



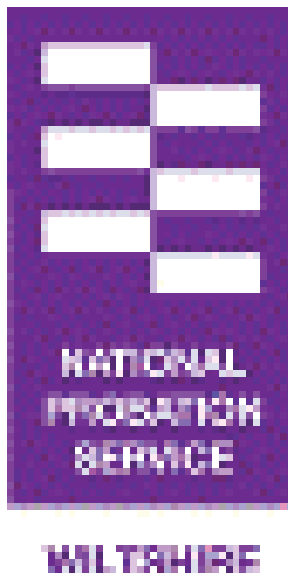
Client Story

Reforming and performing in Wiltshire Probation Area

A collaboration between a Chief Executive and Harthill to provide the synergy for organisational and cultural change in Wiltshire Probation Area.



Reforming and performing in Wiltshire Probation Area



When the UK's 42 probation bodies were assessed to establish their fitness to implement the changes outlined in 'A New Choreography', Wiltshire did not come out of the exercise well. Although the service was given the top PIP (Performance Inspection Programme) rating for its performance on the old criteria, managers were told that their organisation as it stood was simply not capable of meeting the new agenda.

Four years on, Wiltshire Probation Area has moved dramatically up the national performance table. From having been second to bottom of the 42 Probation Areas, it is now rated third from top in the country. It became the first '4 Green Star' performing area in the country, the first small area to achieve 'Trust' status, and achieved excellent scores in public protection practice.

“Our considerable achievements have been the result of a productive partnership with Harthill over a number of years. We have been working towards becoming a learning organisation, which at times has been painful, but we are now in a much better position to meet the future challenges”.

Diana Fulbrook, Chief Officer.

The story unfolds

The lack of an appropriate performance culture could not allow Wiltshire to implement the new requirements successfully. Radical reform was inevitable. The problem was greatly exacerbated by the reluctance of many of the 250 staff, including some senior managers, to recognise the need for change. The more conservative personnel, many of whom had been doing excellent jobs in the context of the old service, felt strongly that 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. Simultaneously, some Board members were reluctant to accept that major change was necessary.

The first task was to draw up an organisational plan. This formed the basis of a three-year change programme with two principal goals - to improve performance, and to introduce a culture of effective practice. The programme was launched in April 2002.

“Our organisation was hierarchical and fragmented, with people tending to work in isolation with little appreciation of what everyone else was doing” says Chief Officer, Diana Fulbrook. “Our staff were loyal and hard-working, but they had no concept of targets or benchmarks. There was a pressing need for the team to improve its management and leadership skills.”

“Change wasn’t optional. We simply had to meet the new requirements” says Chris Hoare, Chair since October 2001. “It wasn’t just a case of restructuring - we needed to deliver lasting cultural change. The challenge was immense.”

The Chief Officer was quite clear from the outset about the type of organisational change and culture the Area wanted and did not require advice about this. However, to assist the Area in implementing a radical reform programme, a management consultancy with expertise in organisational change was commissioned. After an open selection process Jane Allen from Harthill was asked to take on the challenge because of her experience and expertise in the probation field.

A true partnership creates synergy

The consultancy brief was organisation-wide. Initially Jane worked with the Chair and Chief Officer, the Board and the senior management team. She then went on to work with individual groups of senior officers to help them to adapt to the new ways of working, and particularly to develop leadership skills. She supported the Area with their whole Area staff conferences. “This was extremely successful” says Diana Fulbrook. “Jane helped us to deal with the organisational grief - she proved very successful at helping our staff to get to grips with their new agenda. She also enabled us to support some valuable officers who might otherwise have left.”

Mal Munday, a Senior Manager, comments:

“My promotion from Senior Probation Officer to Assistant Chief Officer at the start of the Change Programme was a great opportunity for me. The scale of the changes was frightening, but we all had to recognise that there is no gain without pain. Jane has helped to steer us as managers through it all.”

The ‘tipping point’

By 2005 the organisation had reached a ‘tipping point’ past which the changes developed a momentum of their own, although continued help was needed to develop skills and embed the cultural changes. At the start of 2006 the consultancy brief was re-tendered and Harthill Consulting, with Jane Allen as a director for public service work, won the tender. Under a rolling programme, she has continued to run team-building events for the managers, learning sets for groups of staff to help them to develop skills and executive coaching where required. This is part of a longer term organisational development process drawn up by the Chief Officer, following a review of the Change Programme, that includes developing leadership and management skills across the organisation.

As we pointed out at the beginning, four years on, Wiltshire Probation Area has moved up the national performance table, from second to bottom of the 42 Probation Areas, to third from top in the country. Even so, the leadership team are aware that there is room for improvement, and there will always be some staff who are sceptical of the reforms.

Diana Fulbrook, Chief Officer, says:

“Working collaboratively with Jane Allen has meant we achieved what we wanted to do more quickly and effectively than if we had tried to do it on our own. What worked was the partnership approach we adopted, and Jane’s flexible approach in providing what was needed in a timely manner”.