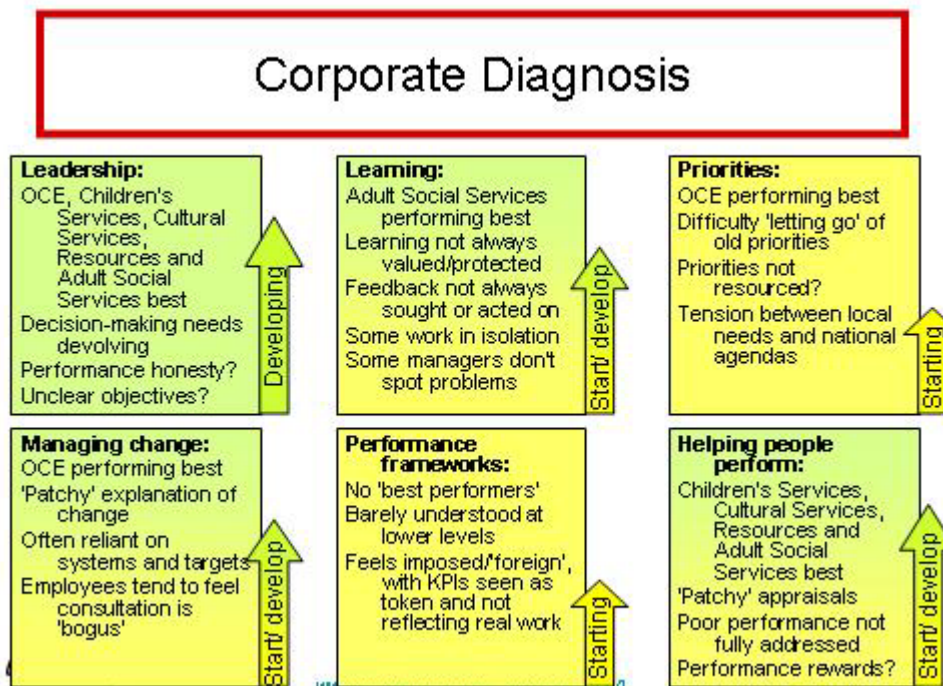
- LCC is developing within the theme of leadership. The Office of the Chief Executive (OCE), the Directorate of Children and Young People, Cultural Services, Resources Directorate and Adult Social Services all appear to perform relatively strongly within this theme. The key issues within this theme are that decision-making needs to be devolved down the chain of command and that both honesty about performance and clarity of objectives need to be applied more consistently across the five directorates.

- LCC is showing tentative signs of 'developing' within three themes, these being learning, managing change and helping people perform:
 - In the learning theme, Adult Social Services appears to be performing best. The key issues within this theme are that learning is not always sufficiently valued, rewarded or time-protected, that employee and service user feedback is not consistently sought or acted on, that some employees see their work in isolation from the corporate goals and other teams and that managers do not always proactively identify problems.
 - Within managing change, OCE appears to be performing best. The key issues within this theme are that explanations of change are not consistently forthcoming, or in language that employees understand, or focused on the difference that individuals can make; that attempts to drive and monitor change are too often reliant on systems and targets (rather than on people's behaviour); and that consultation on change is often perceived to be bogus, ie a formality concerning proposals that are really a fait accompli.
 - In helping people perform', Children and Young People, Cultural Services, Resources and Adult Social Services appear to be the best performers. The key issues for this theme are that the roll-out of appraisals appears to be inconsistent, that poor performance is not being addressed effectively or quickly enough, and that the culture does not make enough linkage between good performance and rewards.

- LCC is at the starting position in relation to two themes, these being priorities and performance frameworks:
 - In priorities, OCE appears to be performing best. The key issues within this theme are that directorates are perceived to have difficulty in letting go of old priorities, that priorities are not always adequately resourced and that local needs do not always sit well with the national – or in some cases the county or directorate – agenda.
 - In performance frameworks’, there are no directorates that stand out in their performance. The key issues for this theme are that the performance frameworks are barely understood at lower levels of the organisation, and for many employees at various levels the system feels like an imposition that does not truly aid or reflect their real work.

This corporate diagnosis is summarised in the chart below.

Chart 3: Corporate Diagnosis



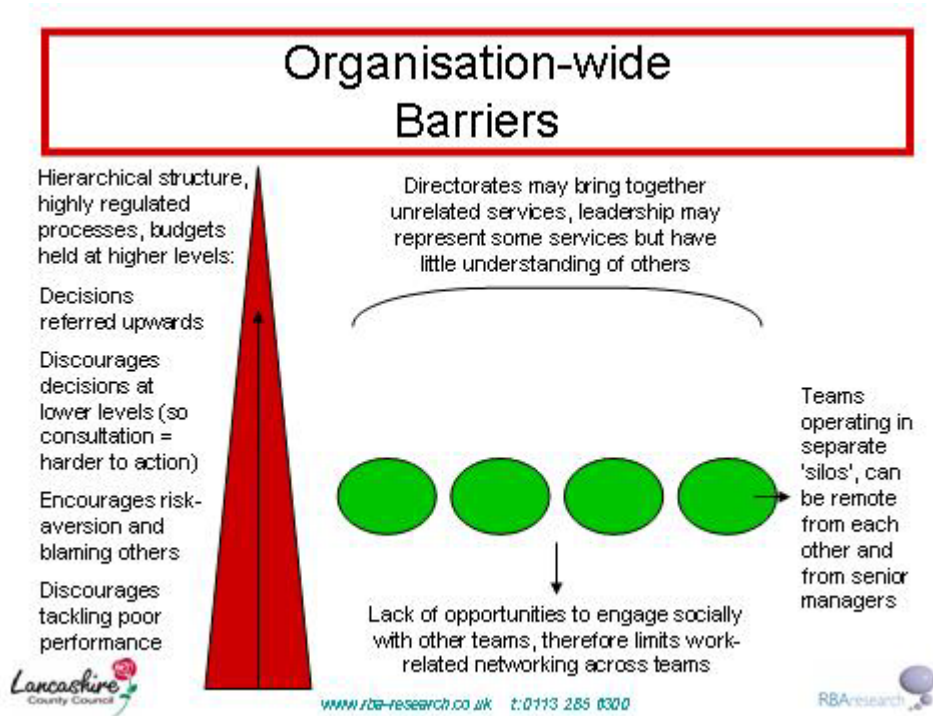
From the exploration of the barriers to excellent performance that was used to reach this diagnosis, a pattern of recurring barriers emerges:

- LCC tends to have a hierarchical structure, with highly regulated processes of checks and balances, and with budgets tending to be held at higher levels of the organisation. Participants tell us this means that:
 - Decisions tend to be referred upwards through the chain of command.
 - Decision-making is in effect discouraged at lower levels, which makes consultation harder to action and makes it more difficult to respond flexibly and quickly to service users' needs.
 - Tackling poor performance is deterred, as the processes are too complex and time-consuming and there is too great a risk of decisions being overturned higher up the chain of command.
 - Risk-aversion and blaming others are inadvertently encouraged, as employees can often deflect a decision to someone else and point to someone else's decision if something goes wrong. Participants see this effect as being contrary to the spirit in which the procedures may have been intended, ie preventing mistakes being made.
- A further recurring barrier is that directorates may bring together unrelated services due to the historical circumstances of the directorates' formation. This means that the directorate leadership may represent some services but have little understanding of others, depending on the career history of the individuals at the senior management team (SMT) level.
- Also, teams tend to operate in separate silos, meaning that employees whose work impacts on each other can be remote from each other. Similarly, employees can often feel remote from their senior managers. Participants tell us that these issues stem from both the environments in which they work, which can physically separate employees from each other and from senior managers, and from individuals' working practices, such as whether senior managers attend team meetings.

- The final recurring barrier is that of a lack of opportunities to engage socially with other teams, which limits the ability to build social relationships with other employees that may eventually facilitate work-related networking and exchanges of information across teams.

These barriers are summarised in the chart below.

Chart 4: Organisation-wide Barriers



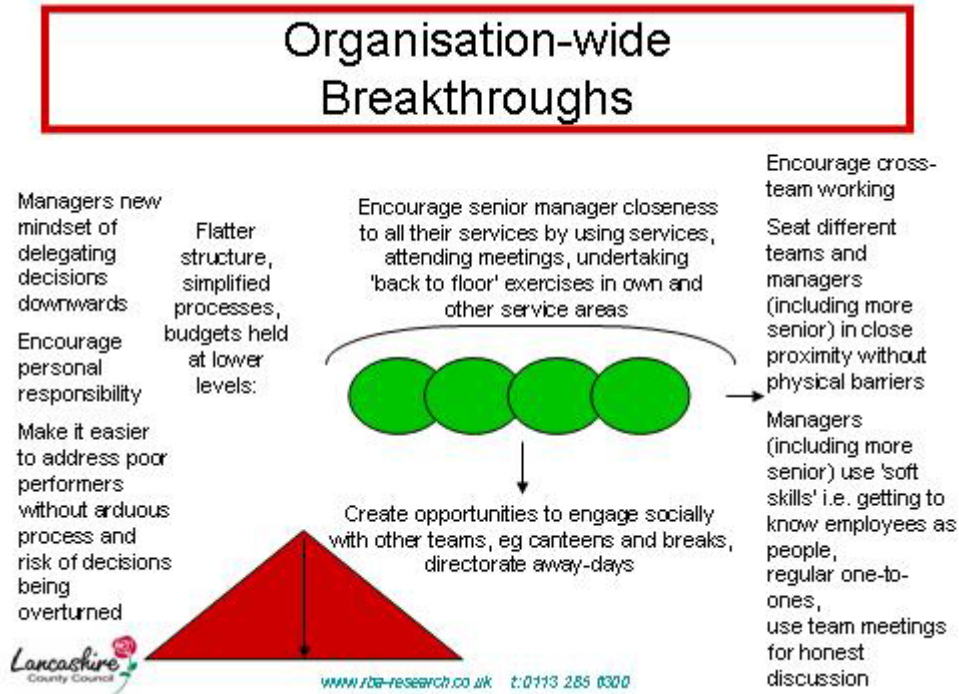
The identification of these barriers was used as a springboard to developing ideas for overcoming the barriers (the Performance Breakthrough model calls these ideas breakthrough ideas). As is the case with the barriers, a pattern emerges of recurring breakthroughs:

- Participants suggest that LCC should have a flatter structure, with simplified processes, and with budgets devolved to be held at lower levels. Participants argue that this would assist the following:
 - Managers having a new mindset of delegating decisions downwards, without seeing this as a loss of their own status or control.
 - Encouraging personal responsibility for decisions and making sure decisions lead to successful outcomes, rather than tending to blame others when things go wrong.
 - Making it easier to address poor performers without an arduous process and without the risk of decisions being overturned at higher levels within the organisation.
- A further recurring breakthrough is that of encouraging senior managers to become closer to the day-to-day, on-the-ground operations of their services by using their own services, by attending meetings at lower levels, and by undertaking back-to-the-floor exercises in both the service area they have their roots in (if applicable) and in other service areas. Participants believe that this will break down barriers with employees and encourage employees to give more honest feedback, and both the improved communications with employees and the frontline experiences themselves will encourage better-informed decision-making.
- Participants also suggest that LCC creates opportunities to engage socially with other teams. For example, shared canteens, facilities for taking breaks, and directorate away-days create opportunities to build social relationships with other employees that may eventually encourage work-related networking and exchanges of information.

- Encourage cross-team working on projects, again with a view to breaking down barriers between teams.
- Seat different teams and managers (including more senior managers) in close proximity to each other, without physical barriers to separate them, again to encourage lines of communication. In the case of more senior managers, this may entail not having a separate office (which participants perceive to create a physical barrier) and not using a secretary or PA to screen out calls and visitors.
- Encourage managers (including more senior managers) to further improve communications with employees by:
 - Using soft skills, eg getting to know employees as people, whether this be by making small talk at work, or by attending social gatherings with employees at different levels and in different teams.
 - Holding regular one-to-ones to allow employees to discuss their projects, their development and any issues that concern them.
 - Using team meetings for honest discussion, with employees having space to set their own agendas (ie not allowing the meeting time to be dominated by dissemination of information such as the Core Brief).
- Participants also suggest that this use of soft skills will also provide a better means of disseminating and reinforcing the aims of teams, directorates and LCC overall.

These breakthroughs are summarised in the chart below.

Chart 5: Organisation-wide Breakthroughs



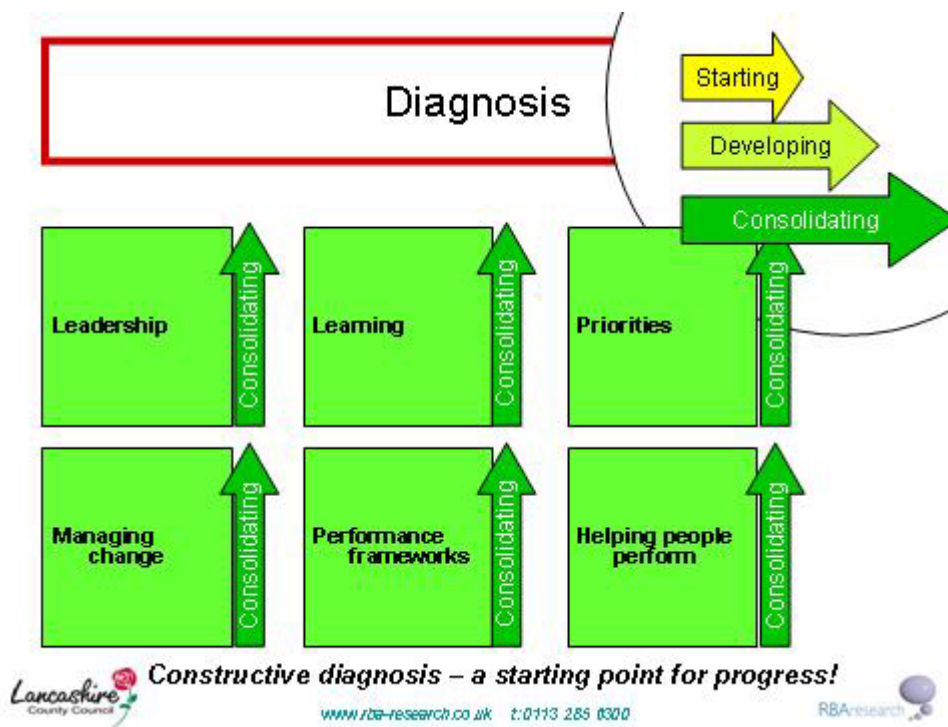
3 MAIN FINDINGS

Within the qualitative sessions, discussions with participants were used to diagnose how far LCC's directorates have progressed towards overcoming each of the six barriers to performance excellence. As noted, each of the barriers was translated into a theme, and within each theme the discussion helped to assess whether the directorate is at the stage of starting, developing or consolidating. This diagnostic discussion was then used as a springboard for exploring ideas for overcoming the barriers identified.

Sections 3.1 to 3.6 detail the main findings of the research on a directorate-by-directorate basis. For each directorate, a diagnosis section is followed by one exploring participants' breakthrough ideas.

In the diagnosis sections, colour coding has been used to highlight the stages of progress towards achieving excellent performance, ie starting, developing and consolidating, so a directorate diagnosis can be taken in at a glance. The chart below includes a key to this colour-coding (top right) and shows what a directorate that is consolidating across all six themes (ie one that has largely overcome all six barriers) would look like.

Chart 6: Diagnosis – A ‘Consolidating’ Organisation



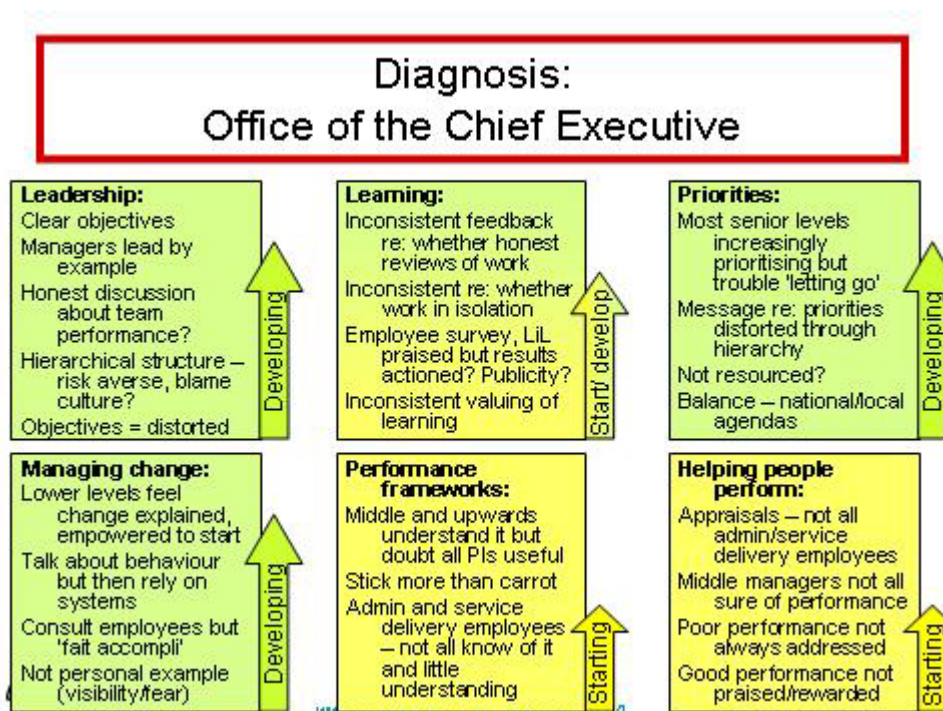
It is worth noting that none of the directorates are in this position, but it is also important to emphasise that the diagnosis sections are intended constructively and that diagnosis of the barriers is the first step towards overcoming them.

3.1 Office of the Chief Executive

3.1.1 Diagnosis

As the chart below shows, the Office of the Chief Executive (OCE) is developing on three themes, showing tentative signs of developing on one theme and is starting on two themes.

Chart 7: Diagnosis of Office of Chief Executive



In the **leadership** theme, the feedback suggests that OCE is developing.

At all levels there is reportedly clarity of objectives and focus and these are communicated by managers who tend to lead by example, perhaps reflecting an apparent engagement with ongoing professional development. A senior manager is cited as a good example of *“going around the team once a week, finding out about projects and giving active feedback”*.

However, there is concern at all levels about the degree to which both discussion about performance and delegation of decision-making is genuine. Some suggest that discussions about team performance are not completely honest and that there may be a blame culture in some parts of the directorate. The issues of honest discussion and genuine delegation of decision-making, are thought to be linked: the hierarchical, many-tiered structure demands that decisions are referred upwards, which makes it difficult to genuinely empower employees at all levels to make their own decisions. In addition, because so many people tend to be involved in each decision, it encourages people to be risk-averse and blame others for problems.

Furthermore, although employees at all levels say they know the council's objectives, at more senior levels there are questions about how much the message is reinterpreted or distorted as it passes through the chain of command.

In the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that OCE is moving between starting and developing.

Across all levels, there is inconsistent feedback regarding all of the elements of learning. Employees give mixed views regarding whether projects are reviewed, whether those reviews that do take place are helpful, whether employees feel able to openly discuss mistakes and whether resultant learnings are shared. Employees at higher levels believe that OCE is improving in terms of sharing learnings. Some employees at lower levels mention a culture of "we perform well and we don't want anyone saying otherwise" in parts of OCE.

There are inconsistencies regarding whether or not teams think of the organisation as a system with interdependent parts. Some more senior employees express doubts and some employees at lower levels mention working in isolation.

Similarly, there are inconsistencies regarding whether customer and employee feedback is asked for and acted upon: the employee survey and Life in Lancashire surveys are cited as examples of good practice. There is general concern that feedback is only obtained reactively and is not always acted upon. At higher levels, employees suggest that action is taken but the fact that it stems from consultation is not communicated clearly enough, leading to cynicism.

Some employees at lower and higher levels believe that problems have to be drawn to managers' attention. Learning is thought to be valued – but not consistently, examples being that managers do not always take account of those studying regularly when setting deadlines for delegated work, and there are reported inconsistencies in deciding who accesses training. In addition learning is perceived not to be rewarded, in that it is perceived not to lead to promotion or re-grading.

Within the **priorities** theme, the feedback suggests that OCE is developing.

Employees at more senior levels assert that the most senior levels of the organisation are increasingly clarifying priorities – an example given is that of the members spending a day each year considering budgets and deciding on the organisation's priorities. However, all management levels perceive there to be cultural difficulties in letting go of old priorities, and there is again concern that the hierarchical structure causes the message about the organisation's priorities to become distorted.

Some employees at higher and lower levels give examples of priorities not being supported by resources. Some perceive the process for filling vacancies to be drawn-out, leaving some areas under-staffed, whilst there is an example of spare budget being spent in a way that does not support priorities.

Employees perceive LCC to strike a balance between the national agenda and local needs, falling into line with the national agenda but making representations to Government when elements of the national agenda are not working locally. An example given is that of putting a case against having a unitary local authority in Lancashire.

Considering the theme of **managing change**, the feedback suggests that OCE is developing.

Employees at lower levels do feel empowered to start change and do feel that change is explained in a way that they can understand.

Employees at all levels tend to say that managers talk about how change will occur through the behaviour of employees and that managers do consult employees about how change will work. However, there are examples of talk about change not being followed through, of managers subsequently relying on processes and systems to drive change, and of consultation on change taking the form of proposals being presented as a fait accompli, with comments being invited but not proactively sought. This suggests that these elements of managing change are not fully embedded in the culture and may be seen to have no real value.

Managers are not consistently leading change by setting a personal example. Employees at higher levels perceive this to be partly a problem of manager visibility (as noted, some managers are perceived to be too remote) and partly a mindset issue, where some managers fear change because they perceive any change in their responsibilities to be a potential threat to their power and status.

In terms of **performance frameworks**', the feedback suggests that OCE is starting.

Employees at middle managerial levels and upwards claim to understand the performance framework but there are doubts as to whether all of the performance indicators involved are helpful. Whilst the Policy Unit can see how the framework relates to them, others find it more difficult to relate to and there is generally perceived to be a need for a more focused, streamlined system:

"It works but it can be wayward and unfocused" – middle manager

"It can be a box-ticking exercise. We don't work to it day-in day-out; we're not regularly engaged with it" – middle manager

There are also suggestions that it is used as more of a stick than a carrot:

"If you fail the CPA, you get less money and you get people coming in an interfering with what you're doing!" – senior manager

At administrative and performance delivery levels not all employees know that there is a framework, and there is little understanding of it.

Finally, within the theme of **helping people perform**, feedback suggests that OCE is starting.

At administrative and service delivery levels, not all have had appraisals.

Middle managers claim they don't always know when their team is/isn't performing, and why this is the case.

Employees at all levels believe that poor performance is not always properly addressed, due to the long, bureaucratic process involved and the fact that managers can be undermined by having their decisions – eg to dismiss – overturned further up the hierarchy. However, there are now some examples of this improving, for example by introducing probationary periods:

“There are people who'd be booted out if we were in the private sector.”

At all levels, employees believe that good performance is not always even praised, and good performance is certainly not rewarded:

“We didn't even get a drink to thank us for the CPA result.” – non-manager

“You don't get something tangible, like a pay rise, but you might be trusted to work from home.” – middle manager

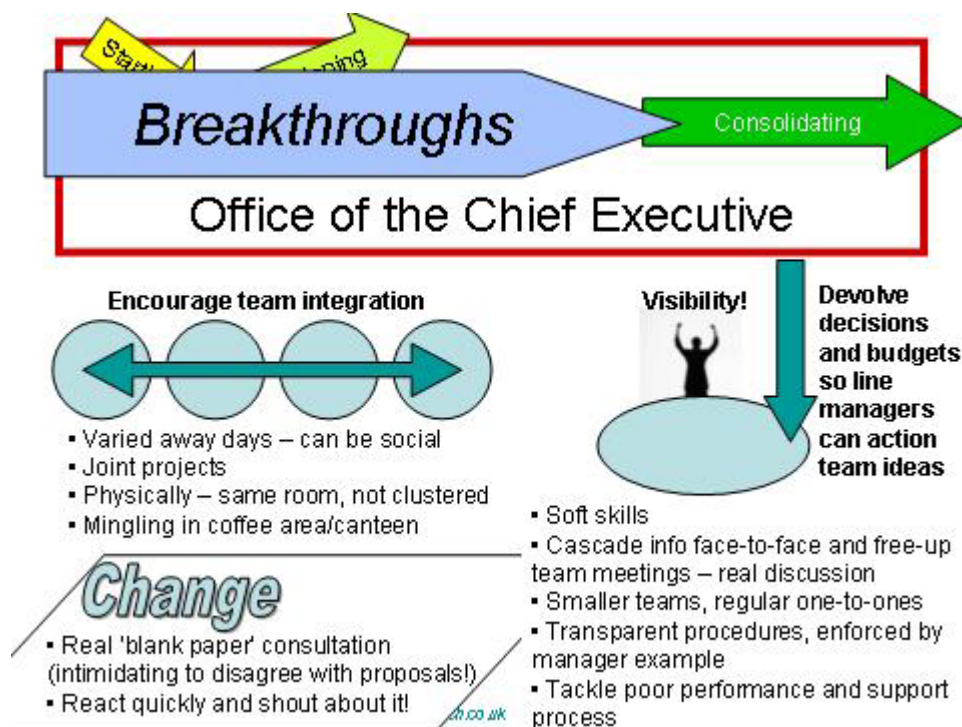
At both managerial and administrative and service delivery levels, participants claim that not all employees understand what's expected of them. Indeed, some vague job descriptions make it difficult to reward employees, since someone with a more demanding job description might perform well but not meet targets, whilst a poorer-performer with less clear or less demanding objectives might receive a reward.

In addition, the pace with which priorities change mean an individual's key targets might change so that they perform well and deliver on something that is no longer important, thus missing a bonus. With this minefield, anyone administering fiscal rewards might be tempted to reward everyone, thus invalidating the whole purpose of giving bonuses!

3.1.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthroughs that participants suggest could be used to help achieve performance excellence within OCE.

Chart 8: Breakthroughs for Office of Chief Executive



A proposed solution to the perceived lack of employee integration across directorates is to encourage the four teams to integrate through team building exercises such as away-days. These away-days should be varied not just outward-bound, days as repetition encourages cynicism. Another proposed solution was to consult employees regarding types of activity and accept that simply socialising with less familiar managers and colleagues can have benefits.

Participants also suggest bringing together people in similar roles within the different teams, and consider incorporating activities that will allow employees to learn about one-another's roles, and emphasise the importance of consolidating the away-day camaraderie when in the office. Joint projects across teams must really happen, not just be talked about. Integrate different teams physically by having them in the same room and not clustered to signal being separate from one another. Also, providing a coffee area or canteen where different teams can mingle as social mingling will encourage sharing of work-related information.

Managers should be more visible. Although some immediate line managers are thought to be accessible, not all are, and managers that are more senior tend to be seen as more remote. To overcome these barriers proposed, solutions should be encouraged such as the introduction of face-to-face contact to cascade information (not just newsletters, briefing documents and emails). Also, an important breakthrough to free-up team meetings from long agendas and briefings to allow genuine discussion was believed to be an important way of increasing employee participation. Managers should also enhance soft skills: say hello to employees, show a genuine interest in them as people, walk around the office and talk to people and attend informal social events with colleagues at all levels (eg after-work drinks and leaving dos). If managers and employees get to know one another better as people, this will allow employees to feel more at ease in being honest with managers.

Managers should lead smaller teams – service delivery and administration employees perceive eight to ten people to be optimum. The OCE Policy Unit is thought to be a good example of close team working. Managers should also have regular one-to-ones (some suggest fortnightly) to allow employees to air their issues, increase manager awareness of workload, provide an opportunity for the manager to give praise and ensure appraisals are followed-up.

Managers should be encouraged to visibly follow the rules set for their employees (eg lead by example in relation to flexitime, when holidays can overlap etc) Managers should also be encouraged to change their mindset, so that delegating authority is perceived to be a sign of good management, and not an erosion of power.

Managers could simplify decision-making procedures and devolve both decision-making and budget-holding further down the organisational structure, to empower employees at all levels to take their own decisions and take responsibility for these accordingly.

The procedure for tackling poor performance should be simplified and encourage senior managers to support the outcomes achieved by junior managers. Senior managers must set an example to managers at all levels by praising employees for good performance. On the other hand, good performance rewards should be considered such as extra leave days, vouchers or gym discounts.

The performance indicators for which data is collected should be rationalised. Participants request that LCC apply rigorous challenge so that the ones remaining are truly useful. The acid test in doing so should be the question “what does the data achieve?”

Encourage commitment to consultation with employees through consulting employees about the issues starting with a blank sheet of paper **before** the planned changes have been developed. Participants tell us it is more intimidating to give feedback when this involves actively disagreeing with what has already been proposed, and some employees will conclude that in reality the proposal has already been decided upon. Other teams could learn from the market research function, where employees are experienced in consulting employees and facilitating brainstorming. External facilitators could open-up the discussions within teams.

Managers should react more quickly to employee feedback (devolved decision-making and budget-holding should help with this) and LCC should actively promote changes that have occurred as a result of employee feedback so that employees become aware that their feedback **can** make a difference. For example, the introduction of PDAs resulted from the employee survey, but some senior managers question whether employees realise this.

The process for deciding who is able to access which learning opportunities needs to become more transparent and consistently followed.

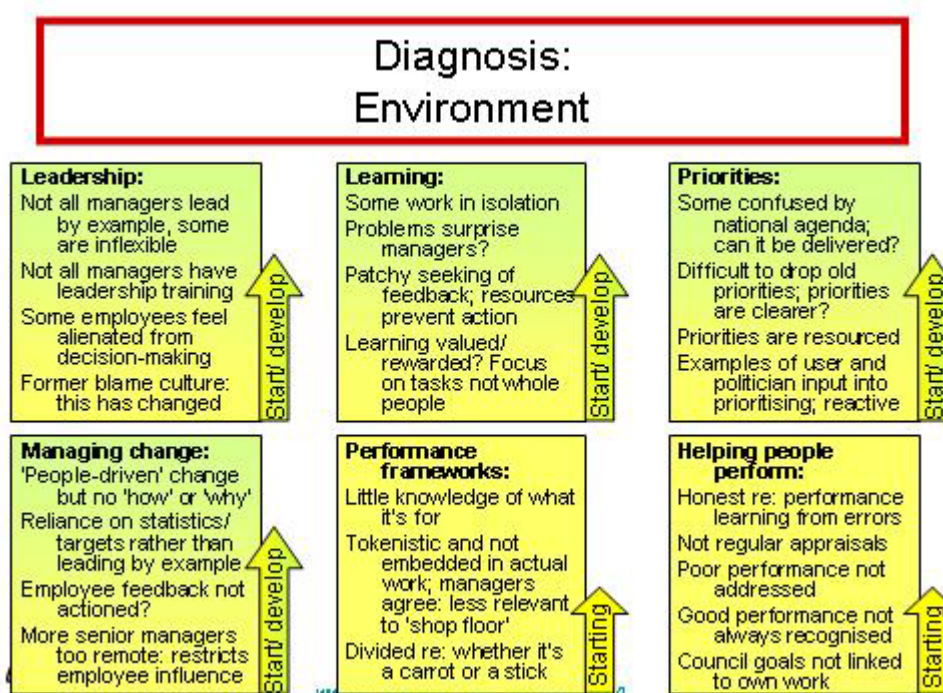
Finally, a facility needs to be provided where employees can access information that answers those questions they feel silly asking (eg fundamental questions about the team's purpose and one's individual role, particularly after re-structuring). The intranet doesn't fulfil this role, since employees want something more directorate-specific that allows sharing of answers.

3.2 Environment Directorate

3.2.1 Diagnosis

The Environment Directorate is between the starting and developing stages for four of the six themes, and is starting for the remaining two.

Chart 9: Diagnosis of the Environment Directorate



The feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is moving between the starting and developing positions in terms of the **leadership** theme.

Managers and employee across the services (public protection; waste and natural resources; strategic planning, transport and highways, environmental management) say that not all managers are leading by example:

“Because they aren’t familiar with what you do” – strategic planning, transport and highways, environmental management team

“My boss is the only one in the team who doesn’t fill in work plans.” – waste and natural resources team

“Managers tend to be very ‘black and white’ so have a ‘just do it’ mentality, but this is improving” – manager

Some managers suggest that managers need to learn to be more flexible and set an example by not adhering so strictly to their job descriptions.

Strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management employees say that not all managers have training in leadership (*“Mine’s not had ‘how to appraise’ training yet.”*). Employees across the services feel they have limited input into decisions. Some managers concede that “some employees feel alienated, for example if they’ve been passed over for promotion”:

“We are encouraged to give feedback but is it really acted on?”

Not all service delivery employees have regular discussions about team performance. Some managers note that there has previously been a blame culture but this has changed. As an example of good practice, employees mention a manager in the Countryside Services with whom employees feel at ease and able to openly discuss mistakes.

In the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is between the starting and developing stages.

The public protection, waste and natural resources teams **do** see how their work fits with those of others, perhaps because of individuals within these teams partnership working with external bodies.

However, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management employees tend to see their work in isolation:

“People don’t know each other generally. There’s lots of agency employee and short-term contracts.” - strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management

Some of the managers consulted agree that this can be the case:

“We’d like to spend time in other departments learning about what they are doing but there’s the guilt if we do that!” – manager

Employees across the services – public protection; waste and natural resources; strategic planning, transport and highways, environmental management – are divided as to whether problems come as a surprise to managers, feeling that sometimes problems are tackled routinely and sometimes not (*“my manager’s not asked what I’m doing in the last 10 months”*).

Managers acknowledge that there are managers who don’t address problems but claim they are the exceptions:

“People problems tend to come as more of a surprise than business problems, perhaps because HR are now removed from the service” – waste and natural resources team

Employees across waste and natural resources, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management are divided regarding whether customer and employee feedback is sought and acted upon. Some feel that feedback is sought from customers, but not from employees, whilst others give examples of limited resources preventing change:

“We take one percentage from the Best Value survey and then it waits a year before it’s made out as a report. Lack of resources prevents change, although we do act on customer feedback because it’s not anonymous.” – waste and natural resources team

Waste and natural resources feel that the availability of training is too limited, learning is not sufficiently valued and knowledge tends not to be shared. Some of the strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management employees observe that learning tends to be focused on carrying out specific tasks, rather than developing the whole person. Managers acknowledge that learning is not linked to rewards in a financial sense, that past work is not consistently reviewed and that learnings are not consistently shared.

On the **priorities** theme, the feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is starting, with some signs of developing.

Employees in public protection, strategic planning, transport and highways, environmental management, and some of the waste and natural resources employees, do not always understand how the national agenda fits with local needs:

“There are mixed messages, with the Government saying one thing...there are also massive expectations but we can’t deliver because of lack of resources and slow response.” – strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management.

Others in public protection feel that the national agenda is continuously changing. However, some employees in waste and natural resources, and all the managers consulted feel that a balance is being struck between the national agenda and local needs.

Employees across public protection, waste and natural resources, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel that it is sometimes difficult to drop old priorities, and that in public protection it is not always clear what the priorities are. Some managers across the directorate suggest that at times everything is a priority and more direction is needed, but some argue this is improving.

Employees across public protection, waste and natural resources and strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel that resources are given to support priorities but, for the public protection employees, equipment can be very slow to arrive. Some managers across the directorate suggest that priorities are not properly resourced.

Waste and natural resources employees feel that service users and politicians are involved in prioritisation, with yearly picnic site surveys and visitor centre user groups being given as examples by the Countryside Services. The Welfare Rights Team employees give positive examples of surveys being used to obtain feedback and politicians being encouraged to use their service, especially after elections. For others in public protection, however, the feedback process is more reactive, ie it relies largely on complaints. Certain managers across the directorate suggest that service users are more accessible than politicians.

In **managing change**, the feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is starting with some signs of developing.

Employees across public protection, waste and natural resources and strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management say that managers *do* talk to employees about the fact that employee will drive the changes, but tend not to explain exactly *how* change will happen. Some in public protection, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management say it's not clear *why* it's happening:

"They tell you as much as they know but they're not clear themselves." – service delivery employee

"We're not given the full picture about restructuring in team briefings, they're giving you 'the line'." – service delivery employee

"You hear about reviews but not about the how and when." – strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management

Despite talking about how employees will drive changes, there is a subsequent emphasis on statistics and targets rather than on monitoring people's behaviour. The managers consulted agree that there have been barriers to managers leading change by their own personal example, due to managers' own discomfort about change, but say that this is being addressed through change management training and a change management scheme with employees from a cross-section of the team.

Employees across public protection, waste and natural resources and strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel that, although their opinions are sought, for instance in the employee survey, they feel their views aren't always acted on and change feels forced on them from above:

"They ignore what they don't want to hear." – service delivery employee

Some service delivery employees feel they are *not* encouraged to start ongoing change, and managers across the directorate agree with this. Some employees in waste and natural resources, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel they *are* encouraged to do this.

“Some things have changed – we have team briefings outside, which we asked for.” - waste and natural resources

Some employees in strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel that the relative remoteness of more senior managers and their lack of visibility is part of the problem, as this makes it more difficult for employees and their line managers to feedback to and influence more senior managers.

On **performance frameworks**, feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is starting.

Those in waste and natural resources, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management suggest that they know very little about the performance framework and its specific aims, and employees in public protection are divided about how much they know:

“Is it targets and performance indicators?” – public protection

Some in public protection and all those consulted in waste and natural resources, strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel the performance indicators (PIs) are imposed, denied real value and are not truly embedded in the activities of teams:

“As long as they reach the indicators, they don’t care how we get there or what the employees are doing.” – service delivery employee

“We achieved targets and won charter marks, but it puts pressure on in subsequent years...have the things set up then been followed through?” – service delivery employee

Managers tend to agree that, even if they find the PIs useful personally, they are less relevant to the frontline. Some managers also suggest that the PIs can identify problems but can actually detract from solving them as administering the PIs uses up the resources that could otherwise be used to tackle the problems they identify.

Employees in public protection are also divided regarding whether the performance framework is used as a carrot or a stick, as are managers:

“We’re reminded that we’re not a statutory body and funding could be cut.” – service delivery employee

“Your funding is cut if you don’t meet the PIs, but it’s not increased if you meet or exceed them.” – manager

On the **helping people perform**’ theme, feedback suggests that the Environment Directorate is starting.

Employees across public protection, waste and natural resources and strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management feel able to admit and learn from mistakes, and claim they know when and why their team isn’t performing. However, employees across these services state that not all employees have regular appraisals, despite being trained to undergo them two years ago.

There are examples of poor performance not being addressed:

“We know who isn’t performing due to targets on inspection quotas, but this is addressed to the team, not to the individuals whom we all know are responsible.” – service delivery employee

“They don’t like conflict, they’re not supported by HR or senior managers and they’re not trained to deal with conflict.” - strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management

Managers attribute this to limited sanctions and a process that is akin to “using a sledgehammer to crack a nut”. Some concede that this is a side-effect of trying to be a good employer and protect employees’ rights.

There is an example of an employee who had never seen their job description, and when he/she finally saw their job description they discovered that they were supposed to have been line managing and developing another employee.

Employees across all these services state that good performance is not always acknowledged, praised or rewarded.

Employees across all these services also say that they do not fully understand how the council’s goals and values apply to their own specific work:

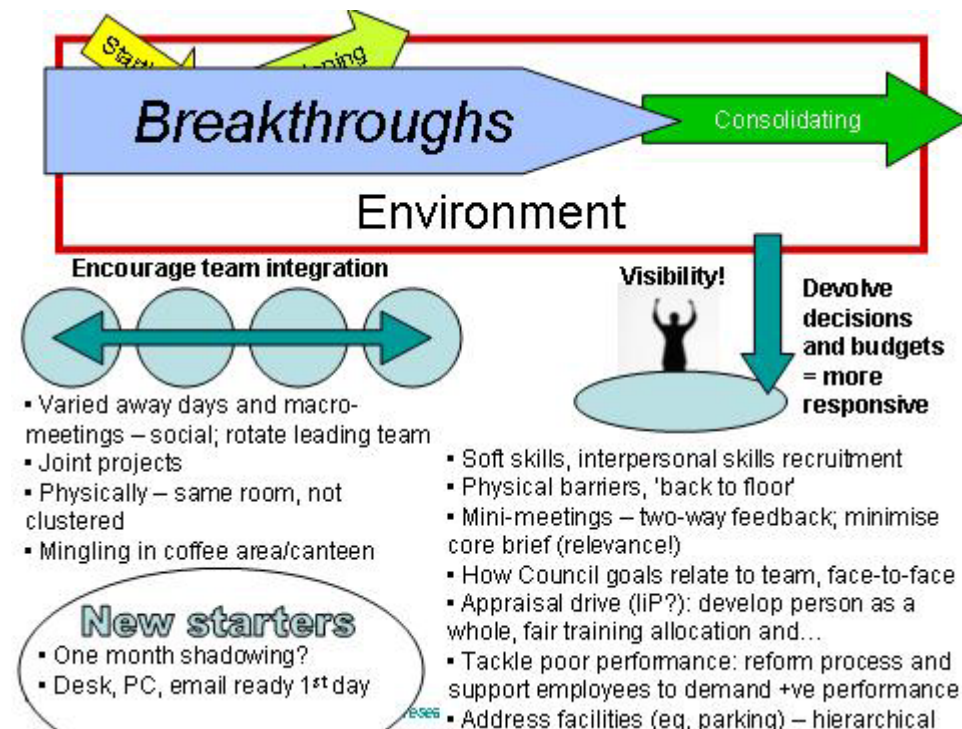
“They’re on a banner outside the building and on the Internet but I don’t really know it. It’s too much of a mishmash from the centre – there’s so many levels of mission statement, you don’t know how your level fits with the corporate goals.” – strategic planning, transport and highways, and environmental management

Managers agree that there needs to be more emphasis on reinforcing the council's goals and values face to face. However, there are suggestions that issuing briefings is not effective. Strategic planning, transport and highways, environmental management employees say that the core briefings are often irrelevant to their team, so the only way to sit through 45 minutes of it is to lampoon it.

3.2.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthrough ideas proposed by employees in the Environment Directorate, as ways of helping achieve performance excellence.

Chart 10: Breakthroughs for Environment



The suggested breakthrough ideas include:

- Explain how the council's goals, values and performance indicators apply to work at the team level, and keep reinforcing this face-to-face.
- Achieve greater clarity regarding what the priorities are. This should come from the top of the organisation.
- Managers to encourage a flexible approach to roles – thinking outside of the strict job description – and to be given training in interpersonal skills. Future recruitment should take account of interpersonal abilities, eg some currently see any discussion or conflict as an unmanageable confrontation, which can prevent poor performance being addressed or leave employee without basic facilities.

- Reform the disciplinary processes, designed to protect employees, that in reality prevent poor performance being addressed.
- Give employees the authority to develop other employees and support these employees in demanding good performance from their colleagues:
 - Support those working in project teams to demand good performance from others in these teams.
 - Ensure job descriptions clearly specify whether employees have the responsibility for developing other employees.
- Prioritise the roll-out of regular appraisals, with this being championed by senior managers as a key priority. Employees ask whether the attempt to gain Investors in People status be used as a catalyst, and note that the introduction of regular appraisals would also help liP to impact on LCC in more than a tokenistic way.
- Link the appraisal process to decisions about what training people receive. This would lead to a more logical allocation of training. Training should also look at developing the person as a whole and how they may progress in future, rather than looking only at skills used in their immediate tasks. This linking of training to appraisals could also be used to tackle training addicts and favourites who get more than their fair share. Also, it is important to feedback to employees **why** they haven't been able to take up certain training opportunities.
- Harness the potential of the appraisal process:
 - As catalyst to refresh or set appropriate job descriptions.
 - As means of reminding employee of the objectives of their role.
 - To address poor performance and gather evidence to apply sanctions if necessary.

- Delegate authority downwards:
 - Delegate the ability to make decisions and the budget needed to action them downwards. Employees feel the present process of funding being held by very senior managers and decisions signed off by cabinet renders employee powerless and their services too bureaucratic/slow to respond effectively to the needs of service users.
 - Tell employees what the desired outcome is from the work that they are doing, but avoid being prescriptive about how they achieve this. The Welfare Rights Service employees feel this works very effectively.
- Provide better inductions for new employees into LCC:
 - The current half-day induction is believed to be insufficient due to LCC's size and complexity. Employees suggest shadowing an appropriate selection of established employee for a longer period, eg one month.
 - Ensure new arrivals have a desk and PC awaiting them, with email access already set up, etc.
- Instigate a mix of smaller/shorter and larger/longer meetings:
 - 10 minute mini-meetings with your manager to discuss work and issues.
 - Encourage employees to give ideas in smaller forums (eg the cross-team change management team) rather than at larger team briefings, so it is easier to speak up.
 - Claims Service macro-meetings are valued as they foster a sense of how different teams' work is inter-related.

- Use meetings – eg team briefings – to facilitate genuine two-way feedback (ie not just the manager speaking to employee):
 - Feedback from employee to managers about workload and issues, with managers actively listening. Time should be set aside in work plans for doing this.
 - Feedback from managers to employees: for example, this could be feedback regarding why individuals cannot take up a particular training opportunity; or it could be feedback from a manager regarding why (s)he seem stressed and less approachable at a particular time.
 - Don't let the session be dominated by the core briefing. Keep the core briefing brief and focused on those elements that are relevant to the team.
- Break down barriers between line managers and employees to encourage better communication:
 - Managers should say hello, ask people how their weekends were, relate to them as people...
 - Remove the remaining physical barriers between managers and their employee (ie by having them sitting with and integrated into their teams).
 - Managers should be cautious about sending employee away because of workload – this may be seen as unapproachable.
 - But employee can manage upwards too: eg an employee member had a heart-to-heart with a manager about feeling unable to approach the manager. This prompted the manager to deal with the workload issues that was making him/her inaccessible.

- Furthermore, break down barriers between managers (*those that are more senior than immediate line managers*) and employees to encourage better communication:
 - These managers should sit in on team meetings to keep in touch with what's going on at the frontline, eg a monthly presence with each team.
 - These managers to go back to the floor – this helps them keep in touch with employee issues and could make them less tolerant of issues such as the lack of facilities and equipment, which can currently obstruct performance and damage employee morale.
 - Again, remove physical barriers between these managers and their employees by having them sitting with/integrated into their employee teams, with a separate meeting room to use *only for making private calls and holding private meetings*.
 - Avoid using secretaries to screen out approaches from employees
 - Again, these managers to say hello, ask people how their weekends were, relate to them as people.
 - Allow any employees who so desire to attend management team meetings.
- Explain how the council's goals, values and performance indicators apply to work at the team level and keep reinforcing this face-to-face.

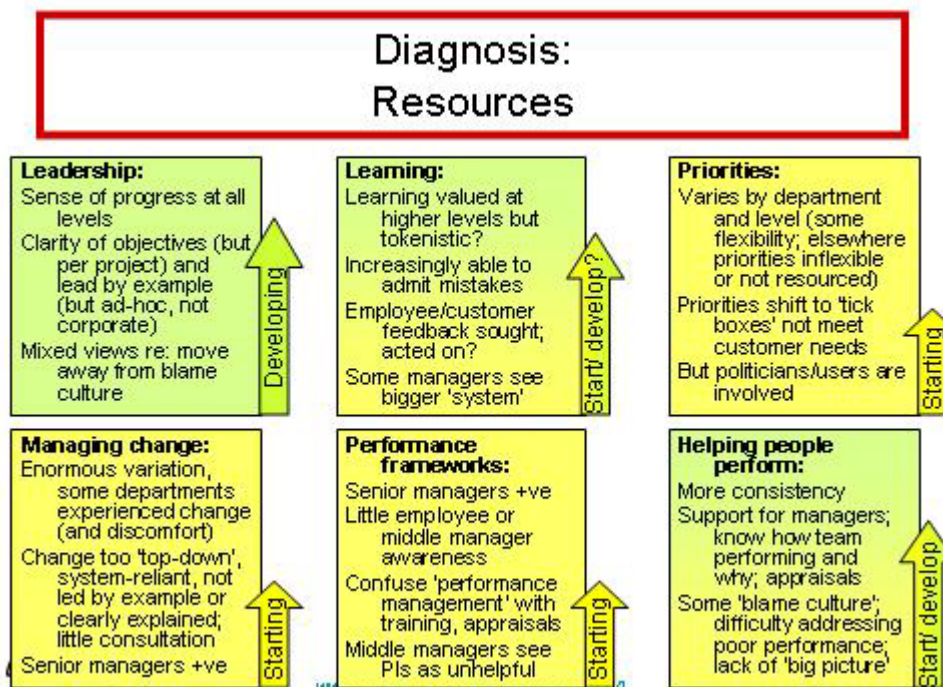
- Use regular away-days:
 - For a geographic area, eg the northern area, to bring together employee from disparate Countryside Services teams and help break down barriers. Teams could take it in turn to lead the days and could programme activities to ensure people are prompted to discuss their work and see how their work relates to that of others.
 - To encourage employees to integrate through socialising. This can also help break down barriers with line managers and more senior managers – to aid this, managers should not perform leadership roles on away-days, as that simply reinforces the existing feeling of hierarchy.
- Consider a move away from unsuitable central Preston sites that lack adequate parking, or basic toilet or heating facilities.
- The current allocation of parking spaces is perceived to prioritise senior managers and members. Some frontline employees, for whom parking is essential to transport equipment, are left without designated parking. For employees, this speaks volumes about the hierarchical nature of the organisation and the extent to which frontline employees are valued. Employees suggest that LCC should prioritise the practical needs of employees, and stop using these privileges to signal the status of more senior officers and members.

3.3 Resources Directorate

3.3.1 Diagnosis

The Resources Directorate is starting on three of the Performance Breakthrough themes, is showing signs of developing within two themes and is more clearly at the developing stage within the leadership theme. The chart below summarises the diagnosis.

Chart 11: Diagnosis of Resources



As noted above, in terms of **leadership**, the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is developing.

At all levels there is a sense that the directorate is moving forwards and improvements have been seen to take place.

There is a clarity of objectives (particularly at the most senior levels) but this is by no means universal. In particular some feel that clarity of objectives is achieved on a per project basis but not at an overall strategic level. Similarly, there is evidence that managers within some, but not other, departments lead by example – indicating that this style of leadership may be developing ad-hoc at departmental level rather than developing strategically across the directorate as a whole.

There are mixed views as to how successfully the move away from a blame culture is progressing. Some say that they are increasingly able to make decisions whilst being honest about problems, however (particularly at higher levels within the directorate) there is a perception that this transformation is only just beginning.

In the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is starting.

Though the importance of learning is acknowledged by some at higher levels, this acknowledgement can appear tokenistic given other evidence suggesting learning is not valued. An example of this is the discrepancy between mileage rates paid for training (13-14p compared with 42p per mile for other travel) suggests less commitment to training.

There are, however, some indications of a tentative move towards developing:

- Some people feel they are increasingly able to admit when things do not go well, although they are not yet comfortable doing so.
- Employee and customer feedback is at least sought. although some say feedback is ignored rather than acted upon.
- Some managers are beginning to see the bigger picture in terms of perceiving the organisation as a system – for example they feel that their work fits with what other teams are doing and they review past work in order to action future improvements.

For **priorities**, the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is starting.

There is a lot of variability across different levels of employees and also between different departments:

- In some departments there are reports of managers prioritising flexibly and moving towards developing.
- However, in other departments there is a belief that resources are not always allocated to appropriate priorities, alongside a perceived lack of flexibility.

There is strong agreement amongst employees and some managers that though priorities may shift as a situation changes, they often shift to allow people to tick boxes rather than to meet genuine customer-driven needs. On the positive side, there is strong agreement that decisions about priorities do involve service users and politicians, indicating a gradual move towards developing.

Within the theme of **managing change**', the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is starting.

There is reportedly tremendous variation between different departments in the directorate, alongside little overlap between employee, manager and more senior manager views.

There is a perception that managers do not lead by example or say how change will happen (with the exception of the most senior managers, who feel much more positively about the extent to which they do lead by example). Managers are felt to rely on systems to drive change, rather than communication with employees. Related to this, there is little evidence of change-related consultation with employees and managers (with the exception of the most senior managers, who again are enthusiastic with respect to the consultation that takes place). Where managers do attempt to talk about change, there is a perception that they use management speak. Employees in particular feel that change can take too long to implement from above whereas, at the same time, some feel that employees are not encouraged to take the initiative and start ongoing change. *It is worth noting that, within certain departments, there has reportedly been significant recent change and discomfort with this change appears to have impacted upon the opinions expressed here.*

In **performance frameworks**, the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is starting.

Employees at senior manager level are generally enthusiastic about the framework, seeing it as tailored to the council's needs, making a valuable contribution to the way that they work, and generally acting as a carrot rather than a stick. However, at employee and middle manager levels there is a lack of awareness of the framework (*"I recognise the phrase, that's about it"* – middle manager). This lack of awareness means that many managers feel unable to comment upon the framework and whether/how it impacts upon the way that they work. There is additional confusion over the meaning of performance management, with employee in particular confusing it with training or appraisals.

When asked to comment upon the extent to which they feel information related to targets is recorded and used, middle managers tend to feel that recording such information is **not** helpful, whereas employees tend to feel that it **is** helpful. This suggests that it is the more senior managers who need to work harder to communicate the meaning and benefits of the framework to middle managers.

Considering the theme of **helping people perform**', the feedback suggests that the Resources Directorate is moving from starting to developing.

There is greater synergy between different levels of employee in terms of their views:

- At all levels there is general agreement that there is good support for provided for managers (stemming from their own managers).
- Most feel they know when their team is/isn't performing and they believe they could identify why.
- A system of regular appraisals is in place.
- In addition, at all levels there is (overtly) agreement that mistakes are acceptable as long as they are put right. However, there is a perception from some that a few in the most senior positions do not actually buy into this idea. This is believed to be fuelling the degree to which the aforementioned blame culture is felt to persist.

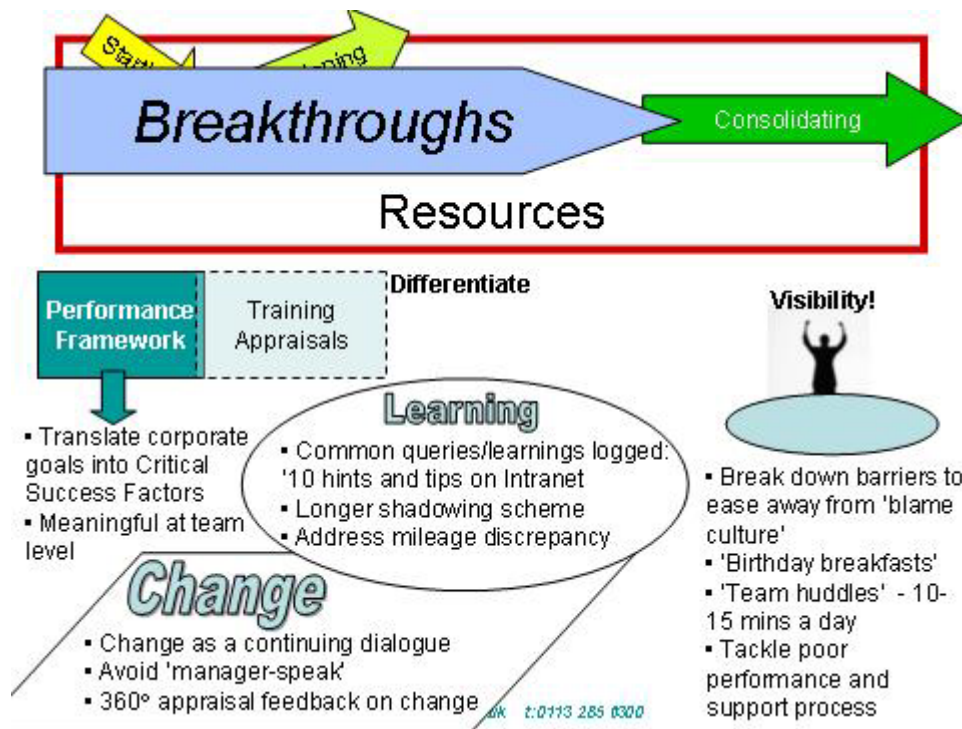
There are less positive notes struck, however:

- Given the confusion surrounding the council's corporate goals, few perceive their own performance in relation to the bigger picture.
- Middle and senior managers report difficulties in dealing with poor performance. Some question whether those who perform well are actually rewarded any more (in real terms) than those who are less scrupulous employees.

3.3.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthrough ideas that participating employees from the Resources Directorate suggested as ways of achieving excellent performance.

Chart 12: Breakthroughs for Resources



The breakthrough ideas for achieving excellent performance that are suggested by the Resources directorate participants are as follows:

- Open the lines of communication between more senior managers and employees – making senior managers more visible to employees yet also allowing them greater insight into the realities of the work that employees undertake. Some suggest that this will help ease progression away from a blame culture.

- One idea to help achieve this is that of birthday breakfasts', drawn from a participant's experiences working elsewhere. Once a month a different senior manager would meet for breakfast with all those employees who had a birthday in that month. This does not need to be elaborate, but could involve, say, coffee and doughnuts at 10 am.
- Encourage managers to develop ways of ensuring past work is reviewed and learnings are acted upon.
 - One suggestion (which the manager in question has already put in place) is a system whereby common queries were logged, developed into a list of '10 hints and tips' and then made available via the intranet.
- Alongside efforts to incorporate learning into the actual day-to-day workings of the directorate, build the perceived value of learning and training.
 - Some would like to see the shadowing scheme allow longer periods of shadowing to take place, which they feel would be of greater practical use.
 - Address the discrepancy in mileage payments between training and other activities.
- Managers at all levels should not merely talk about change, but should be seen to go further, by leading by example and saying how change will happen.
 - This should be in the form of a dialogue with employees involving more employee consultation, and instigating actions as a result of such consultation.
 - Managers need to be aware of avoiding management speak throughout these interactions with employees.
 - There is some suggestion that appraisals of employees should, at all levels within the directorate, incorporate 360 degree feedback enabling employees to feed back to their managers how they feel this change dialogue is progressing.

- Raise awareness of performance frameworks amongst those lower down in the directorate.
 - There needs to be clear differentiation of the framework from training and appraisals.
 - There is a need to help these employees appreciate the link between corporate goals, performance and their own roles.
 - One suggestion to help achieve this (from a member of employee who had witnessed the process elsewhere) is the development of critical success factors (CSFs). Each directorate in the organisation would formally break the organisation's corporate goals into CSFs. These were then cascaded down to departmental level (again being broken down into CSFs) before being repeated at team level. Once CSFs are agreed they can be formalised and incorporated into written standard procedures and training activities. For example, an overall goal might be “to communicate clearly and professionally with customers”, which a team might translate into procedures to be adopted when answering the telephone or passing on messages.
- Senior managers should better explain the purpose and contribution of the performance framework to other managers, aiming to overcome managers' perceptions that the framework is used more as a stick, and that the information collected is not that useful.
 - Related to this, greater clarity for middle managers as to how the framework relates to individual performance and reward, as well as the overall corporate goals.

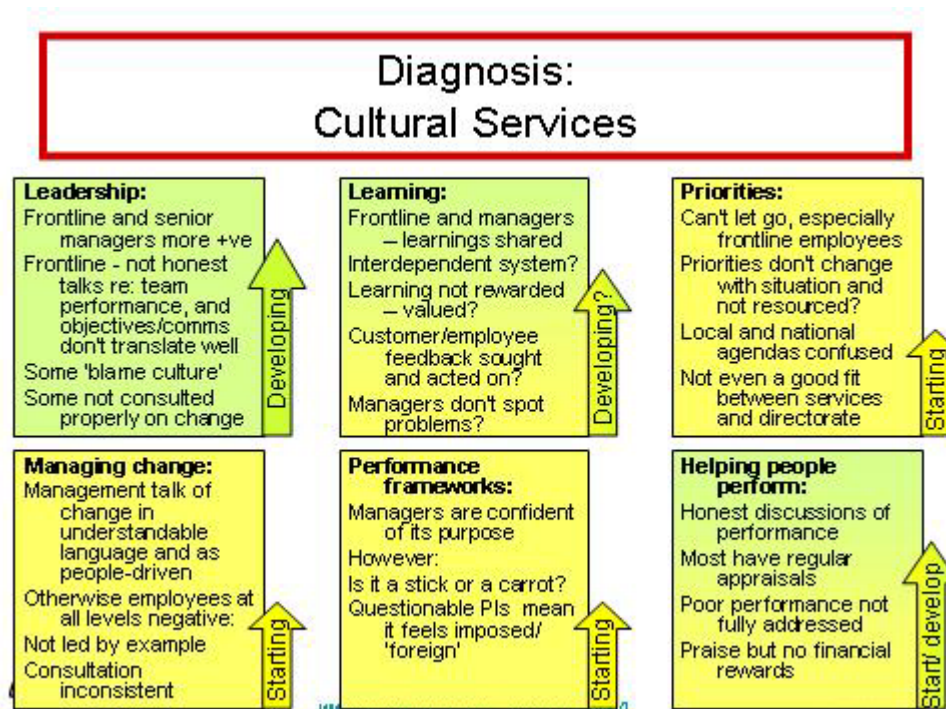
- One suggestion for improving communications (already put in place by one department) is holding a short 10-15 minute team meeting each day. These meetings, which have become known as team huddles, were initially resisted, but employees now see the benefits. Each member of the team identifies their priorities for the day and this assists with the management of workloads/communications. For example, another member of the team may have some experience on that particular issue that they can share, or someone might say that they are awaiting a decision which is holding up their work and hence they have capacity to spare which they can use to help another member of the team.
- Managers at all levels should be given the support to address poor performance, via:
 - A streamlined disciplinary process.
 - The provision of greater support from Personnel. In particular, this support needs to tackle the reported issue of poor performance being explained away via goals not having been set out sufficiently clearly by managers at the outset and/or employees not being adequately prepared to take the next steps in their development.

3.4 Cultural Services

3.4.1 Diagnosis

Cultural Services is at the 'starting' position for three of the Performance Breakthrough model themes, is showing tentative signs of developing within one theme, appears to be developing within a further theme and is more clearly at the developing stage within the theme of leadership. This is summarised in the chart below.

Chart 13: Diagnosis of Cultural Services



For the theme of **leadership** the feedback suggests that Cultural Services is developing.

Frontline employee and more senior managers are more positive about leadership than other employees and managers are.

Some frontline employees claim they do not discuss team performance regularly and entirely honestly. Some frontline employees also say that the corporate objectives and communications do not translate well to the frontline services:

“The core briefs are not specific to us, they are ‘dumbed down’ to general corporate stuff.” – frontline employee

More senior managers and some frontline employees state that there are elements of a ‘blame culture’, but the former say that this has successfully been addressed by a culture change programme.

Some managers suggest that employee are not always properly consulted about change:

“My job role changed completely without anyone asking me about it.” – manager

“Operational employee have less of a say.” – manager

In the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that Cultural Services is starting but showing some signs of developing.

Frontline employees and managers agree that learning is being shared more. although there are exceptions.

More senior managers claim that a lot of work has been done to help employees see their team as part of an interdependent system, and some, but not all, of the managers, office and frontline employees agree with this.

However, employees at all levels suggest that learning is not rewarded and there are questions from some about how much it is valued.

Some managers and frontline employees question the degree to which customer and employee feedback is sought and acted on.

Some managers and frontline employees say that managers are not always aware of and addressing problems:

“You have to help them spot issues.” – frontline employee

“Managers don’t always spot problems because they are busy doing their own work. There’s a lack of understanding of what other teams do.” – frontline employee

The feedback suggests that Cultural Services is at the starting position within the **priorities** theme.

There is a question mark over the extent to which employees can let go of tasks that are no longer a priority, particularly amongst frontline employees. *Some* employees at all levels suggest that priorities tend not to change to reflect changing situations, and say that resources are not allocated to reflect priorities:

“Lots of priorities are not properly resourced, because we tend not to be good at de-prioritising anything!” – manager

There is also confusion amongst some frontline and other employees about how the national agenda applies to them. Some managers acknowledge that there are conflicts between local and national needs. Other managers suggest that there are even conflicts between service and SMT-level priorities, due to Cultural Services being made up of unrelated individual services. The SMT-level agenda reflects the needs of some of these services but not others, with this depending on which services the most senior personnel are drawn from.

Within the theme of **managing change**, the feedback suggests that Cultural Services is starting.

Although there tends to be agreement that managers talk about change in understandable language, and talk about how change will be driven by changes in people's behaviour, in other respects the assessment of employees at all levels tends to be negative.

At all levels, employees tend to suggest that managers do not lead change by setting an example, that there is not always consistent consultation with employees before change takes place (particularly regarding changes that extend beyond the local level) and that employees are not empowered to drive ongoing change:

"We're not all the way there. There's still a fair bit of 'talking the talk'." – manager

For **performance frameworks**, the feedback suggests that Cultural Services is starting.

Whilst managers are confident of the performance framework's purpose, some of these managers are unsure of whether the framework feels more like a carrot or a stick.

"If it's linked to appraisals, they might be able to offer training as an incentive to meet PI targets." – frontline employee

In addition, some question whether the PIs really make a valuable contribution to the way teams work, so the framework feels like an imposition:

“Some statistics are just not useful, and measure things that are out of our control, so those are unfair measures.” – manager

“I don’t have a problem with service-related ones, but the [SMT-level] ones feel less relevant.” – manager

In the theme of **helping people perform**, the feedback suggests that Cultural Services is showing some signs of moving from starting to developing.

Across management, office and frontline employees, there are positives in that the culture is now thought to allow more honest discussion of performance, so that teams usually know when they are and are not performing well. Another positive is that most of those consulted claim that employees are now tending to receive regular appraisals, although there are exceptions.

However, across all these groups of employees there are concerns that poor performance is not always adequately addressed by managers:

“The organisation doesn’t let people deal with it. We’re hidebound by the regulations. But in other ways it’s good to have employees-friendly policies!” – manager

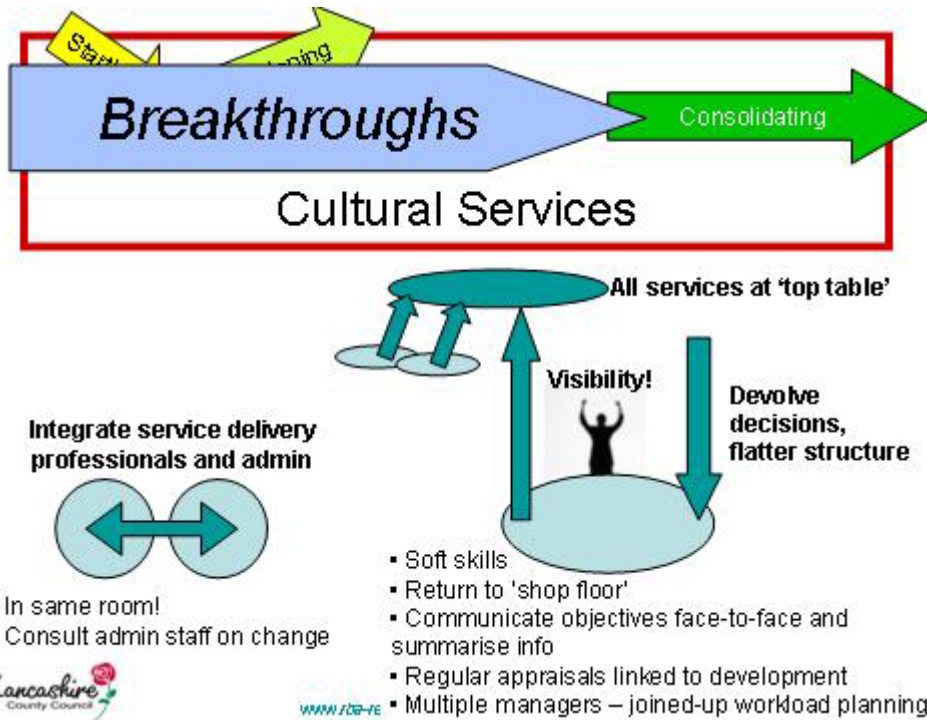
Across management, office and frontline employees, there is also agreement that good performance is sometimes praised but is not linked to financial rewards. There are differences of opinion as to whether performance should be linked to financial incentives in the public sector:

“We’re good at verbal rewards. We need to go further with financial ones.” – manager

3.4.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthroughs that participants suggest could be used to help achieve performance excellence within Cultural Services.

Chart 14: Breakthroughs for Cultural Services



The breakthrough ideas are as follows:

- Create a flatter structure and ensure managers are better integrated with the employees they are managing. To help achieve this:
 - Remove the need for managers to refer every decision upwards.
 - Service delivery professionals should sit in the same room as the administrative employees in order to break down barriers, improve communication and stop sending a subtle message about the status of the different teams.

- Ensure managers (including those more senior than immediate line managers) regularly return to the frontline:
 - Frontline employees mention a manager who is now much more responsive and understanding after spending two days delivering frontline services.
- Encourage managers (including those more senior managers) to visit employees at all levels, introduce themselves and make small talk, to encourage communication:
 - As an example of what employees perceive to be an **inappropriate** response to this: a senior manager was mistaken for a visiting contractor and this was dealt with by showing employees pictures of senior managers – employees want face-to-face contact to familiarise themselves with their senior managers instead.
- Ensure employees from all services are represented at the SMT-level of the organisation.
- Also address barriers between professional and administrative employees by involving administrative employees in decision-making about changes.
- Streamline communication:
 - Use face to face contact to communicate the council's objectives and messages instead of overly-relying on e-mails, memos and briefing documents, which overwhelm employees and lead to the messages being ignored.
 - Summarise information and direct people to where they can find more detail (eg LCC could provide calendars of council meetings and direct people to further details on the internet).
- Where several managers request support from the same team, encourage the managers to jointly plan their workloads and set priorities so as to resolve competing demands on the same employees.

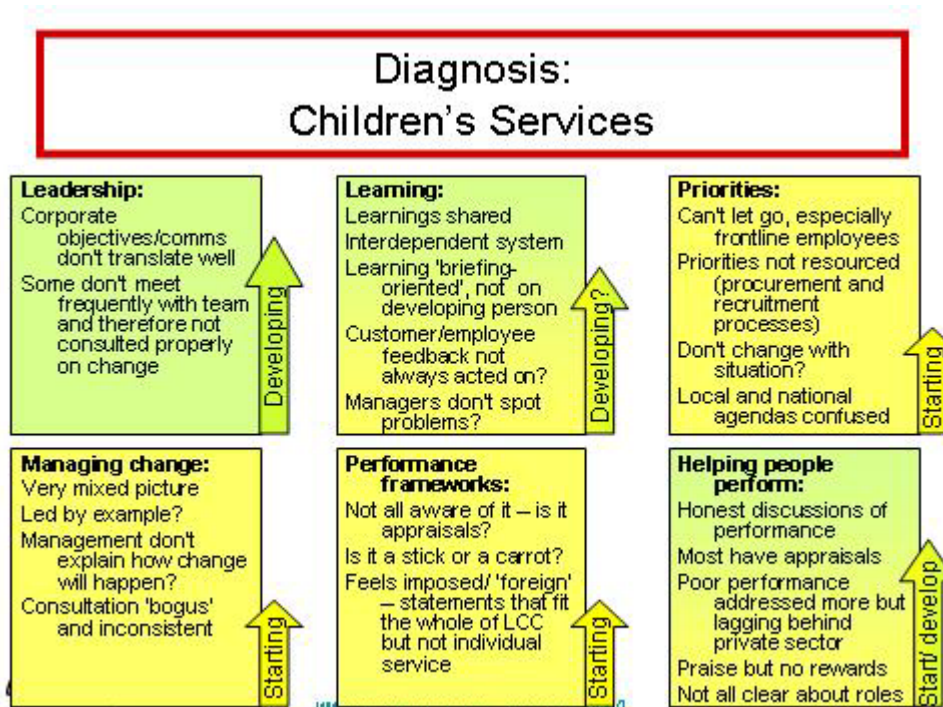
- Ensure all employees have appraisals:
 - Employees say they want positive feedback and constructive criticism to help them improve.
 - Use appraisals to link training allocation into a plan of personal development for each employee. By showing employees how training is structured and linked into progression pathways, there will be a demonstrably higher value placed on learning.
- Regarding budget allocation to services:
 - Be more transparent about how budgets are set.
 - Be more flexible in setting them, to allow more creative use of budgets, eg carrying surplus money over from one year to the next to allow longer-term planning of how specific priorities will be funded.

3.5 Directorate of Children and Young People

3.5.1 Diagnosis

The diagnosis of the Directorate of Children and Young People (C&YP) is summarised in the chart below. C&YP is starting for three themes, is showing tentative signs of developing within one theme, appears to be developing for another theme and is more clearly at the developing stage for the leadership theme.

Chart 15: Diagnosis of Directorate of Children and Young People



As noted above, within the theme of **leadership**, the feedback suggests that C&YP is developing.

Some frontline employees say that team meetings are relatively infrequent, which obstructs communication. This is compounded by the perception that the corporate objectives and communications do not translate well to the frontline services:

“The core briefs are not specific to us, they are ‘dumbed down’ to general corporate stuff.” – frontline employee

Some managers suggest that employees are not always properly consulted about change:

“My job role changed completely without anyone asking me about it.” – manager

“Operational employees have less of a say.” – manager

Within the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that C&YP is starting but showing some signs of developing.

Frontline employees and managers agree that learnings are being shared more.

More senior managers claim that a lot of work has been done to help employees see their team as part of an interdependent system, and some, but not all, of the managers, office and frontline employees agree with this.

However, employees at all levels suggest that learning is not rewarded and there are questions from some about how much it is valued.

Whilst most agree that they have to obtain customer feedback *“or we wouldn’t have any young people using our services”*, some managers and frontline employees question the degree to which customer and employee feedback can be acted on.

Some managers and frontline employees say that managers are not always aware of and addressing problems:

“You have to help them spot issues.” – frontline employee

“The old problems don’t get resolved.” – manager

For the **priorities** theme, the feedback suggests that C&YP is starting.

There is a question mark over the extent to which employees can let go of tasks that are no longer a priority, particularly amongst frontline employees.

Some employees suggest that resources are not allocated to reflect priorities, with the procurement and recruitment processes being particular obstacles:

“It’s such a rigmarole to employ new staff. It takes 6 months.” – frontline employee

“We have to buy from a particular agency even if they offer a poorer service and price.” – frontline employee

Finally, participants report confusion amongst some frontline and other employees about how the national agenda applies to them.

On the theme of **managing change**, the feedback suggests that C&YP is starting.

Although there tends to be agreement that managers talk about change in understandable language, in other respects the assessment of employees at all levels is mixed but tends to be more negative.

At all levels, employees tend to suggest that managers do not lead change by setting an example, that there is not always real consultation with employees before change takes place (particularly regarding changes that extend beyond the local level) and that employees are not empowered to drive ongoing change:

“We’re consulted, but after the decision’s been made. It feels ‘bogus’, although in some ways, we feel over-consulted!” – frontline employee

“It’s inconsistent – and it’s not always the difficult decisions that they avoid consulting on.” – manager

Within the theme of **performance frameworks**, the feedback suggests that C&YP is starting.

Managers across the directorate are confident of the performance framework’s purpose, and some of these managers say that there are rewards tied to good performance:

“I get the training I requested.” – manager

Some question whether the PIs really make a valuable contribution to the way teams work. In this respect, the framework feels ‘foreign’, like an imposition:

“Some statistics are just not useful, and measure things that are out of our control, so those are unfair measures.” – manager

“Some of them are just general statements for the whole Council, that you can’t fit to frontline service delivery.” – frontline employee

“It’s clearer now we have income targets.” – manager

Within the theme of **helping people perform**, the feedback suggests that C&YP is showing some signs of moving from starting to developing.

Across management, office and frontline employees, there are positives in that the culture of the directorate is now thought to allow more honest discussion of performance, so that teams usually know when they are and are not performing well:

“We have a blame culture from parents, but not from colleagues.” – frontline employee

Another positive is that most of those consulted claim that employees are now tending to receive regular appraisals, although there are exceptions.

“I’m appraised to death!” – manager

“It’s happening now because of liP.” – frontline employee

However, across all these groups of employees there are concerns that poor performance is not always adequately addressed by managers:

“People are asked to leave the building now, which never used to happen. But then, people can still be promoted to get them out of the way!” – frontline employee

Across management, office and frontline employees, there is also agreement that good performance is sometimes praised but is not linked to rewards.

Finally, frontline employees tend to claim that not everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities:

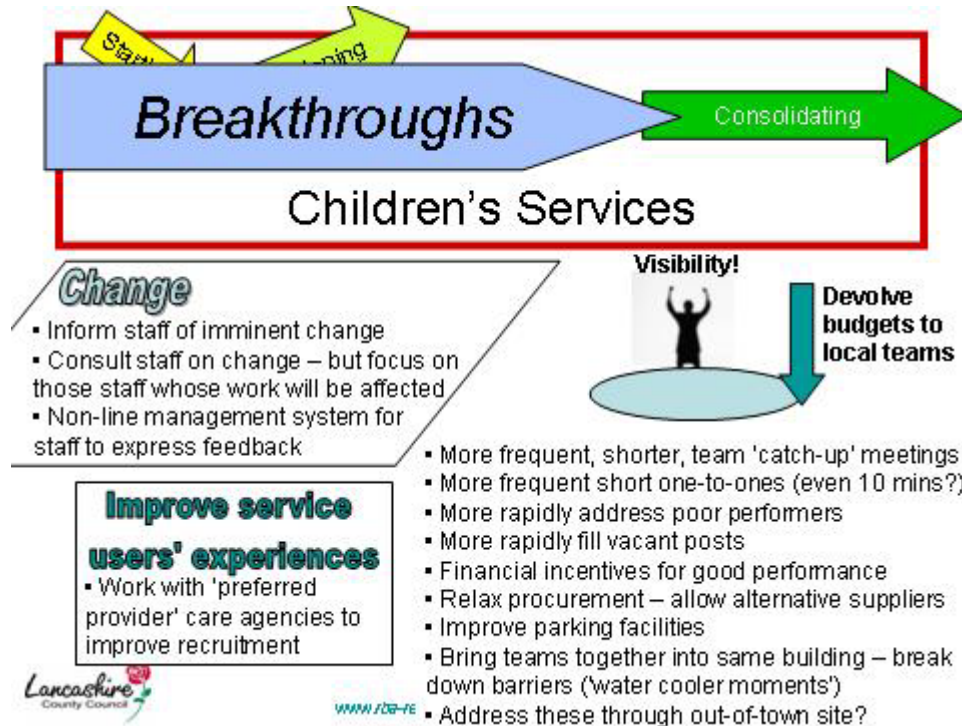
“There are people who’ve been in their job a long time. Their job has changed but they’re still doing their original job. Or they pretend they don’t know!” – frontline employee

“Job descriptions keep changing. Or, they don’t change but become less relevant as expectations change. liP has revealed this.” – manager

3.5.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthroughs that participants suggest could be used to help achieve performance excellence within C&YP.

Chart 16: Breakthroughs for Children’s Services



The breakthroughs to achieve performance excellence are as follows:

- Inform employees of imminent change and consult employees on this change, focusing on those employees whose work will be affected and ensuring that administrative employees are involved in decision-making about changes:

“After all, they are going to carry the changes out and, if they were consulted, pitfalls could be avoided. At the moment, they are seen as a ‘bolt-on’.” – manager

- Introduce a non-line management system for employees to express feedback on issues that are affecting morale or hampering their performance.
- One team is working with "preferred provider" care agencies, helping them review their procedures to ensure they employ suitable employees. They feel this will reduce employee turnover and improve the quality of experience of the service user, and perhaps this practice could be extended to other teams.
- Devolve budgets to local teams.
- More frequent, shorter, team 'catch-up' meetings that allow employees to catch up on workloads and resolve issues relating to day-to-day work. This is perceived to create opportunities to develop the team spirit and improve lines of communication within the team.
- More frequent short (10 minute) one-to-ones to improve communication with managers.
- More rapidly address poor performers so that their colleagues do not have to carry them. This may initially be in the form of additional support to improve their performance.
- More rapidly fill vacant posts.
- Consider financial incentives for good performance, or, if the scope for these is limited, explore alternative forms of reward.
- Link the appraisals system to carrying out skills audits on employees, to ensure that:
 - LCC makes full use of the existing skill sets available to it.
 - Prior learning is taken into account when determining which training opportunities individuals take up, so that training is not wasted on individuals who already have the skills that that training will develop.
- Relax procurement – allow alternative suppliers to LPA be used so as to improve the price and service that can be obtained.

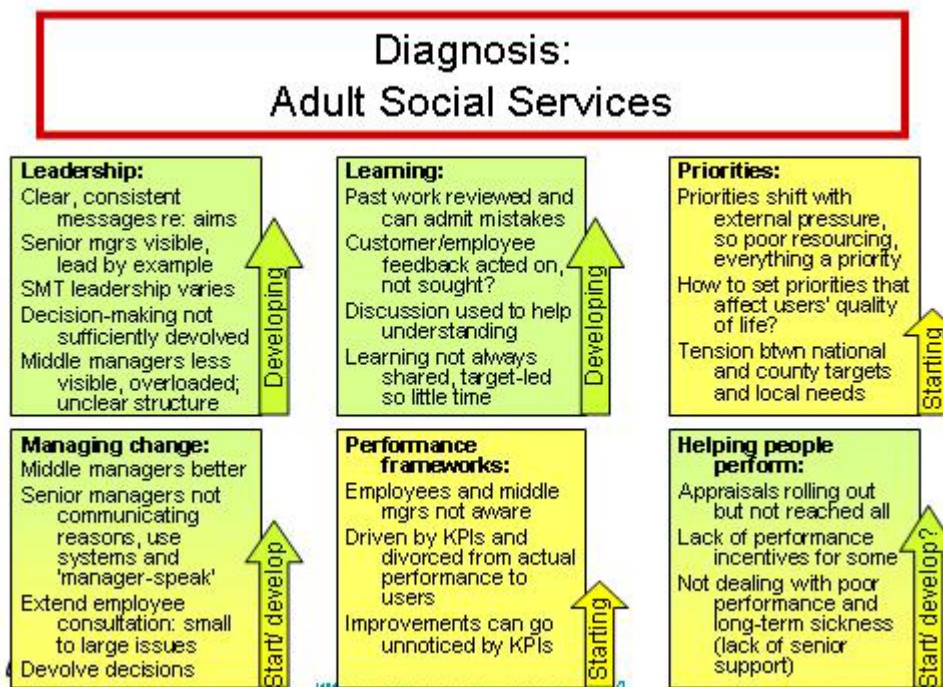
- Improve parking facilities. Employees suggest that an out-of-town site could resolve this issue.
- Bring teams who work together into the same building in order to break down barriers through more frequent and more informal encounters, eg water cooler moments. Again, participants suggest that teams could be better accommodated if an out-of-town site were used.
- Provide more administrative support and stewarding hours for youth and community centres so that level three employees do not spend time doing tasks that could be done by others.

3.6 Adult Social Services

3.6.1 Diagnosis

Adult Social Services is at the developing stage within two themes, is showing tentative signs of developing for a further two themes and is at the starting point for the remaining two themes. The diagnosis findings are summarised by the chart below.

Chart 17: Diagnosis of Adult Social Services



Within the theme of **leadership**, the feedback suggests that Adult Social Services is developing.

There is clarity as to the service's aims, indicating that clear and consistent messages are being sent out in relation to performance. Managers at all levels appear to be sharing responsibility for sending out these messages. For example, one manager received a letter of appreciation from the SMT, and he made a point of sharing this letter with his team to celebrate their success. There is also general agreement that senior managers lead by example.

Employees also mention and appreciate that certain senior managers have made an effort to make themselves more visible to employees – for example one senior manager has spent time with employees and experienced their jobs. In addition, written thank-yous sent from senior managers to employees are appreciated.

However, there are areas for improvement:

- Some managers feel that the quality of leadership is not wholly consistent across the SMT, and believe certain higher level managers operate within a culture of generalities rather than specifics.
- Other managers feel that decision-making powers are not sufficiently devolved and this appears to be more so within the non-operations departments. Those in operations tend to feel more empowered to make decisions affecting them and their team.
- There is a perception amongst some employees that middle managers are not visible enough. In addition it appears that leadership at this level is, in some instances, impinged upon by middle managers' workloads. For example, some middle managers are not delegating work as they know they should due to a fear of overloading their team. This results in these managers having insufficient time to work on developing their leadership skills.
- Some employees lack an understanding of the leadership structure, for example they may not know who to go to if they had a problem with a particular manager.

In the **learning** theme, the feedback suggests that Adult Social Services is developing.

There is general agreement that past work is reviewed and that this process is useful, and also that the service has a culture in which people are able to admit if something does go wrong.

Feedback from customers/employees is acknowledged as important and acted upon, though some question whether this feedback is actively sought in a structured way.

There is some evidence of teams using facilitation/discussion as a tool for thinking about the organisation. For example, in one instance where employees were unsure of the council's goals and were planning to ask a senior manager who would be visiting them shortly. Instead they had a valuable initial discussion amongst themselves and felt that within their team *"we really answered it for ourselves"*.

A key area for improvement, identified by a number of participants from senior management level down to employee level, is the issue of how best to share learning. At present learning is not always shared across teams nor between teams by managers where relevant. There is a perception that this is due to a lack of time to learn and share learning. Some also describe a target-led culture that sacrifices quality, perhaps fuelling perceptions amongst some that learning is not sufficiently valued.

Within the **priorities** theme, the feedback suggests that Social Services is starting.

There are issues with everything being a priority. This appears to be a particular problem for those at middle manager level (although it is also mentioned at a more senior level) suggesting that the leadership team is not making clear statements about how corporate objectives translate into priorities.

Middle managers perceive priorities to be frequently shifting in response to political pressure, which perhaps fuels their difficulties in distinguishing what the priorities are.

Both managers and employees are quick to point out that, given the nature of the service's work, it can be difficult to identify and evaluate what constitutes a priority. For example, how is it possible to place a value on a service user's life experience? However, an example of good practice is the work with learning disability service users, who have (via a partnership board) become involved in setting priorities.

Related to the perception that priorities frequently change in response to external pressures, there can be a lack of clarity as to whether or not priorities are re-considered in the light of changing circumstances.

There is a perception amongst managers and employees that resources are not allocated to support priorities, although this perception may be in part due to the confusion surrounding the nature of the priorities.

There is some additional tension between middle management and senior management in that middle managers perceive senior management as placing too great an emphasis on county-wide priorities. Middle managers feel priorities need to be flexible to local needs.

Some also perceive conflict between national targets and the realities of the work that the service undertakes:

"It's all very well talking about being a green authority and trying to hit government targets but social workers need to use their cars." – manager

Within the theme of **managing change**, the feedback suggests that Adult Social Services is in the process of moving from starting to developing.

Some **employees** perceive **middle managers** as able to deal with change better than the **middle managers** perceive **senior managers** to be dealing with change.

There is a perception that senior managers, in particular, tend to rely on systems to drive change rather than actually talking about the change and how it will happen. Where senior managers do talk about change, there is a belief that some use management speak.

Consultation with employees does take place, but often not where there are difficult decisions to take:

“You are asked, not about a new team being created or resource allocation, but where you want to sit.” – manager

However, the importance of the practice of consulting on issues such as where to sit should continue **alongside higher-level consultation**. Employees give good practice examples of occasions when they have been consulted on their work environment. For example, a team that had been re-located to Nelson against their will report that being provided with new equipment and choosing the colour of the carpet helped improve morale.

In addition consultation is not universal – in the non-operations groups in particular some feel change has been forced upon them from above.

There is a lack of communication from senior managers as to the reasons behind the changes, and the benefits of change. For example, some were not consulted about the home-working arrangements. Given the nature of the work that is done in the service some employees who regularly worked alone welcomed the chance to work from the office. They do not see how the flexible working arrangements benefit them, and feel the changes were driven by IT rather than need.

Middle managers tend to feel that decision-making is not sufficiently devolved to allow them to assume responsibility for delivering specific elements of the change plan.

“There are too many layers – we need a flatter structure.” – manager

However an example of good practice is the Locality Management, which devolves decision-making to a more local level.

For the theme of **performance frameworks**, the feedback suggests that Adult Social Services is starting.

There is a lack of awareness of the performance frameworks amongst both employees and middle managers. Employees may have heard of the frameworks but have no conceptual understanding:

“I’ve heard of it, but I’ve no practical experience of this.”

“There is a need for clear guidelines but we don’t have them yet.”

“I’m stuck now.”

Some confuse performance frameworks with appraisals or training. Middle managers, some of whom have been recently briefed on the frameworks, are still coming to terms with the implications of implementation:

"It all sounds good in theory but we'll have to wait and see." – manager

Some employees and middle managers see the frameworks as driven by KPIs and somewhat divorced from performance, reflecting a need for the framework to be better tailored to their needs. For example, occupational therapists are ordering ahead to ensure the availability of equipment, and yet from a KPI perspective it looks as though service users are waiting three weeks for receipt of their equipment. In addition there are service improvements that go un-noticed within the current frameworks. For example, equipment can now be delivered to service users on bank holidays, after employees and managers tackled the issue and ensured this need was built into supplier contracts. However the frameworks do not recognise this development and as such it has not been formally celebrated as beneficial.

Within **helping people perform**, the feedback suggests that Adult Social Services is starting, but showing tentative signs of developing.

The appraisal system is being rolled out but as yet not all employees have been appraised.

Though some feel good performance is rewarded others do not see a clear link between actual performance and incentives to perform.

The issue of managers' inability to deal with poor performance is key. Some perceive a lack of support from more senior employees. One employee attempted to deal with this issue over a twelve-month period. Recently she had to put the employee back on regular duties because the manager could not attend a disciplinary meeting. The entire team has been affected and yet they have had to abandon the process:

"I said to my manager that I won't make the effort again to improve performance." – employee

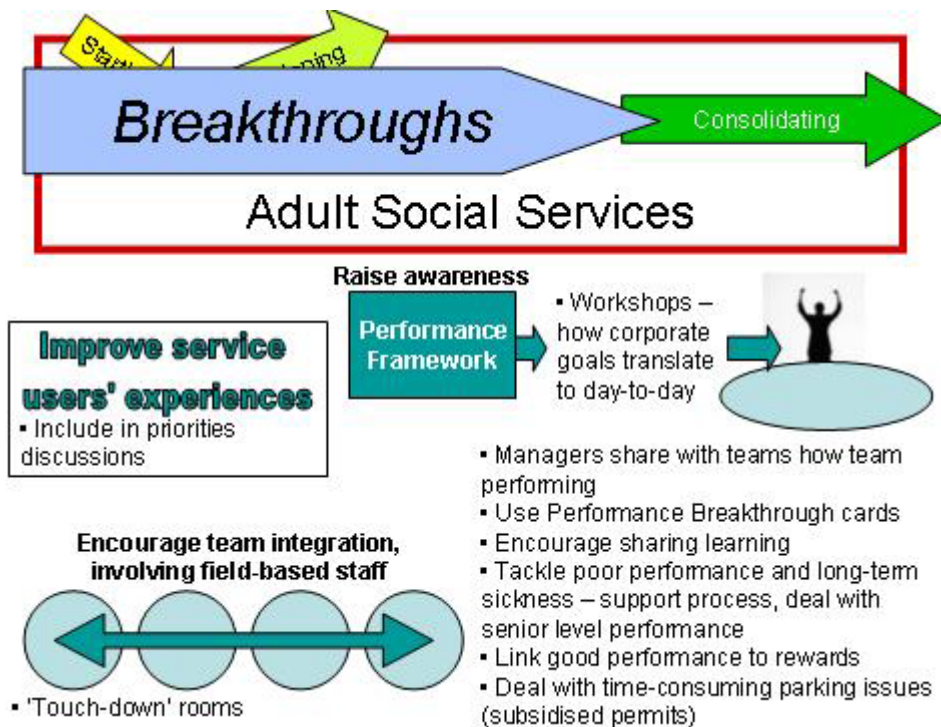
There are also issues around long-term sickness. In one case, Health and Safety took 18 months to get "access to work" equipment in place and the person concerned remained on full basic leave during this time.

Some feel that the current weak relationship between performance and reward, coupled with managers' inability to deal with poor performance, is in danger of fostering a culture of poor performance. However, senior management **do** recognise the difficulty of dealing with under-performance, and long-term sickness. They are aware that these areas require improvement, and are in the process of putting mechanisms in place. There is also some acknowledgement that poor performance at senior levels must be tackled also, in order to lead by example.

3.6.2 Breakthroughs

The chart below summarises the breakthroughs that participants suggest could be used to help achieve performance excellence within Adult Social Services.

Chart 18: Breakthroughs for Adult Social Services



These breakthrough ideas include the following:

- Provide managers with the cards used within the Performance Breakthrough group discussion exercise, to enable them to open up a discussion with their teams about the model and the implicit importance of performance.
- Re-evaluate systems for sharing learning across teams and, where relevant, between teams, encouraging and supporting middle managers to disseminate learning to other managers.

- Include service users within discussions about priorities.
- Extend 'touch-down rooms' further (already introduced by one team), ie rooms where computer equipment is available to any employee who is visiting the department. This offers practical benefits plus enables field-based employees to feel involved with the rest of the team.
- Raise awareness of performance frameworks and encourage employees to appreciate the links between their own performance and the council's ability to achieve corporate goals:
 - For example, one department has already run workshops helping employees to identify how the corporate values of the council manifest themselves in their day-to-day work.
 - One more senior manager suggests that the SMT should provide managers and teams with better information about their performance, to empower them to see where they need to improve or to confirm that they are performing well.
 - In addition, one employee reports that her manager encourages employees to take the view that good performance is having enough toilet rolls, the point being that if the little tasks are not done right the more important tasks won't be tackled.
- Continue to roll out appraisals for all employees.
- Overhaul procedures for dealing with both poor performance, simplifying the process, making it less bureaucratic, and ensuring that managers have the support of more senior employees in their efforts to tackle poor performance. Tackle poor performance at senior levels also. Overhaul the procedures for dealing with employees on long-term sick leave.

- Re-evaluate the systems for rewarding employees, with the aim of strengthening the link between good performance and rewards.
- Employees suggest that subsidised parking permits allowing employees to park at reduced rates within the town centre would help improve performance and they report another local council has already adopted this approach. They feel significant amounts of working time would be saved if employees did not have to move cars during the working day.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RBA believes that the key findings of the research can be summarised as follows:

- In progressing towards excellent performance, Lancashire County Council as an organisation tends to be somewhere between the starting and developing positions in the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough model. There are examples of good practice and positive comment across all of the directorates and employee levels that participated in the research, which means that the challenge is one of becoming more consistent.
- The breakthrough ideas suggested by participants tend to be very consistent with those suggested within the Performance Breakthrough model.
- Reduced to their simplest form, the key breakthrough ideas suggested by participants as ways of achieving excellent performance are:
 - Less hierarchy – more personal responsibility.
 - Break down barriers between teams.
 - Use soft skills to make connections between employees and more senior managers, to communicate corporate goals, and to encourage both learning and change.
- The organisation-wide breakthrough ideas are presented in more detail in the Executive Summary (section 2.0) and both the diagnosis of each directorate's position within the Performance Breakthrough model and the individual breakthrough ideas for each directorate are detailed in sections 3.1 to 3.6.

RBA makes the following recommendations:

- To minimise discomfort at the research findings and resultant denial of the findings and/or resistance to change, it may be more appropriate to present the breakthrough ideas to employees than it is to promote the diagnosis findings.

- As a way of introducing the topic of improving performance, the cards used in the qualitative sessions (see appendices) can be used to allow teams to reach their own diagnosis and to stimulate a discussion about barriers and breakthroughs. This in itself can help avoid the argument that the research findings don't apply to our team being used as a means of resisting engaging with the findings.
- However, it will be important that the facilitator and participants are comfortable with each other and can make guarantees of having a non-judgemental approach when opening up these discussions. In this respect, it may be worth bringing in facilitators from other teams. This could have additional advantages, eg it could build relationships between teams and encourage teams to learn from each other's examples of good practice. As we have seen, there are examples of good practice and positive comment across all of the qualitative sessions: the challenge is to learn from one another and achieve greater consistency.
- One of the findings is that consultation within LCC is often perceived by employees to be bogus, ie it is a mere formality that takes place after a course of action has been decided. Reflecting on this, it is important to communicate both changes that have already been made as a result of consultation with employees and service users and changes that are made in future as a result of this research (ie changes derived from the research must be clearly and repeatedly communicated as such). Failure to act on consultation increases cynicism and decreases the willingness of employees to contribute to consultation in the future.

- This of course means that some high profile changes must be made relatively quickly. LCC should work to identify the quick wins amongst employees' breakthrough ideas and implement these. For example, RBA suggests that changes to the use of team meetings to allow more open discussion, the introduction of shorter team catch-ups and regular one-to-ones with line managers will be easier ways of signalling that change is in progress. High visibility attendance of more senior managers at team meetings, at social occasions and at the frontline of services, at which they are not usually present, will also signal change.
- Changes to the process for dealing with poor employee performance will be equally important in signalling LCC's determination, but RBA acknowledges that this will take longer to implement.
- Beyond this, a fundamental change to the organisation's way of operating seems to be required, in order to address what employees perceive to be an overly hierarchical and process-oriented state. This does not necessarily mean a change in organisational structure, but rather a change in culture, so that decision-making and budgets are devolved downwards and the checks and balances at higher levels of the organisation are relaxed in order to encourage this.

Angus Tindle

Rachel Featherstone

RBA Research

March 2006

Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Discussion guide for group discussions, including diagrams of stimulus cards

Lancashire County Council 'Performance Breakthrough' Model

Job no 04108

Draft discussion guide E

c.120 minutes

Overall Aim:

To guide the implementation of the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough Model at Lancashire County Council.

Specific Objectives:

To explore:

- the nature of barriers to performance present within Lancashire County Council's Directorates,
- how the Directorates sit within the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough Model (i.e. whether starting, developing or consolidating)
- ways in which employees could overcome these barriers, generating some practical ways of helping teams to work better, and
- opportunities for different teams and departments to learn from each other's different strengths.

The above to be explored using findings of Lancashire County Council's recent employee survey as stimulus, where appropriate.

This discussion guide is used within the sessions as an aide memoir – it is not read out word for word. If any part of the guide doesn't work with a particular participant or group of participants, the researcher will focus on the above objectives and think on his/her feet, adopting an alternative approach accordingly.

This guide has been produced for use in the group discussions. The discussion guide will for the one-to-one interviews will follow a similar approach, although reliant more on straightforward conversation than on exercises.

Note on pre-session tasks:

RBA proposes the following pre-session tasks – participants to be asked to bring these with them to their session:

- **Participants recruited** to be asked to informally chat to a colleague before they come to the session, about work-related things that lead to a good day at work or, on the other hand, to an unsuccessful day at work. Participants to be prompted to reassure their colleague that whatever they say is confidential and to cover a number of broad points regarding what's going well and what's not going so well where they work.
- **Employees in general** to be invited to post comments – on what's going well and what's not going so well where they work, work-related things that lead to a good day at work or, on the other hand, to an unsuccessful day at work – into a ballot box within the Directorate premises. Employees to be encouraged to indicate the name of their Directorate so that good examples/areas of strength can be shared with other teams (NB – RBA has 4 ballot boxes available so need to rotate between premises in accordance with research session timings. Also need to discuss how to invite the contribution of more remote employees).
- **As an additional pre-session warm-up task for any participants operating 'in the field':** these participants to be asked to note on a sheet of paper the people at work that they've come into contact with/spoken to in the past 2 weeks

These may be people who impact on their performance, or for whom their own performance has implications, and so this task is to be used in case these participants view themselves as 'one-man bands'.

The above pre-session tasks are to assist in 'warming-up' people for the sessions, easing them into the subject matter and making sure that the subject matter is already at the forefront of their minds.

Introductions 10 mins

- Introductions: each to introduce themselves giving first names, a brief summary of what their team does, what their role is within it and what other organisations (if any) they've worked for in the past (***moderator to list these topic areas on flipchart to prompt participants; moderator also to listen for the tone of each participant's description of their role – i.e. does it feel positive?***)
- Moderator to explain
 - *“This piece of consultation is being carried out by RBA Research, an independent research agency, on behalf of Lancashire County Council.*
 - *Lancashire County Council is looking to build on the results of the recent employee survey, by finding out what gets in the way of you and your colleagues having successful days at work and what can be done to overcome these things.*
 - *We want to work with you today to come up with some practical suggestions for helping everyone to work better and to find opportunities for different teams and departments to learn from each other's strengths.*
 - *It is **not** about comparing negative views of teams or individuals or blaming anyone.*
 - *We are talking to a number of different groups of Lancashire County Council employees across all directorates and at all levels – we are not looking at this with any department or employee grade in particular.*
 - *There are no right or wrong answers, we are simply interested in your own particular views and experiences*
 - *At the end of the project, we write a report based on what everybody we've spoken to has said. Rest assured no one will be individually identified within that report - everything you say is anonymous. Teams will only be named when they act as an example of a people working well, so that other teams can learn from them.*
 - *We are tape recording the sessions, with your permission, to make sure we have accurately noted and fully understand your points. These tapes will only be used by the RBA Research team and will never be given to anyone at the Council.*
 - *We want your help to improve the way the Council works.”*

Background – Context and Definitions 5 mins

- When they talk about working with other people and getting things done at work, what group of people do they tend to think about?
 - Moderator to note whether it's an immediate team, a department, Directorate, the Council overall or something else.
 - Probe for who their managers and bosses are (job titles, not individuals).
 - **Moderator to probe for the level/job title of managers/bosses referred to, throughout the session.**
- Moderator to write the phrase 'good performance' on a flipchart and brainstorm what are all the things that 'good performance' means to them at work? Is there a better word to describe this?

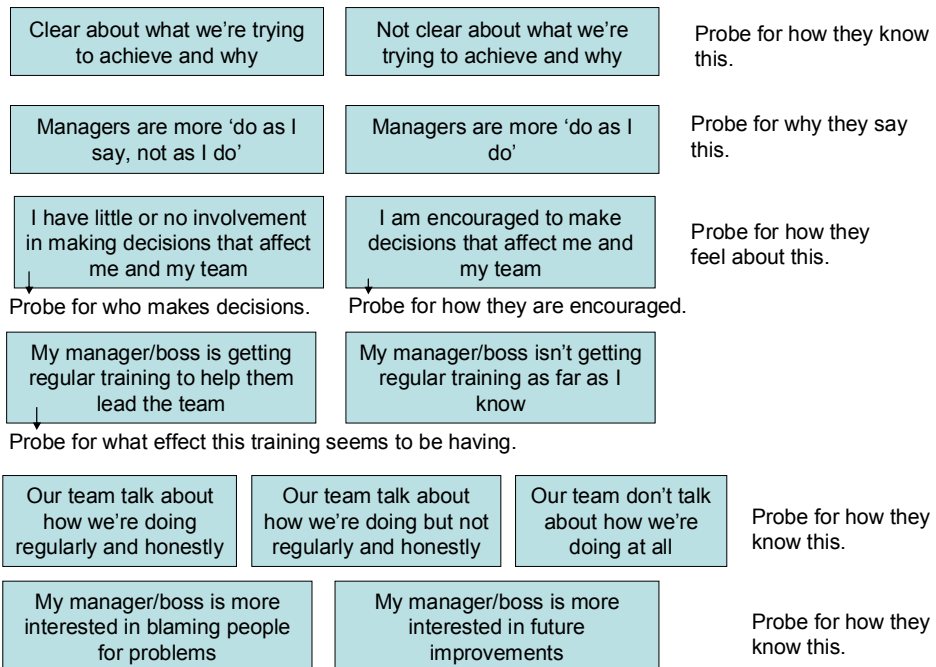
Barriers to Better Performance 10 mins

- Participants to tell moderator about a good or successful day at work – based on their own and their colleague's thoughts. What are the things that have helped it to be a successful day?
 - **Moderator to listen for strengths or potential solutions to problems and note them on the flipchart.**
- Now participants to tell moderator about an unsuccessful day at work. What are the things that have got in the way of it being a successful day?
 - **Moderator to listen for barriers and note these on sort cards.**
- Moderator to explain that we're now going to talk about ways of improving the way we work:
 - What things **used** to be a problem that got in the way of a successful day at work, but have been successfully sorted out? How was this sorted out? Who sorted it out?
 - Probe for when they've been impressed by the way they or their own team work. What did they do that was impressive? Is there anything that other teams at work could try?
 - Probe for examples of when they've been impressed by the way that other teams are working. What impressed them? Is there anything that they or their team could try?
 - Probe: if they've worked in other organisations, what impressed them about the way the other organisations worked? Is there anything that they or their team could try? What about other teams at work?
 - **Moderator to listen for potential solutions to problems and note them on the flipchart.**

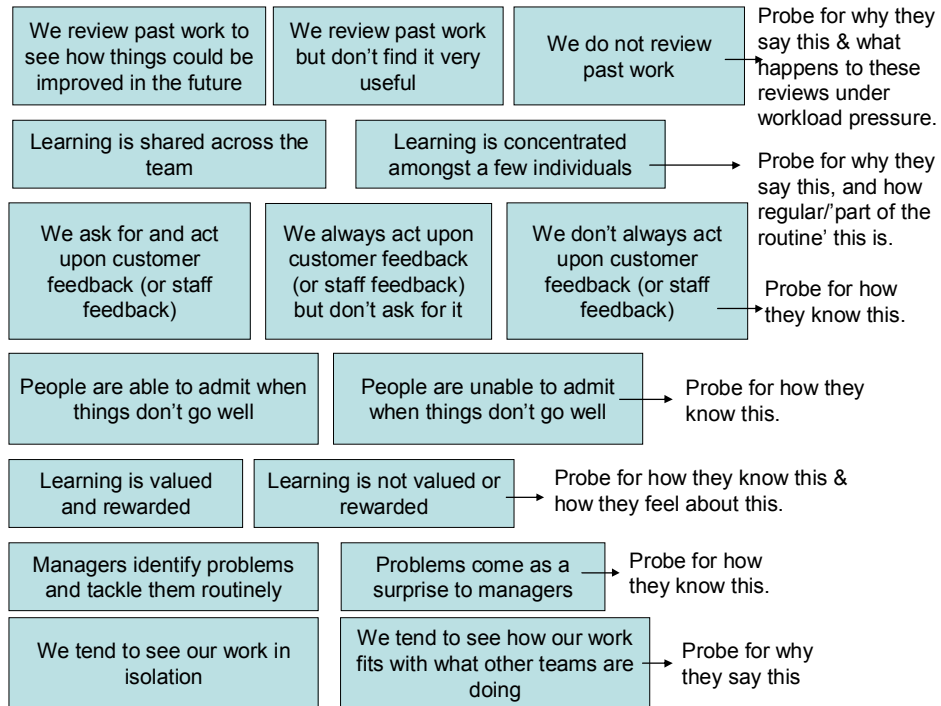
Exercise 90 mins

- Moderator to probe for elements of AC model by taking the participants through rows of cards and using these to stimulate discussion: thinking about where they work, which of these cards 'ring bells'?
- *NB – moderator to quickly move on from any rows of cards about which employees feel unable to comment (i.e. if they have no experience of the level of the organisation where that row of cards applies) and to adjust the 'probe' questions according to both the level of employees being consulted and their initial reactions to that row.*
- *Moderator to avoid laboriously talking through each row of cards one-by-one but instead to encourage participants to rapidly identify the cards that 'ring bells' and then talk through why they have chosen some cards but not others from this group, taking an overview of the whole set. The specific probes can then be used to 'fill in the gaps' that the participants have not adequately talked through.*
- *When probing, moderator to be aware that the cards that are not mentioned will be as significant as those that are.*
- *When probing, moderator to look beyond formal processes and pronouncements to tease out more subtle, cultural factors underlying respondents' views.*

○ **Leadership (15 mins):**

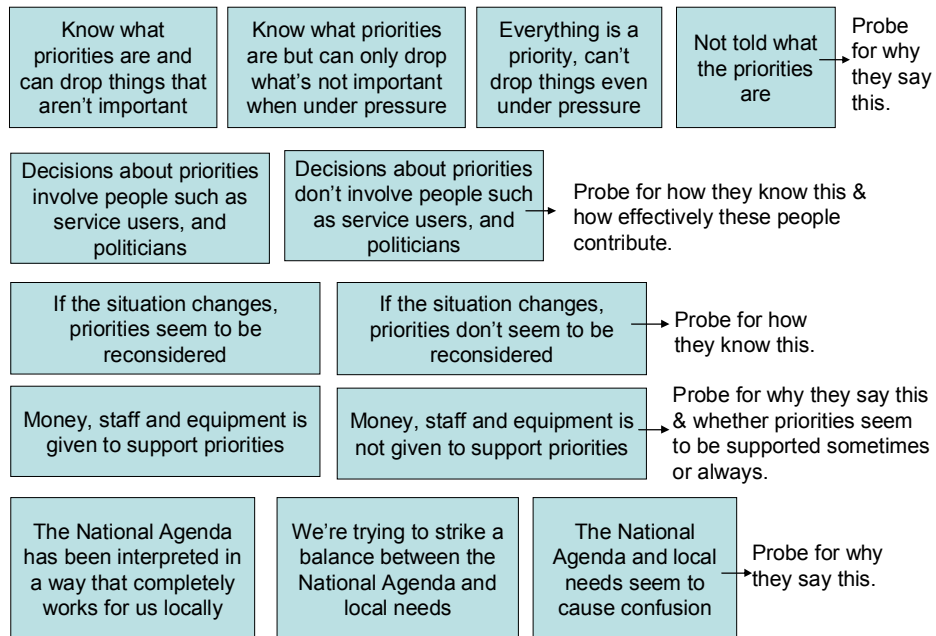


○ **Learning (15 mins):**

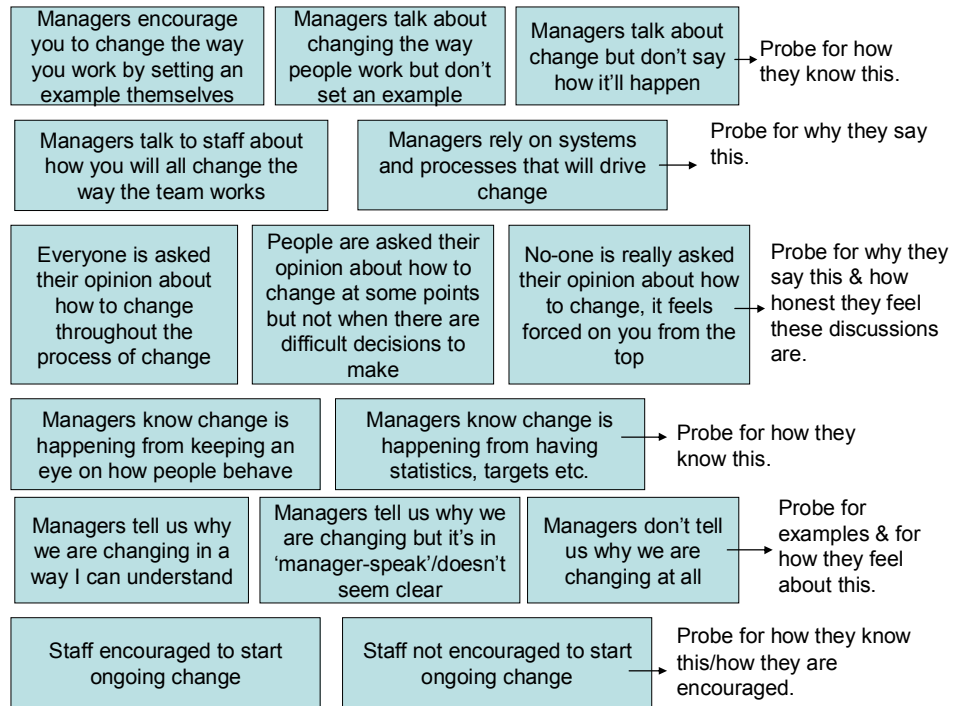


- Moderator to state that in the employee survey: 43% answer that 'speaking up on issues where you disagree with management can damage your career prospects'. Obtain reaction and explore reasons for this.

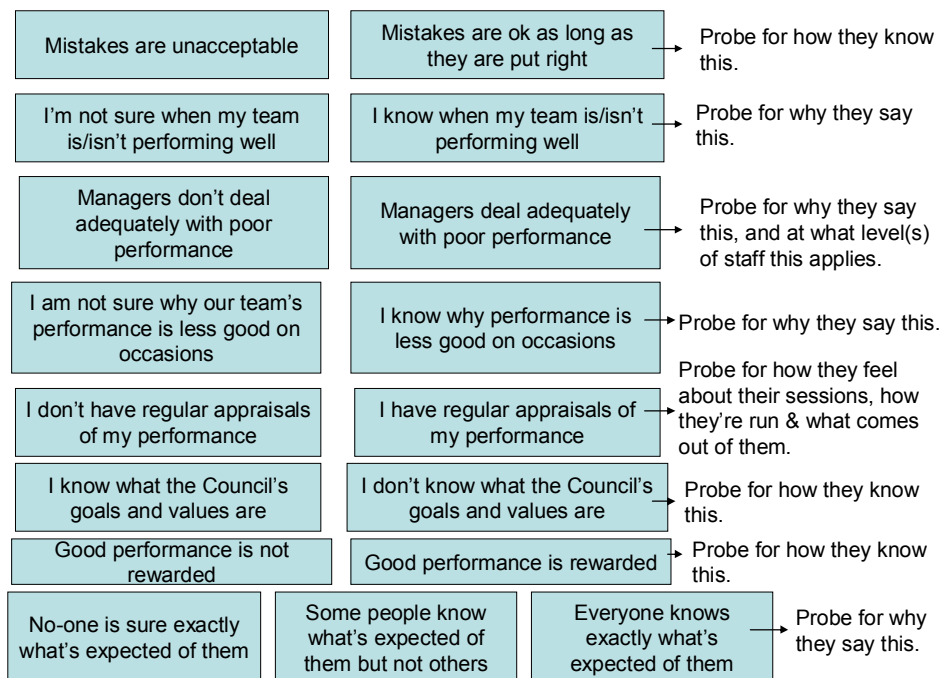
○ **Priorities (15 mins):**



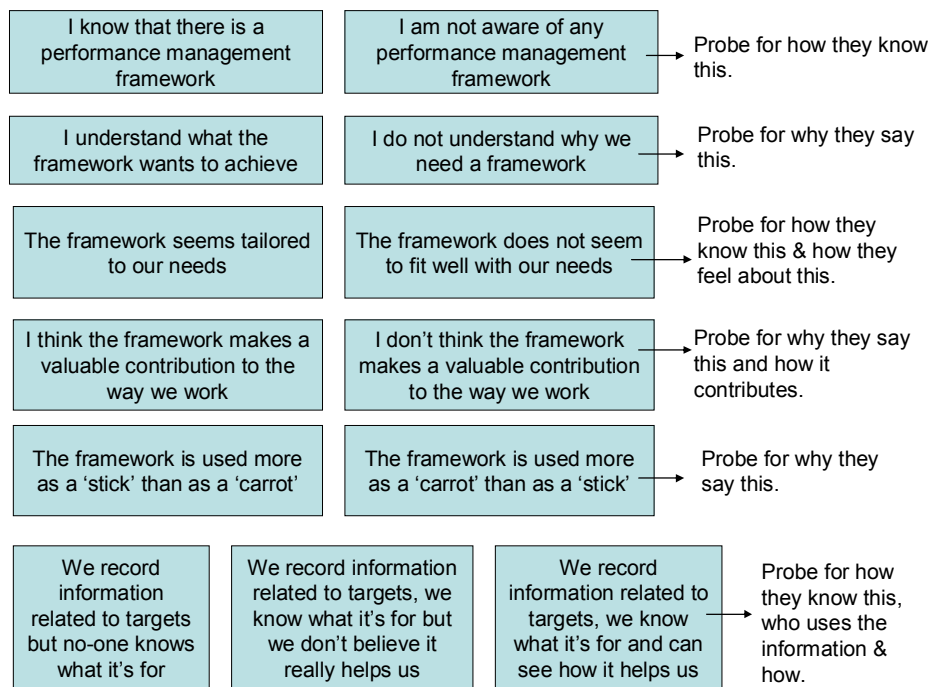
○ **Managing Change (15 mins):**



○ **Helping People Perform (15 mins):**



○ **Performance Frameworks (15 mins):**



For each of the sets of cards: if discussion flagging, introduce as prompts:

- Selected issues from the employee survey
 - Selected comments posted into the 'ballot box'.
 - Barriers spontaneously mentioned within the section 'Barriers to Better Performance'
- Moderator to focus on **those rows of cards above** where the participants indicate that there is room to improve:
 - Participants to imagine that they are their own boss/manager. If they were managing their own team, what would they do to tackle this? What support would they offer? Why? Probe for who would need to do what.
 - Probe for what, if anything, have they noticed other teams do, that they or their team could try? (refer to flipchart)
 - Probe for what, if anything, have they noticed other organisations do, that they or their team could try? (refer to flipchart)
 - Which of these have they, or the people they work with, **already** tried to improve? What specifically did they do? What effect did this have? Why? What needed to happen to make this work?
 - Which haven't been tackled? Why might this be?
 - Which would be easiest to tackle?
 - And reflecting on **all** of these rows of cards:
 - When have they been impressed by things they or their own team have done to improve any of these? What could other teams at work try?
 - If discussion flagging, introduce strengths/solutions spontaneously mentioned within the section 'Barriers to Better Performance'

The above section will allow us to identify not only the barriers present within the team/department, but also how far the team/department has progressed towards breaking through the barriers – i.e. to identify areas of strength and weakness and assess whether the team/department sits at the 'starting', 'developing' or consolidating' stage of the AC model.

Summarise/Reflect 5 mins

- What, if anything, surprised them? Why?
- What are the key overall messages to send to:
 - The people they work with?
 - Their immediate manager/boss?
 - The top management of their directorate (if relevant)?
 - The top management of the Council overall (if relevant)?
- If they were to change one thing, what would make the biggest difference? Why? (NB – if say 'more money' or 'more resources', ask participants to imagine that there is no more money/are no more resources!)
- What, if anything, would they most like to take away from this session and try themselves? How do they think it would help?
- What else would they like to add?
- **Participants to be given a sheet at the very end, containing the questions:**
 - **Which, if any, of the things that get in the way of teams performing at work have 'rung bells' with you personally?**
 - **What ideas do you have for overcoming these things, that you personally would like to try?**

Thank and close

Appendix 2: Discussion guide for in-depth interviews, including diagrams of stimulus cards

**** VERSION FOR DEPTHS ****

Overall Aim:

To guide the implementation of the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough Model at Lancashire County Council.

Specific Objectives:

To explore:

- the nature of barriers to performance present within Lancashire County Council's Directorates,
- how the Directorates sit within the Audit Commission's Performance Breakthrough Model (i.e. whether starting, developing or consolidating)
- ways in which employees could overcome these barriers, generating some practical ways of helping teams to work better, and
- opportunities for different teams and departments to learn from each other's different strengths.

The above to be explored using findings of Lancashire County Council's recent employee survey as stimulus, where appropriate.

Note for moderator:

- **If the participant has chosen to be interviewed in their place of work, moderator to look for things in the office environment that shed light on the character of the participant's workplace – both whilst waiting for the interview to begin and during the interview itself.**

Note on pre-session task:

- **Participant** to be asked to informally chat to a colleague before they come to the session, about work-related things that lead to a good day at work or, on the other hand, to an unsuccessful day at work. Participant to be prompted to reassure their colleague that whatever they say is confidential and to cover a number of broad points regarding what's going well and what's not going so well where they work.

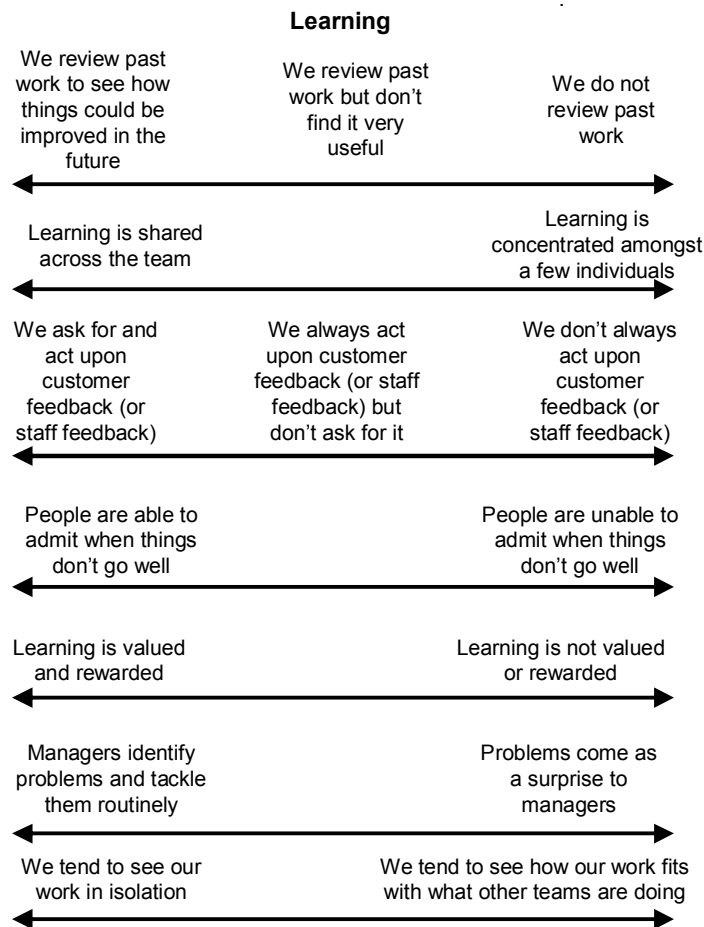
Introductions and background 5 mins

- Introductions: participant to introduce him/herself giving a brief summary of what their team does, what their role is within it and what other organisations (if any) they've worked for in the past (***moderator to listen for the tone of the participant's description of their role – i.e. does it feel positive?***) Moderator to signal that this is a quick fire response because there's a lot to get through.
- Moderator to check - when they talk about working with other people and getting things done at work, what group of people do they tend to think about? (Moderator to note whether it's an immediate team, a department, Directorate, the Council overall or something else; and to probe for who their manager / boss is (job title(s), not individuals).
 - ***Moderator to probe for the levels/job titles of employees referred to, throughout the session.***
- Moderator to explain
 - *“This piece of consultation is being carried out by RBA Research, an independent research agency, on behalf of Lancashire County Council.*
 - *Lancashire County Council is looking to build on the results of the recent employee survey, by finding out what gets in the way of you and your colleagues having successful days at work and what can be done to overcome these things.*
 - *We want to work with you today to come up with some practical suggestions for helping everyone to work better and to find opportunities for different teams and departments to learn from each other's strengths.*
 - *It is **not** about comparing negative views of teams or individuals or blaming anyone.*
 - *We are talking to a number of different groups of Lancashire County Council employees across all directorates and at all levels – we are not looking at this with any department or employee grade in particular.*
 - *There are no right or wrong answers, we are simply interested in your own particular views and experiences*
 - *At the end of the project, we write a report based on what everybody we've spoken to has said. Rest assured no one will be individually identified within that report - everything you say is anonymous. Teams will only be named when they act as an example of a people working well, so that other teams can learn from them.*
 - *We are tape recording the sessions, with your permission, to make sure we have accurately noted and fully understand your points. These tapes will only be used by the RBA Research team and will never be given to anyone at the Council.*
 - *We want your help to improve the way the Council works.”*

Barriers to Better Performance 5 mins

- Participant to tell moderator about a good or successful day at work – based on their own and their colleague’s thoughts. What are the things that have helped it to be a successful day?
 - ***Moderator to listen for strengths or potential solutions to problems and make a note of them.***
- Now participant to tell moderator about an unsuccessful day at work. What are the things that have got in the way of it being a successful day?
 - ***Moderator to listen for barriers and make a note of them.***

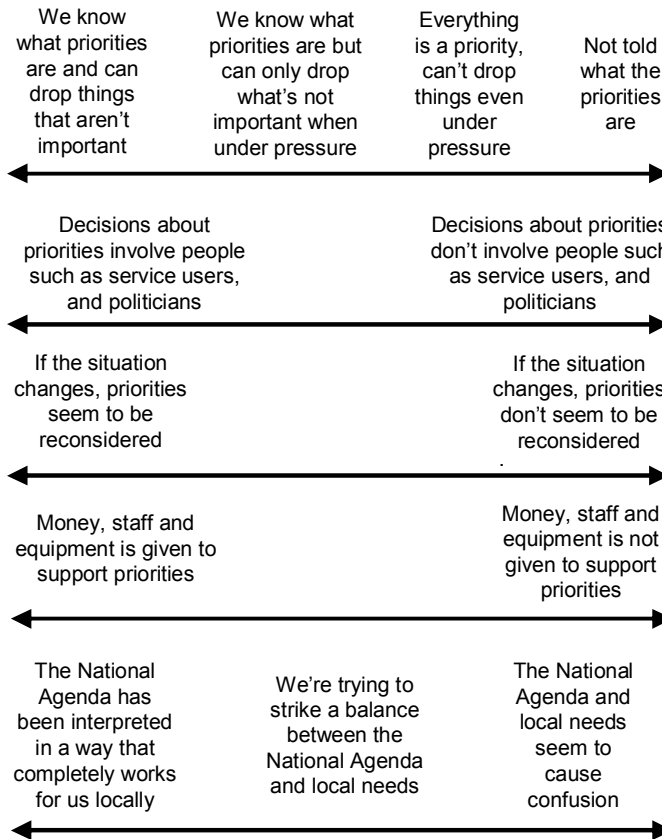
○ **Learning (5 mins):**



- Moderator to state that in the employee survey: 43% answer that 'speaking up on issues where you disagree with management can damage your career prospects'. Obtain reaction and explore reasons for this.

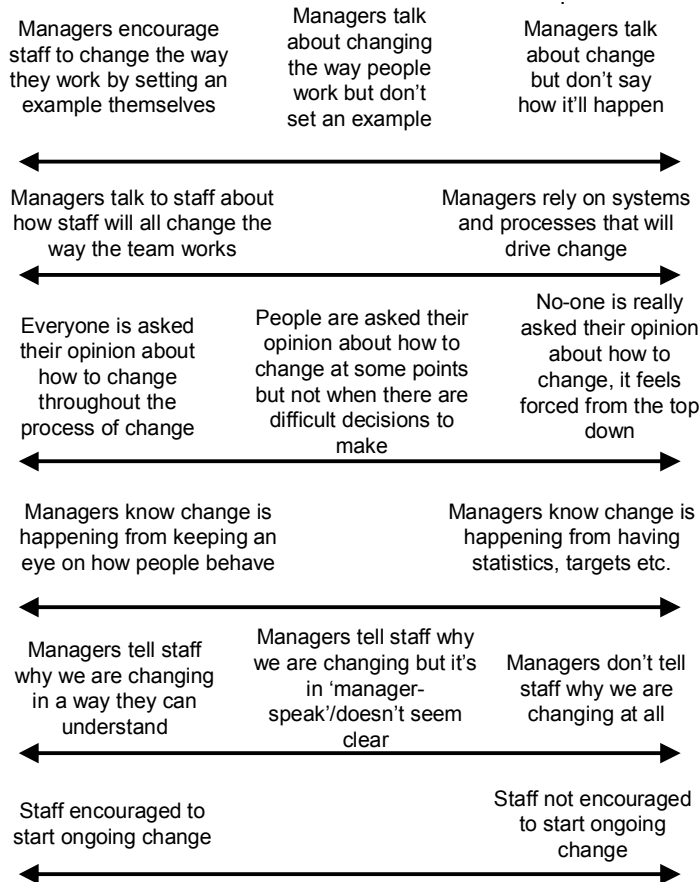
○ **Priorities (5 mins):**

Priorities



○ **Managing Change (5 mins):**

Managing Change



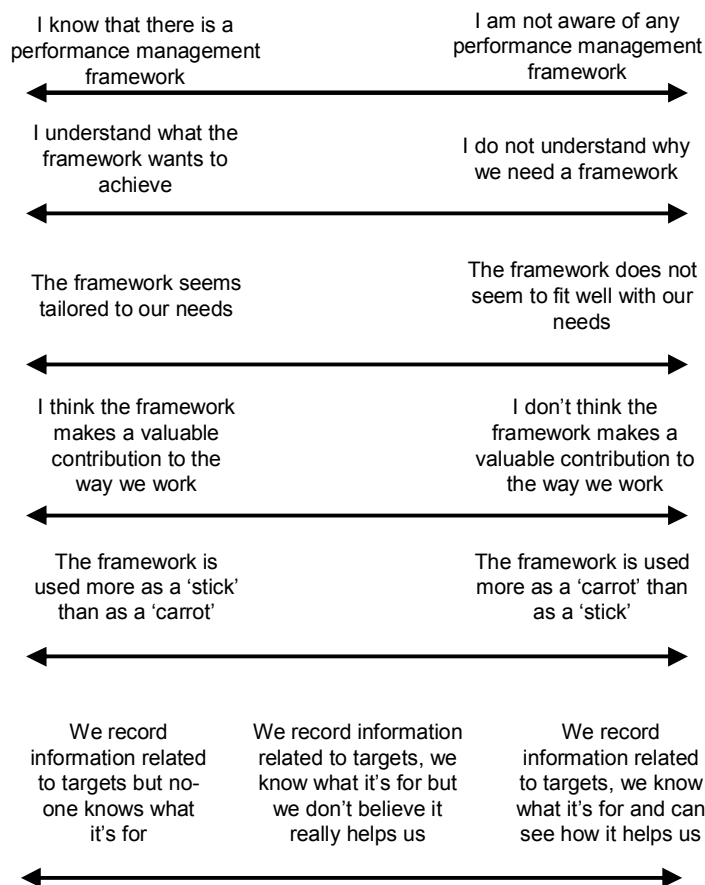
○ **Helping People Perform (5 mins):**

Helping People Perform



- **Performance Frameworks (5 mins):**

Performance Frameworks



Further exploration 15 mins

- Moderator to focus on **those rows of statements above** where the participant indicates that there is room to improve:
 - What could be done to tackle this? What support should be offered? Why? Probe for who would need to do what.
 - Probe for what, if anything, have they noticed other teams do, that they or their team could try?
 - Probe for what, if anything, have they noticed other organisations do, that they or their team could try?
 - Which of these have they, or the people they work with, **already** tried to improve? What specifically did they do? What effect did this have? Why? What needed to happen to make this work?
 - Which haven't been tackled? Why might this be?
 - Which would be easiest to tackle?
- And reflecting on **all** of these rows of statements:
 - When have they been impressed by things they or their own team have done to improve any of these? What could other teams at work try?
 - If discussion flagging, introduce strengths spontaneously mentioned within the section 'Barriers to Better Performance'

Summarise/Reflect 5 mins

- What, if anything, surprised them? Why?
- What are the key overall messages to send to:
 - The people they work with?
 - Their immediate manager/boss?
 - The top management of their directorate (if applicable)?
 - The top management of the Council overall?
- If they were to change one thing, what would make the biggest difference? Why? (NB – if say ‘more money’ or ‘more resources’, ask participant to imagine that there is no more money/are no more resources!)
- What, if anything, would they most like to take away from this session and try themselves? How do they think it would help?
- What else would they like to add?

- **If the participant has chosen to be interviewed in their place of work, moderator to ask whether participant has time to show them things in the office environment that shed light on the character of their workplace – including either examples of things that encourage good performance or things that get in the way of this.**

Thank and close