



## **Kaizen a Model for Continuous Improvement Aberdeenshire Council, North East Scotland**

**International Leading Practices Symposium 2008  
29-30 May 2008, Surfers Paradise, Queensland, Australia**

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Form of Government (e.g., council-manager, commission)	Local Authority
Legislative Body (e.g., 8-member council, separately-elected mayor)	68 member council
Population	236,260
Area (in square kilometres)	6,313 square kilometres
Budget (in local currency)	476.8 million (UK Sterling)
Budget (equivalent in Australian dollars)	931.25 million (AUD)
Number of Employees	c 10,000 FTE (full time equivalents)
Socio-Economic factors Industries Other key statistics	See Aberdeenshire Profile Document Nov 2007 <a href="http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/statistics/area/aberdeenshire_profile2007.pdf">http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/statistics/area/aberdeenshire_profile2007.pdf</a>

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to providing first class services for the residents of the area and has, under strong leadership, developed a model for improvement using the talents and know-how of the employees at the frontline.

A host of customer improvements have resulted across all the Services of the Council, from speeding up planning applications, paying Foster Carers, to maintaining public toilets.

In all, 52 full Kaizen Blitz projects have been tackled to date, together with many smaller scale team and workplace Kaizen projects. Approximately 530 staff members have been part of teams and many hundreds have been close to and positively impacted by the changes they have been brought about. Some teams have included other stakeholders such as partner organisations, national agencies, councillors and in some cases residents.

**The Council was the recipient of a prestigious UDITE European Improvement Award in 2006.** UDITE is the Union of Local Authority Chief Executives of Europe. In introducing an improvement award at their 8<sup>th</sup> annual convention they sought to recognise “the most excellent projects undertaken during 2006”. In particular they were interested to find something that had really made a difference and was transferrable to others. The Council went through a rigorous assessment process and won the award in the face of fierce competition from a total of 25 submissions across Europe.

The panel of assessors who came to make a judgement said this of the Kaizen programme:

*“There is major buy-in from the employees who ‘own’ the final outcome. The emphasis is on creative solutions rather than capital investment.”*

*“The results have been staggering in terms of the potentially sustainable improvements achieved and the cultural change in terms of the staff attitude to their work is apparently quite remarkable, with those involved in Kaizen projects subsequently seeking continuous improvement in the workplace at every opportunity.”*

Aberdeenshire Council is now on a journey to build on the success and commitment from staff and to create a model of Kaizen which supports employees and the work they do on a daily basis.

Key to all of this is the commitment from senior managers, who’ve had the determination and tenacity to stick with it. Success can also be attributed to the creation of a skilled team of Specialists/Facilitators who have over time developed the model to meet the needs of the organisation.



## **PROBLEM ASSESSMENT/INITIAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

The Chief Executive felt that ongoing initiatives such as Best Value Reviews and the application of the EFQM (European Framework for Quality Management) could not alone transform the quality of services to the public and believed passionately that tapping into the talent and experience of our workforce was the answer.

His initial impression of Kaizen at a Quality Scotland event (see [www.qualityscotland.co.uk](http://www.qualityscotland.co.uk)) was that it appeared to combine the benefits of measurable performance improvements with culture change. In 2004, two pilot Kaizen projects were undertaken and the results were impressive.

Not wishing to discount other similar approaches to improvement through empowerment the council also experimented with other models.

As a result of this experimental phase it became clear that introducing any approach would require expert guidance and support. The politicians who made up the Policy & Resources committee in the Council were asked to give their support to an investment of £100,000 equivalent to approximately AUD212, 000 to engage such an expert. In terms of the overall budget for the Council this did not represent a large sum of money but nevertheless some members needed some convincing that this was the best course of action. The resulting tender would be for an Aberdeenshire-wide improvement model which engaged and empowered staff to effect improvement in their own work. Crucially the tender insisted upon the transfer of skills and competencies to deliver an ongoing programme. The Council ambitiously aimed to be self sufficient within six months of the engagement.

The Council considered a range of approaches in the selection process. Kaizen emerged as the preferred option because of the potential to deliver outstanding results and engage wide numbers of staff in the process. The panel who evaluated the tenders were also swayed by the successful consultant's willingness to question the culture, leadership and general organisational readiness and to suggest remedies should any of these area be found lacking.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION/CHANGES IMPLEMENTED**

### **What is Kaizen?**

Rooted in the Toyota production system of 'lean production', Kaizen Blitz is a breakthrough technique designed to bring about significant, rapid improvements in productivity, efficiency and morale.

In a Kaizen Blitz the right team is brought together and fully empowered by management to find a solution to a critical business issue.. The team is given the necessary time and tools and is supported throughout by an experienced facilitator. They are empowered by management to redesign how the work should be done to produce better customer results

Typically in Aberdeenshire Council, Kaizen is used to improve the performance of a current process, establish the best possible version of something new or accelerate a piece of work which may be part of a wider change agenda.

In all cases a means of measuring current or predicted performance is found. .

In simple terms this is how it works:

- A critical business issue is identified
- The scope is agreed and management goals are set
- A Project Leader is selected.
- The Project Leader selects a team (usually between 9-11 people)
- Pre work is done to establish the current performance
- Awareness raising takes place. This often takes the form of a tour around the locations where the process happens and together with news bulletins published on the intranet or through team briefs
- The Kaizen team comes together for a Kaizen Blitz event, usually lasting 4.5 days, to find the new way forward (they are fully empowered to do so by management)
- The team are trained in Kaizen principles and during the week map the current and future state
- The team consult colleagues and service users throughout
- Management are very visible around the Blitz week
- The event culminates in a team presentation of the outputs
- The team declare when they will be able to achieve their goals
- A report and implementation plan is created
- The Project Leader takes the lead on implementation supported by management and other colleagues and members of the Kaizen team.
- A Final Report Out (project closure) is presented by the team when the implementation is complete and results are known
- Improvements are sustained by ensuring that the new process is the defined new standard operating procedure and that performance continues to be measured and monitored.

The Kaizen principles which form part of the training are as follows:

Remove Waste	Anything that doesn't add value to the end customer can be described as waste.
Quality everywhere	Defects, poor data, misinformation mustn't be allowed to get into a process.
Encourage Flexibility	It may be necessary to get people to operate outside their normal sphere of operation in order to make things better for the customer.
Aim efforts at the customer	It's necessary to know who they are and what they want and to think of them when the work is redesigned.
Standardize	A standard or standard operating procedure is essential to provide a platform for further continuous improvement opportunities.
Dare to be different	Innovation before benchmarking.
Ensure flow	Eliminating back tracking, hand offs and steps that don't add value.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Since Kaizen was a departure from the norm in the Council and therefore called for new attitudes and behaviours, it was found necessary to be very specific about the roles and responsibilities of the key players and therefore guidance booklets were developed at an early stage to reinforce the way things should be done.

The Key players as referred to above are:

- The Supporting Manager
- The Project Leader
- Individual team members
- The Kaizen Specialist/Facilitator

### **The Supporting Manager**

Managers have an important role to play in ensuring the success of a Kaizen project. Generally it is he or she who will identify the subject matter, and having done so, set goals for the team. The manager must select who they believe will be the most appropriate Project Leader and give encouragement and support to that person throughout.

They need to be visible around the project, giving of their time in the preparation and implementation and visiting the team as the Kaizen week unfolds.

The team may call upon the manager to unblock any problems during the implementation phase and he or she has to ensure that the implementation is seen through and the team reach their goals and in doing so realize the improvements and get the sense of achievement and recognition they deserve.

In short, empowering employees through Kaizen to tackle critical business issues is not an abdication of management responsibilities but rather a way to undertake those responsibilities differently.

Middle managers are most likely to find Kaizen threatening as they can feel exposed when the current status is laid bare. Managers need support to overcome this and the Kaizen Specialist is sensitive to these issues and prepared to manage them.

Manager at all levels who “get it” and in the Council this now represents a large proportion of that group, know there is much to be gained in identifying and supporting Kaizen activities, for example:

- Improved performance (often a radical improvement) and a transfer of the ownership of performance to the workforce
- A greater understanding of the business process and the problems encountered at the frontline.
- A chance to engage with subordinates about what can be achieved.
- A growing ethos of continuous improvement in the service area
- Increased staff morale

### **The Project Leader**

The importance of getting the right Project Leader cannot be underestimated. The success of a project relies on the he or she more than any other, as they take the lead on implementation.

The Project Leader is not relied upon to motivate and direct the team during the Kaizen Blitz week as this task falls to the Facilitator.

Long after the euphoria around the Kaizen event has died down, the hard work to bring about the outcomes goes on, and the project leader needs to maintain the motivation to see things through.

The Project Leader is asked to select the team and helps the Kaizen specialist gain access to the service area to do the pre analysis in order to establish the baseline.

### **Individual team members**

Team members are chosen because of their relationship to the process or service area and typically come from different geographical areas, different disciplines and work at different levels. The idea is to gather together many different perspectives and opinions about how things may need to be improved.



Project Leaders are asked not to compromise in their selection and sometimes blockages have to be removed in order to get the right person on a team. This usually involves the Kaizen specialist lining up management support to make this happen.

Although a Kaizen team can benefit from the input of employees who are “up for change”, it is certainly not the case that every team member starts off with this mindset. Indeed those identified as being potentially resistant to change are often invited to participate. In an ideal team there would be a mixture of both i.e. a balance.

The true power of the Kaizen process can often be evidenced by those, less than enthusiastic participants, doing a complete U turn and becoming the best ambassadors for Kaizen and continuous improvement in the organisation.

There are many examples of comments such as:

- “This was the best week of my working life”
- “I was really skeptical but now feel we’ve achieved something amazing”
- “I wished we’d had Kaizen years ago”

### **The Kaizen Specialist/Facilitator**

The role of the specialist as developed in the council has proved to be a very challenging yet rewarding one according to the present incumbents.

The Council has chosen to have a Specialist assigned to each Service in order that they maintain a close relationship to the local performance issues and the people in that area. Although the Council strives to work as one organisation that does not negate the fact that Planners may see things differently from Social Workers and differences in culture, values and in improvement priorities will exist.

When it comes to giving advice, scoping projects and supporting ongoing Kaizens each will predominately work within the own Service. However at an early stage it was agreed that Kaizen Specialists, when facilitating, would work across boundaries to increase their own learning and to improve the overall quality of delivery in the Council.

Few would deny that 4.5 days of an experienced group’s time is a significant resource commitment. Put together with the fact that Kaizen Blitz tackles the critical business issues of an organisation delivering a vast range of essential services to a quarter of million people, it is hardly surprising that the subject matter tends to be challenging and complex.

For this reason the Specialist/Facilitator has a great many important considerations to take account of e.g.

- Ensuring the scope will stretch the team without being unrealistic or unachievable
- Ensuring that the right links are made to things happening elsewhere in the organisation
- Ensuring the team stay focused and meet the deadlines
- Keeping the motivation and momentum going
- Anticipating and dealing with sensitivities

- Dealing with inappropriate behaviours
- Having a thorough understanding of Kaizen principles and encouraging others to apply them

It is commonplace in Aberdeenshire Council for Specialist/Facilitators to work in teams of two. This has come about over time and is found to be the best way of ensuring that all the above tasks are covered and that each event is as successful as the last.

## **Our Objectives**

Aberdeenshire Council was the first local authority in Scotland to adopt and perhaps more importantly **adapt** the Kaizen model for continuous improvement and, as such, had to navigate uncharted waters.

In the first instance the project specific objectives were:

- To develop the expertise and in-house capacity to sustain a Council-wide Kaizen programme
- To recruit a Kaizen Champion and 1 Facilitator in each of the 8 Council Directorates
- To deliver a programme of Kaizen ‘culture change’ workshops to senior managers
- To develop and document an **Aberdeenshire Council model** for end-to-end Kaizen projects
- To deliver a programme of individual Kaizen projects with measurable outcomes for review purposes over the first six months

The longer term objectives were to create an ethos of continuous improvement, where employees could see and embrace improvement opportunities.

## **Transferring the know-how**

As previously outlined, following a rigorous selection process the Council engaged a consultant for a six-month period with the intention of embedding an improvement methodology, whilst at the same time transferring the skills and competencies to run and further develop the model.

The successful consultant organisation could lay claim to having taken the lead on over 100 Kaizen Blitz interventions but were honest that their expertise was routed mainly in manufacturing and had only five case studies from the service sector with only three in the public sector.

They were persuasive in putting forward a belief that the process was transferable and the Council took the leap of faith necessary to commit to the approach.

There were three clear benefits of bringing in external expertise. Firstly, the programme needed to rapidly establish its credibility as an effective driver for change. Secondly, the range of expertise and skills needed to develop the programme did not exist in the Council or any of its partners. Thirdly, it was the most cost-effective option.

## **What’s in a name?**

There was debate at the outset as to whether the Kaizen word be used, and indeed many in Scotland who have followed the Council’s lead have chosen not to use it. Questions such as “Would people

be put off by this strange Japanese term?” and “Should the Council develop some unique brand for the programme?” were asked.

In the final analysis it was decided to retain the Kaizen term but not to use the term LEAN since this had connotations of downsizing the workforce.

Although the Council sought to be more efficient in every way it had no strategic intention to reduce head count as a consequence of introducing Kaizen. This was made very clear in and around the improvement events.

The decision to retain the Kaizen word proved to be a good one as it allowed us to network with many other organisations, which picked up and understood from the term what we were pursuing.

It very quickly ceased to be a strange term in the organisation and became instead something associated with positive change.

### **Our journey and some of the milestones**

When	What was done	Efficacy/Lessons learned
November 2004	The recruitment of a Kaizen Champion High profile campaign Chief Executive directly involved Consultant encouraged the use of Job/Personality profile matching	Chief Executive involvement sent the right message to the organisation  Campaign attracted a lot of candidates
November 2004	Senior Managers on one day workshop Experiential learning around Kaizen principles and an opportunity to discuss	Had partial success in getting the entire Senior Management Team to be united in their support for the programme/ Probably should have been repeated in a slightly different guise at regular intervals as the programme developed.
December 2004	First Kaizen Blitz Registration of Planning Applications Kaizen Champion involved for training purposes as team member	Hurriedly scoped and executed but nevertheless the learning was powerful and the successes story a good one.
December 2004	CE requested that all Service Directors come up with one Kaizen Blitz proposal to be scheduled within the first 6 months	Very varied level of enthusiasm and cooperation. Probably wouldn't have got a project from every Service without the CE directive.
Between January 2005- May 2005	Early projects identified, scoped, scheduled and carried out	Consultant spent about 50% of his time onsite so Kaizen Champion had to learn this skill very quickly



Between January 2005- May 2005	Further one day workshops Service by Service to coincide with the first of the respective Service's Kaizen event. Top 22 Service Managers involved. Experiential learning around Kaizen principles and an opportunity to discuss concerns.	Received a mixed reception but most were positive. Once again probably should have been repeated in a slightly different guise at regular intervals as the programme developed and perhaps to next layer of managers. .
January 2005	1 further Service Facilitator identified and appointed	This early appointment proved to be invaluable as far as capacity to deliver and also as a support and sounding board for the fledgling Kaizen Champion
March 2005	6 more Service Facilitators Appointed on a part-time/secondment basis – Job/Personality profile matching used plus innovative interview techniques. Training plan devised as follows - they would participate on events as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team Member</li> <li>• Support to Facilitator</li> <li>• Lead Facilitator with experienced support</li> <li>• Lead Facilitator</li> </ul>	This proved to be too many too soon since the training plan and the number of Kaizen events meant the training period had to be very protracted and this understandably caused frustration among facilitators. Some offline training was done with the consultant. Of the 7 appointed only 1 could not make the grade.
April 2005	Kaizen Champion facilitating solo without consultant support	
May 2005	1 Service Champion facilitating solo without consultant support	
May 2005	End of consultant contract	
June 2005	First set of guidance materials produced detailing the standard Aberdeenshire Kaizen approach	Given the limited experience of the Kaizen Champion when these were created they were subject to numerous updates which made version control quite challenging. There are now no hard copies printed.
June 2005	A rewrite of the consultant's Facilitator Manual  More step by step guidance With What to do What's important	There was a real appetite for this amongst facilitators given the way they got their training and how challenging events could be. This has become a dynamic support document giving instructions, tips, and tactics gleaned from over 50



	What to watch out for	events.
July 2005	Commissioned an in-house DVD to spread the word	Has been edited and added to over the period and has served as a great tool to introduce Kaizen to groups inside and outside the authority First version 24 mins long Should have been shorter
By end of 2005	15 projects undertaken Many results beginning to emerge and “Big wins”	
During 2005-2006	Continued to cascade training to facilitators and developed a competence framework to assess progress and define training needs	
During 2005-2006	Frantic efforts by the Kaizen Champion to engage with people and bring in projects for the Kaizen treatment	Began to see some great results/ lots of repeat customers and positive employee attitude toward Kaizen
June 2006	Scottish Local Authority award in the “one to watch” category	“You’ve got to be in it, to win it” Putting projects forward for awards does require a bit of effort and time. In this case it proved very worthwhile as it not only increased the profile of the Council as a local authority who cares about continuous improvement, it also increased buy-in for Kaizen within the organisation.
September 2006	European Excellence Award	It also gave a great morale boost to those who had been involved. Also drawing together evidence and ideas for an award submission can be a great way of reviewing how things are going and what might be improved.
November 2006	Most Services recognising the worth of the approach and the value of their own Specialist/Facilitator made the post Permanent and full time with a wider Continuous Improvement remit	
November 2006	Major review with former Project Leaders to understand and support the challenges around implementation	Recognising that implementation has to be paramount A lot of learning was derived from this event. As a consequence many changes were made including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role which had previously been known as</li> </ul>



		<p>Team Leader was changed to emphasise the responsibility throughout the life of the improvement project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New arrangements were put in place to assess the time commitment post Kaizen and to back-fill their substantive post.</li> <li>• New arrangements to work collaboratively with ICT were put in place.</li> <li>• There were also new arrangements for the Kaizen Specialist to give additional support through the implementation phase.</li> </ul>
February 2007	Launched Team Kaizen to deal with Team issues	To meet a demand for smaller scale projects. Some early successes. Organisation given clear message this wasn't just about reducing the time for full Kaizen Blitz.
March 2007	Founder members of a Public Sector Lean Group in Scotland To share ideas/ best practice and joint training opportunities	Exchanged facilitators with another organisation. Change Management training done and Benefits realisation training on the cards for Sep 08
October 2007	Embarked on a major programme of Kaizen 5S – workplace efficiency	Has attracted a lot of interest and now rolling out in 3 Services.
April 2008	Plans in place to take Kaizen methodology to establishments, teams, operational environments. Providing a structure to empower staff to improve day to day activities and manage and monitor performance	

### Developing our own model

When engaging a consultant it is common to recognise elements of an approach that don't sit well within your own organisational culture and therefore will require to be adapted or translated to ensure acceptance.

There was a danger for the Council that the internal and at that stage inexperienced Kaizen people would jump to those judgements too soon and thus dilute the efficacy of the approach. After all, this

was largely about changing the culture. The solution was therefore to stick 100% to the consultant's model during the period of engagement and accept that some elements of his model would play into the hands of the cynics.

When it was time for the consultant to leave, the Kaizen Champion and fellow facilitators were still relatively inexperienced and struggled for a short while with what might be okay to alter or even leave out altogether. They imagined that they would be ignoring some LEAN bible if they were to deviate from the path they had been shown and that suddenly a band of Japanese industrialists would burst into the room accusing them of Kaizen heresy. They experienced even more anxiety when projects were proposed which didn't ideally fit the Kaizen process mould.

Thankfully the revelation that what was important, was to use the model to meet the improvement needs of the organisation, wasn't too long in coming. Armed with all they had learned from the consultant and the previous events they were able to develop and adapt the model with confidence. The Kaizen Champion and other Specialists have maintained a close team synergy and move this development forward together. Extra training has been brought in to underpin some delivery methods over the period e.g. on Value Stream mapping and System approaches.

### **Recruiting and training Kaizen Facilitators**

The Council was keen to recruit facilitators at an early stage particularly since it hoped to use the consultant's skills in the training phase. However the rate at which projects could be scoped and undertake meant that some of the facilitators weren't able to get hands-on experience for some time and with hindsight a more staged recruitment would have been best.

Training days, reading, research and even role play were found to be no substitute for a real live Kaizen event.

The time commitment for facilitators in the beginning and how challenging the role would be were both underestimated. When facilitators were involved in a project they reported difficulties in refocusing on their other job and many found it an anti climax to go back to normality after the buzz of a Kaizen event.

### **Identifying Projects**

The organisation started with no structured process to allow us to prioritise improvements topics for Kaizen and could have benefited from this at an earlier stage.

Efforts were made to find projects that would be a good Kaizen fit, rather than focus on what needed to improve quickly. This was one of the reasons why adapting the model became so important.

There were high hopes that relevant improvement needs would be highlighted through the use of the EFQM Excellence Model but this did not materialise.

These days each Service Management Team goes through a process of identifying Kaizen priorities for their Service with the assistance of the Specialist/Facilitator.

### **Collaborating with others corporate departments**

The outputs from Kaizen events often impacted on other departments and in particular the ICT (Information & Communication Technology) team. When they were unable to comply with the ambitious implementation timetable for change after a Kaizen they felt themselves to be blamed.

The Council over time developed a means of anticipating this and to work collaboratively with ICT colleagues. A senior ICT analyst regularly attends Kaizen Specialists meetings and is made aware of all planned events. The scoping document now asks proposers to include comments about technology around the process.

A similar arrangement exists for our Internal Auditors and on a more ad hoc basis with Personnel and Training & Development.

### **Implementation**

Implementation of the outputs, not surprisingly, proved to be the most challenging phase and many enhancements have been made to overcome these difficulties. These include clearly defining the time commitment for the project leader, allowing the Kaizen team to set the timetable for implementation as part of the event, regularly reporting on progress to management teams and ensuring that the end point of each project is an opportunity for celebration.

### **Leading the way**

Being a trail blazer meant that the Council had other organisations beating a path to the door and although this was very flattering it was also quite time consuming. On reflection it might have been preferable to have developed e.g. an information pack rather than accommodate so many face to face contacts.

Nevertheless a reputation for innovation and excellence has been another by product of the Kaizen programme and one which the Council has been pleased to acquire.

Other public sector bodies in Scotland have decided to embrace Kaizen in part due to the experience of Aberdeenshire Council. Several have chosen to employ the same consultant.

### **COSTS/SAVINGS/FISCAL IMPACT**

The driver for introducing this model was not, and should not, be to reduce costs but rather to increase efficiency. Since a lot of costs relate to employees and in this model the Council asks employees to lead the organisation toward efficiency gains, it was made clear that there was no agenda to reduce FTEs (full time equivalents).

That said, in increasing efficiency, cost savings are often realised e.g. a team who tackled the process of paying electricity bills (7,000 each year) found a way to save \$74,000 AUD whilst at the same time stripped out 2,860 man hours from the process annually. Another team looking at better utilisation of vehicles made a \$204,800 AUD savings in the first 12 months.



A list of the type of projects undertaken follows:

- K1 - Registration of Planning Applications**
- K2 - Building Maintenance - Stock Control**
- K3 - Carriageway Defects**
- K4 - Violent Incident Reporting in Schools**
- K5 - Building Standards - Site Inspections**
- K6 - ICT Systems/Equipment for New Starts**
- K7 - Council House Sales**
- K8 - SW Reports for Looked After Children**
- K9 - Preparation, Management and Completion of E&R Property Projects**
- K10 - Capital Plan Monitoring**
- K11 - Booked Travel**
- K12 - Integration of Service for People with Learning Disabilities**
- K13 - Natural/Built Heritage Consultations**
- K14 - Single Referral Point – Peterhead**
- K15 - Property Enquiries**
- K16 - Training & Development Admin.**
- K17 - Electronic Document Management**
- K18 - IAF for Vulnerable Children – Social Work/Education/NHS**
- K19 - Contract of Employment**
- K20 - IAF – extension**
- K21 - Accident Reporting in T&I**
- K22 - Council Tax to the contact centre**
- K23 - Roads to the Contact Centre**
- K24 - Facilities Management in E&R**
- K25 - Major Planning Applications**
- K26 - Communications in E&R**
- K27 - Home Care Annual Leave**
- K28 - Health & Safety Corporate Recording**
- K29 - Single Status Communication**
- K30 – Waste to the Contact Centre**
- K31 – Mobile Library Service**
- K32 – Home Care Referral to Provision (paperwork)**
- K33 – Cross Service Passenger Vehicle Utilisation**
- K34 – Joint Management Older Peoples Services**
- K35 – Commissioning Care at Home**
- K36 – Fostering Schemes**
- K38 – Corporate Plans**
- K39 – Criminal Justice Service User Feedback and Involvement**
- K40 – Internal Invoices**
- K41 – Software Testing**
- K42 – Public Toilet Maintenance**
- K43 – Petty Cash**
- K44 – Electricity Bill Management**
- K45 – Roads Stores**



- K46 – Maintaining the Corporate Gazetteer**
- K47 – Housing Voids**
- K48 – School Meal Tickets**
- K49 – Housing Repairs to the Contact Centre**
- K50 – Planning process – PPE**
- K51 - Audit of Accounts**
- K52 – Arcadia Phone Book**

Although the reader will not be fully informed about the nature to the projects from title alone, hopefully this list will give an indication as to the variety and diversity of projects.

Some focus on front line services to residents, whilst others relate to the internal customer. In the case of the latter the idea is that time is freed up to once again improve the customer experience. There is no doubt the Council has found some projects more difficult to measure than others. This is particularly true of projects which undertake to deliver something within a National agenda e.g. Criminal Justice Service User Feedback and Involvement. Nonetheless in all cases a way is found to measure that the project has made a difference.

Completed Kaizen projects typically report benefits in the following categories:

- **Performance Indicators** e.g. in responding to roads defects or selling council houses.
- **Staff time saved** e.g. 3 mins. of each form saved and there are 500 each week
- **External and Internal Customer Satisfaction** e.g. Foster Carers from other regions wishing to move their allegiance
- **Monetary Savings** e.g. the realisation that under the new arrangements one tractor on a depot will do saving approx. AUD125,000
- **Customer Delivery times** e.g. on Building Completion Certificates and Property Enquires
- **Staff Morale** e.g. comments such as “this is a better place to work now” “these days I look forward to coming to work” “we get things done as a team now”

However to measure and accurately evidence all the improvements derived from these projects would require an industry in itself.

The solution has been to conduct a series of structured interviews with those involved in each project, at the point when the goals are implemented and results are known.

The first question asked of the supporting manager is “Did the Kaizen address the critical business issue”. So far over 80% of completed projects tick this box.

## **RESULTS ACHIEVED**

Efficiency and financial savings as described above are important, but they are but are not the whole picture.

The Council’s Kaizen model delivers tangible added value because:

- It delivers measurable improvement in critical end-to-end business processes.
- Improvements in services are focused on customer needs.

- It departs from previous ‘management led’ initiatives by empowering frontline staff to develop solutions to problems and, in so doing, begins to change the culture.
- It involves multi-level, multi-functional teams of staff, thus breaking down barriers, developing relationships and allowing a share of best practice.
- It contributes significantly to the creation of a strong culture of learning and encourages creativity and risk-taking whilst stimulating challenge, innovation and change.
- Improvements are sustainable because they become embedded in operational procedures.
- It is cost effective – Kaizen solutions depend on ‘creativity, not capital investment’.
- Implementation is much faster than other approaches to change management.

A sample of results is shown below:

#### ICT for new employees

Hardware/software for new employees available on start date to allow them to be fully productive	
Pre Kaizen	Post Kaizen
33%	98%

#### Processing an application for planning consent

Time taken to get the application to the planner’s desk	
Pre Kaizen	Post Kaizen
Average 8 days	All under 3 days most in 1day

#### Regulation of building works

Response time for householder visit	
Pre Kaizen	Post Kaizen
61% (within 8days)	91% (within 6days)

#### Completion certificates sent to householder within 3 days

Pre Kaizen	Post Kaizen
70%	86%

#### Buying your home from the Council

Sales completed within the statutory period	
Pre Kaizen	Post Kaizen
47%	92%

#### Stock Control discrepancies in Housing Depots

Discrepancies on housing stock in depots	
Post Kaizen	
65% reduction	

## CONCLUSIONS

The experience of the Council has demonstrated that the Kaizen approach can be used in a public body and is not, as some believe, best suited to manufacturing environments. However the approach cannot be an “off the shelf” purchase and a commitment to develop a good organisational fit is key to success.

There will be huge gains if the whole programme can be aligned to the strategic priorities and having top management support is the most crucial critical success factor.

Organisations that choose to adopt this type of change need to be in it for the long term and see it as embarking upon a journey. After three years Aberdeenshire Council still considers itself to be in the early stages of that journey.

So far it has proved to be a very worthwhile endeavour and the Council look forward to what the future will bring by continuing to combine Kaizen with the talents of the workforce. .