Local Government Association

Exeter City Council Decision Making Accountability (DMA) Summary Report - March 2023

Purpose

The Local Government Association were asked by Exeter City Council to lead the DMA review (Decision-Making Accountability), which is a methodology that supports organisation design.

The DMA review took place across the council and through to the frontline, with an aim of developing a more efficient and effective organisation. This resource highlights a brief overview of the LGA's initial findings.
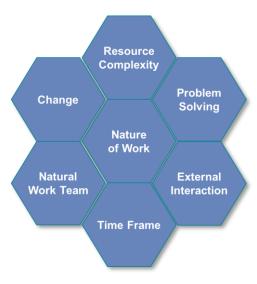
The Process

The DMA review involved 34 interviews and 2 drop-in sessions were offered by independent DMA experts from the Local Government Association during February/March 2023. The type of roles interviewed ranged from front line staff, team leaders, managers, service leads and directors.

Exeter City Council should be a Level 4 organisation, which means it should have no more than 5 layers of management from the frontline to the Chief Executive post.

The DMA review identified a maximum of 6 layers (5 levels) of hierarchy across the organisation, which is non-DMA compliant but there has been a proactive approach to layers of management. The DMA review took place across the council and through to the frontline focusing on the areas suggested by SMB. These services included: Senior Management, Revenues Benefits & Customer Access, Finance, City Development, Net Zero and City Management, Corporate Services.

There is a genuine commitment from the council to ensuring it has the most effective and efficient management structure to enable it to deliver services to residents and the city.

The 7 Elements of DMA

Some of the things you told us:

"I'm firefighting all these issues myself"

"Corporate machinery that seems to work against us"

"Everyone works in their own pockets"

"It's always somebody else's job to do something"

"Not clear how our department relates to other parts of the council."

"It concerns me that we are not agile enough to deal with the next phase"

"We had clunky old systems, now we've got clunky new systems"

"We try our best with the IT to get by on a day by day basis"

"Asking us to set KPIs with hands tied behind our backs because systems aren't working properly"

"If they want use to be more OneExeter, more efficient, then they need to spend more money on these tools to help us."

"Would like to see us communicate better with staff and not be so hierarchical"

Summary of the findings

The council has a 'really good core of staff' who were keen to be involved in this review. Colleagues told us that:

1. Silo working has prevented teams working together

Silo working is evident within the council, which has restricted effective communication and prevented teams working together towards the council's vision. Tasks and projects are therefore often not effectively prioritised owing to a lack of understanding of the council's overall vision and direction of travel.

> " Not clear how our department relates to other parts of the council. "

2. Internal communication is 'light'

There is an opportunity to develop internal communications to ensure all employees are engaged and communicated with. Reasons for internal communication being 'light' could include silo working, lack of one-to-ones and team meetings.

3. A lack of administrative support

Staff have reported that there is an increasing amount of administration duties within their role. This is taking them away from their core responsibilities and preventing them adding value.

4. A lack of consideration for future leaders

Learning and development was raised as a concern, especially when considering future leaders and progression within the council. The council needs to do more to support new employees and create effective training for staff.

> " Frustration in the lack of learning. "

5. Effective structures

The current structure is designed around individuals and services rather than the customer. Staff describe this as 'disjointed' and affecting how quickly decisions can be made. Colleagues report needing to ask their line manager to contact other teams.

> " Decisions seemed to get bounced around and kicked down the road. "

6. IT systems are not fit for purpose

Staff reported that IT systems keep crashing which is affecting how efficient employees can be in their role. Many IT platforms that staff use are only doing 'half the job' and not effectively working together.