



PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR



Newton Europe with Kent County Council

Optimisation programme revolutionises Adult Social Care services across Kent County Council

As reductions in government funding continue to bite, Kent County Council (KCC) is doing its best to cut costs while protecting and improving the services that matter most to people. The council is challenging the way services have traditionally been delivered – embedding new processes and setting goals to improve outcomes for adults receiving care.

With almost 1.5 million residents in Kent, the council's adult social care services are delivered on a large, complex scale across many localities. The council recognised the volume and depth of work lent itself to engaging with an efficiency partner and Newton is now undertaking a major programme to improve outcomes and efficiencies in KCC's adult social care services. The programme aims to make the council's resources work as effectively as possible, while releasing annualised efficiencies greater than £26 million.

This particular case study looks at 'Sandbox', a model office KCC and Newton set up in Dover to trial a new way of assessing and reviewing service users. The successful operational changes introduced through Sandbox were then rolled out across the whole of Kent. To date, Sandbox has generated £5.86 million in savings towards KCC's wider adult social care portfolio which is on course to deliver £32.6 million (well over the £26 million target).

The programme began with a thorough diagnostic which revealed an overly complex, inefficient system of processes that were working as barriers rather than enablers. A number of key opportunities for improvement were highlighted in areas including contact assessments, scheduling processes, paperwork reduction, and team structure. The programme team also worked to promote the use of helpful IT tools, they improved and redesigned the service user journey, and successfully implemented an improvement cycle to monitor live performance and drive positive cultural change.

For the programme to be a success, it was crucial to build strong relationships. The Newton team immersed themselves in the culture and life of the department, observing, collaborating, training and eventually implementing the recommendations, hand-in-hand with staff.

The changes resulted in lead time, from first contact to first assessment being reduced from 29 days to 9 days. Assessment and review staff productivity has increased by 375% and the county is making better use of voluntary services.

Sandbox has generated £5.86 million in annualised savings towards KCC's wider Adult Social Care portfolio which is on course to deliver £32.6 million (against a £26 million target). Aside from these monetary savings, there have been huge benefits for staff and service users. Staff are reporting far greater work satisfaction because they feel better organised, empowered, more proactive and able to affect change.

The benefits to service users are significant. They now have faster access to the right level of support and are encouraged to be empowered, rather than dependant.

The work Newton and Kent are doing is highly relevant to other local authorities facing similar challenges, and it has been recognised as best practice by the LGA through their Adult Social Care Efficiency Programme.