Process Improvement Framework
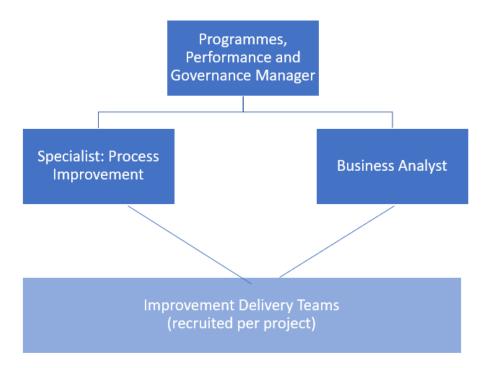
Maldon District Council

2021- 2024

- ## 1 . What is process improvement?

Process Improvement is the **proactive task of identifying, analysing and improving upon existing business processes** within an organisation for optimisation and to meet new quotas or standards of quality

Maldon District Council brought in this approach as part of the Transformation programme in 2019 and have since formally embedded this into a permanent resource. It also helps us to respond as new processes come in, for example supporting the administration of various Covid support grants

For customer facing processes, development work primarily takes place through website improvements and forms built in Firmstep. But the work is much wider than this, often looking at automatic integration to back-office systems, and removing areas where there are duplicated and manual staff interventions

- ## 2. The process Improvement Team

There are three posts permanently attached to the process improvement workplan at Maldon District Council, two of these are on a full time basis.

The delivery team for each specific improvement are also identified and recruited as part of the scoping and include Subject Matter Experts (SME's) for the specific areas.

Additionally, our Leadership Team have oversight for improvements within their area, and overall delivery of the process improvement work through regular programme reporting.

As a team, our goal is to:

- Use process improvement to create sustainable services in the future and help future proof MDC through increased efficiency
- Embed a continuous improvement culture across the organisation by facilitating training sessions and workshops
- Highlight where the use of improvement tools can be applied throughout the organisation, (for example when opening discussions around re-tender of contracts and requirements) so that we work smartly as an organisation.

- **3. How process improvement underpins the Corporate Strategy**

Process improvement contributes to Value for money local authority requirement. It is up to individual local authorities to secure value for money in their spending decisions and to set a balanced budget. They have a legal duty to deliver continuous improvement and to combine that with economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This is demonstrated through the external audit of Council accounts, and at Maldon the Process Improvement workplan forms part of our evidence base for audits and grounding for value for money.

Process Improvement also enables us to deliver the Performance and Value outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan, for example:

- **Finance and income** – all improvement work is tracked for efficiencies in time or actual financial savings, and process review look to remove non-value-adding parts of the processes.
- **Governance** – the reporting and process mapping work that comes out of the programme supports our corporate governance, ensuring knowledge transfer and good documentation.
- **Performance** – process improvement helps to address areas of operational performance, and contribute to improved performance across the organisation.
- **Technology** –the team work closely with ICT to implement and embed new technologies, and move customer processes online, making technology as simple as possible.
- **Meaningful engagement** –work is based on detailed workshops with stakeholders to understand their 'pain points' and improvement work utilises customer feedback to make improvements.

- **Our workforce** – by training and enabling staff to work with the process improvement methodology, and addressing frustrations staff have in their day-to-day work, process improvement supports the workforce.

OUR PERFORMANCE AND VALUE OUTCOMES

14. FINANCE & INCOME
Effectively use our financial resources and approach to procurement and risk management to deliver value for money, whilst seeking fair funding and adopting a commercial approach to raise income, make the most of our assets and deliver our corporate outcomes.

15. GOVERNANCE
Delivering a robust corporate and political governance framework for sound decision-making

16. PERFORMANCE
Holding ourselves and our partners to account for service performance, whilst delivering good project management.

OUR PERFORMANCE AND VALUE OUTCOMES

17. TECHNOLOGY
Meeting the needs of our customers effectively and efficiently and reducing our carbon footprint by deploying appropriate technological solutions

18. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
Using engagement with our residents, businesses, partners and staff to inform our decision-making

19. OUR WORKFORCE
Building a flexible and happy workforce by creating a positive working environment that supports well-being and learning

Workshops with staff in service areas identify the link between Performance and Value Corporate Plan outcomes and the Process Improvement work, and help staff to identify areas in their personal work objectives that they can highlight working in this way.

- **4. Information Communications Technology (ICT) strategy**

The team also works closely with ICT, and with a view to feed into and help deliver on the wider ICT strategy. The team acts as a link between the ICT policies and implementation in the organisation, as a supporting service.

For example, we will be moving towards Microsoft Dynamics for our customer front end by 2024, and future opportunities and development work are built with this in mind.

We expect that in 2022, we will be working on a dual system, where front end forms still utilise Firmstep with a back office dynamics 365 database, and then gradually these forms will be migrated for full end to end customer journeys within the same system and greater internal process efficiencies.
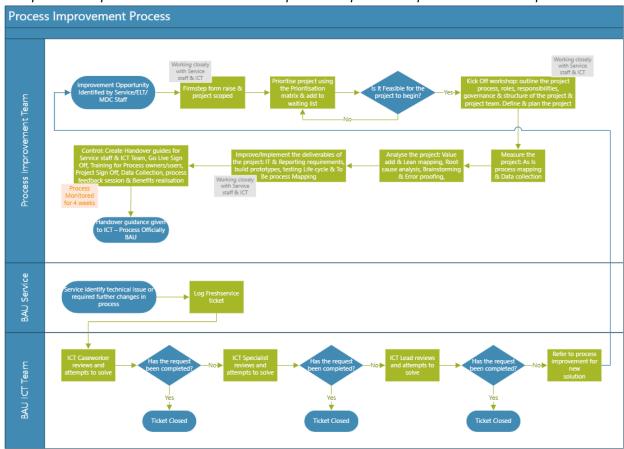
In early 2022, the process improvement team will begin training on dynamics 365 to support the move to this tool.

We have regular strategic meetings and project involvement from our ICT colleagues and work to deliver solutions and improvements that improve our use of technology across the organisation.

- **5. What is our methodology?**

The process improvement team follow the Lean Six Sigma methodology which relies on collaborative team effort to improve performance by removing waste / defects and reducing variation. The team strives to change the mindset of employees to focus on growth and continuous improvement leading to processes which will maximise efficiency and provide best value / services to our customers.

This process map shows the transition from the process improvement process to the BAU process:

We use a prioritisation matrix as a tool to visually structure and help decide which improvement projects should be started first. The matrix works in a collaborative environment with Tier 2's, Senior/Lead Specialists, Specialists, Case Workers and a Customer Solutions Advisor communicating what criteria are most important to their team/the organisation and score the importance of these within each process.

We use a Six Sigma tool within the process improvement process known as DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control). This process involves identifying the problem you're trying to solve, taking stock of your current processes, identifying and implementing a solution, and maintaining that solution in the future.

We use a delivery charter to monitor and manage the DMAIC lifecycle to ensure that all process improvement projects are using a structured problem-solving framework that gives consistency in delivery. We have developed a bowling chart to capture tasks and assign owners to each task with deadlines ensuring that everyone is accountable for their agreed actions.

DMAIC focuses on improving an existing process, we apply the following tools into each stage as shown below:

- o **Define** – within this phase we define the project and scope using a project charter format and begin to capture the A3 (project on a page) document. We do a feasibility analysis to ensure we do not waste time progressing with improvement projects which are not feasible.
- o **Measure** – within this phase we begin to collect data on the current process and identify and map the 'As Is' process with the service team.
- o **Analyse** – within this phase, we review and analyse the As Is' process map and brainstorm improvement ideas. We produce a value stream map identifying any waste, value add and amendments required. The 5 Why's tool is used to do a root cause analysis. When identifying potential software purchases and upgrades a Cost or SWOT analysis will be used.
- o **Improve** – within this phase we use the 5-stage model for design lifecycle to identify IT and reporting requirements, we build prototypes in the test system and pass to service teams to carry out testing. We design the 'To Be' process map and provide training on the end to end process to the service team. If required, any additional software training will also take place.
- o **Control** – within this phase we create handover guidance which includes a software to process matrix for service staff and the ICT team. We complete the 'go live sign off' with the lead SME (Subject Matter Expert) within the project team and transfer the process to the live systems. We provide a 4-week control period which is in place to allow service teams to raise any issues with the process before the project is signed off for complete closure.

More information and details on each of these stages and the tools used can be found here.

- **6. Reporting process improvement**

Throughout the project lifecycle, we review and complete a lesson learnt log which feeds into the Project Management Office (PMO) lessons learnt log. We also report on the following to track the delivery and the benefits of the programme:

- Project review report – a progress update reported bi-weekly
- Project board highlights report – a delivery update for managers, reported monthly
- Process Improvement Program successes, this is a running total for the achievements of the program – reported quarterly
- Balance score card, this is the quarterly total of the achievements of the program – reported quarterly as part of internal performance monitoring
- 'You Said' 'We Did' Successes – for all MDC staff we give an update of how their suggestions have turned in to actions, this is published in One Team, the staff newsletter, and reported quarterly

- **7. Our Achievements to date**

The process improvement teams top achievements over the last 18 months consist of the following:

Case study 1: COVID19 forms
As part of Maldon District Councils COVID19 pandemic response, it was essential to provide forms to allow customers to carry out a number of tasks associated with the government guidelines. These were often required as a matter of urgency at short notice and by working closely with the teams involved we scoped form and process requirements, built forms with integrations where necessary, carried out the testing lifecycle and published to our live system for our customers.

Our customers were able to access the support they required during the pandemic with ease at any time of the day. This was available within just a few days of the guidelines being published by Central Government. Please see some feedback below:

"Very easy to use", "Easy to understand, website responded well", "Good service, easy to use"

Case study 2: Garden waste database

The original garden waste database was not fit for purpose, it was very slow to load and to respond to any searches, it had many duplications and inconsistency's within the data e.g. the payments would show paid when the customer hadn't or showed as not paid when the customer had. The database would not always be updated accurately and therefore the whole team would have to spent 4-5 weeks on an annual basis to cleanse the database and ensure all data was correct. This was costing £21,554 annually, in staff wages alone. The issues were caused by not being able to access the back end of Core, manual reporting from the database and customers paying the incorrect amounts. Members of the team would then have to chase underpayments, collect non-payments, and issue refunds for overpayments which in staff time cost £4712.00 annually.

We made fixes to the database making it as automated as possible, cleansed the data within the current database to assist with speeding up the loading and searching facilities.

This went live at the end of January 2021 and in that time we have saved 7 minutes per search at a cost of £21,917.00 which will be an ongoing saving.

Case study 3: Delivery of new forms with integrations (ongoing)

To improve the accessibility to our services we have delivered numerous online forms to allow our customers to access support, pay online, raise queries, report issues or make requests at any time of day. This ensures that customers are able to contact us when it is most convenient for them and with the COVID19 pandemic closing our office doors, this was essential for many customers.

We are continuing to add more and more online forms for customers to access our services. On top of this, we are also implementing integrations to many processes to save time for back office staff which allows quicker response times to customers.

Some forms which have gone live over the last 18 months are:

- Noise nuisance
- All in one payment form
- Street naming and numbering
- Report it – Litter, Dog Fouling, Fly tipping and Dead Animals
- Car Parking season tickets
- High Street Residents Permit
- Many forms in relation to the COVID19 response

Some customer feedback from our online forms: *"I normally pay by hand at Council Offices but due to COVID19 I have used the online service, which was easy and convenient , so I will continue to use this in future.", "easy and convenient", "Easy to navigate and simple to fill out"*

Some other achievements between January 2020 and September 2021 include:

- New permanent process improvement program with ability for ongoing improvements to be added.
- Delivery of new forms with integrations e.g. Noise nuisance (ongoing)
- Interim solutions for the Section 106 process which was failing
- Improvements to finance reporting
- Introducing paperless invoicing
- Setting up HR select reports in a dashboard
- Removal of pink sack collections at the MDC office
- Introducing electronic signing of online forms
- Improving the deed of variation documentation and storage process

More information on these achievements, and others can be found on our SharePoint site [here.](here)

- **8. Our timetable of work for the next three years**

We have a development timetable and list of 'pipeline' projects that are identified as opportunities arise. At any given time, the team have 6 live improvement projects, 2 major projects (e.g. HM Land Registry migration and website development), 2 quick win workshops and space for 2 urgent projects (e.g. COVID forms). New projects will not begin until one of these have been delivered and live.

Prioritisation work also pays consideration to wider strategic goals and operational issues of the organisation, for example, working closely to the ICT strategy, and prioritising areas such as licensing where historic systems for customer journeys will cease in April 2023.

We continually review this and re-prioritise the list as technology, legislative requirements and customer demand may change over time.

A key driver for the workplan is to move processes online for easier customer access where they aren't already, and improve journeys for our customers and our back office to make them as simple and effective as possible.

Below is an extract from the team worklist that shows the initial processes for work that have been identified:

Position No.	Score	Service area	Process Impacted:	Process Description - 'what is the issue?'	Business Requirement 'we would like to...'	Target outcome - 'so that we can'	Is a Firmstep Form Required?
				Waiting List - Improvement Oppotunities			
1	54.4	Customer Services	Develop website	Website is not clear enough for customers and difficult to find what they need	Improve the website to ensure customers can find at first attempt	Reduce the number of calls from customers unable to find the correct information online	No
2	49.2	Customer Services	Further all in one payment development	Not all payments can be received online	Add more payments to the all in one payment form	Customers will be able to pay for more online	Yes
3	48	Customer Services	Firmstep development	currently no Integrations with MDC other systems, underdeveloped customer face (forms, icon, widgets for customer info, matching customer records with ID,	To improve accessibility by reducing the number of steps for the customer	so that customers are able to find the information easily which will reduce call volumes	Yes
4	47.4	Waste	Stopping using Suez portal	Information regarding services is not clear on Suez portal, causes high call volumes and rework. Suez charge for any amendments on their portal	Build forms and MDC website to hold all the information and instructions for customers and have a integration feed that information to Suez	Reduce confusion to customers, reduce call volumes and rework	Yes
5	47	Customer Services	Sending customer forms electronically	CSA's sending out Benefit forms and resending council tax bills via post	Implement paperless billing and reminders	reduce carbon footprint & reduce costs	No
6	46.8	Customer Services	Change of address	Transfer to new forms	Close old forms down or redesign to meet the service requirments		Yes
7	45.4	RAMS	RAMS process	New process - interim process is not monitored and payments are being refunded	Create the workflow with automated triggers and create payment pot which will split to be allocated where it needs to	ensure delivery of the service	No
8	45.4	RAMS	RAMS form	Form needed as part of the build of the end to end process	collect the Checking & monitoring Fee together when the Unilateral Undertaken is submitted	reduce steps in the process and avoid duplication	Yes
9	44.8	Planning	Online payments for applications	Unable to pay for planning applications online and not able to take payments over the phone so currently using BACS	Add this payment option to the All in One Payment form	allow customers to pay online	Yes
10	44.4	FOI	FOI process & reporting	Break in workflow, backlog of FOI's & ownership issues	create a workflow which is mostly automated to help direct the workflow to the correct staff	automate and design the workflow	Yes

A full version of the plan for process improvement work can be accessed on the Member's SharePoint Alongside the specific process improvement workplan, we have identified that we will:

- Train and embed process improvement practices across the organisation - including possible link between apprenticeship and new recruits (HR), and wider training and guidance available for all staff
- Establish an internal process improvement group, to help build capacity around the work, and share learning across subject areas
- Work closely with members to utilise their insight to help improve processes for our customers
- Work closely with the Project Management Office (PMO) to support wider project delivery and help apply continual improvement skills to some of our corporate projects, for example, supporting with workshop facilitation
- Identify new projects based on staff feedback and review suggestions based on the impact they could have
- Support projects that come out of the PMO where their delivery will improve the efficiency of the organization

- **9. Learning and continual development**

As part of our ethos of continual improvement, our delivery plan also includes learning and development of the team, to make sure we embed current best practice into the

organisation and change and adapt to wider priorities. A summary of how we do this is outlined below:

- Always reflecting on timetable and priorities
- Keeping on top of technology and best practice developments
- Regular meetings and planning with ICT colleagues to align to developments of theirs
- Working to industry standards and investing in training for our staff
- Training for our team to embed structured practice- e.g., both full time members on specific process improvement apprenticeships
- Knowledge transfer and support within the team
- Networking and bringing back wider learning through forums such as the Essex Policy and Performance Network
- Continually update and review our lessons learnt log to ensure we capture and share knowledge from our experiences, including reflecting on what went well and what could be done differently to improve future projects.

Both FTE attached to the team will be trained on Firmstep technical development and stakeholder facilitation and process re-engineering, which means they are able to cover and support all areas of process improvement work that come up and building resilience within the team.

- **10. Knowledge transfer outside of the team**

As part of the work to enable process improvement across the organisation, the following methods of knowledge transfer are specifically built into the work programme:

- Training housing staff and other areas to lead on and deliver improvement work
- Training ICT/ wider staff on forms build and end to end process testing
- Training on new/amended processes by providing a walk-through of the end to end process to all teams involved, this is recorded and available for later viewing.
- Testers – we will recruit and train some people that can test from a customer perspective (ideally including members, to give a customer-centric view and be part of our improvement journey)
- Creating documentation, such as the forms design guide, so that where wider staff pick up forms build, we ensure a consistent, best practice approach
- Ensuring documentation and a handover period is in place for all improvements we implement, to ensure knowledge transfer of the process to the processing team.

11. Risks and issues

The following risks have been identified for the process improvement programme and how it is delivered

Risk	Score	Mitigating actions
Resource in the team	I-5 L- 3 15	Building capacity for process improvement in wider staff as part of their day to day role Large projects and improvement work that take away capacity for the programme (e.g., HMLR) may require a backfill of resource and associated budget
As we use integrations more, more technical ICT support is required	I-3 L-3 9	Look to move away from integrations over time- by utilising dynamics 365 Avoid integrations where they don't add value to the process (owing to development time on Firmstep)
Having the time to train and build capacity – e.g., testing training	I-3 L-3 9	This is built into the workplan, but means that we have to rationalise resource and will manage taking on less specific improvement work alongside this
Changing priorities/ technologies for ICT	I-4 L-3 12	Regular communication between the Lead Specialist for ICT and the Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager Training for process improvement staff early on as technologies emerge
Availability and capacity of service staff	I-4 L-4 16	Prioritisation of live work from the pipeline considers service staff availability Regular progress reporting as identified in section six, highlights issues with staff availability and where this is ongoing will lead to discussion around whether to pause work in a specific area and prioritise elsewhere.
Member support and awareness	I-2 L-3 6	Transformation review report to O&S committee highlighted process improvement work Development of the Process Improvement Framework and report to Performance, Governance and Audit committee highlighting link to financial audit requirements Recruitment of Member testers to help champion process improvement work Reporting of exceptions to delivery through the Balance Scorecard reporting identified in section six.