

# Case Study: A Noble QUEST

While spending cuts dominate the headlines and police chiefs contemplate how to equip themselves for the future, it is tempting and dangerous to forget the importance of improving services. Operation QUEST has helped seventeen police forces and law enforcement organisations over the last 3 years to generate more than £100m per annum of operational efficiency savings, whilst simultaneously transforming the performance of frontline services. **James Brady**, who has been involved in the development of QUEST since its inception, explains how this ongoing programme is having a dramatic effect on staff and the delivery of services alike.

Operation QUEST was first introduced by the Home Office in 3 police forces during 2006, once the concept that business process re-engineering techniques could be successfully applied to frontline operational policing had been proven. Since then some 15 forces have been involved in the QUEST programme and it is anticipated that others will also become involved in the months and years to come.

The Home Office's pioneering work with Operation QUEST drew its inspiration from some of the most successful organisations in the UK and overseas, in which those bodies had set out to achieve a programme of continuous improvement based on systematic reform of 'nuts-and-bolts' processes. QUEST's strong focus on internal co-operation, with its implied reversal of traditional hierarchy and unremitting focus on quantified analysis and implementation of what works, is fairly uncharacteristic in large UK organisations generally, including in the public sector and in the Police Service.

By allowing officers and staff to work out (through the rigour of the best in process and change methodology) how they can best use their time,

and that of their colleagues, to make the biggest impact, QUEST has harnessed the power of the frontline to deliver public sector reform. The Chief Constable of a large force says:

*"One of the most profound outcomes...has been the personal and professional development of the staff from the Force in delivering QUEST. ...[The team has] been careful to understand and fit with our values and have been mentors to the representatives of the customer. I expect QUEST to make a significant difference to our business processes but the real legacy is in the learning of the people who have been involved."*

QUEST incorporates a rapid upfront diagnostic to quickly identify priority areas in terms of performance and cost to focus on the larger organisational opportunities. The approach uses detailed cost modelling and frontline demand analysis to develop robust business cases that clearly articulate the scale of benefit, both in terms of cost saving and productivity. Robert Arnott, sponsor of the work, and Head of Value for Money at the Home Office, comments:

*"QUEST takes the simple concepts of rigour and vigour and applies them to the management of day-to-day tasks. We have seen profound results where a focus on what matters and delivers positive outcome is understood and prioritised".*

Programme performance is managed at force level as that is where ownership lies. During the course of a force engagement with QUEST, the programme works to develop the benefits management frameworks and supporting infrastructure. Forces report performance and benefits to the Home Office, while the department, in turn, provides benefits management oversight and post-implementation assurance to help secure sustainability.

## QUEST Around the UK

Operation QUEST is a national programme. However, each project demonstrates a local priority or focus linking into the strategic objectives of the organisation. The thread that joins them is sustainable improvements in

capability and performance. Suffolk Constabulary has now sustained substantially better customer service for over two years. Sussex police officers, who joined the work in 2007, have acquired the skills and applied it to a range of policing activities, so that the QUEST-way is impacting simultaneously on custody waiting times, the time in attending scenes and the quality of victim care.

West Yorkshire police have significantly reduced the time in investigating a crime, reinvesting that capacity into problem-solving neighbourhood policing and serving the needs of the vulnerable, while also reducing predictable demand on the service. These solutions centred on improving the standard of initial investigation with frontline officers and on simplifying and managing the investigation process more effectively, focusing precious investigative time on productive investigative tasks and on crimes with clear 'solvability'. The project has resulted in reducing the average time to investigate low-level crime by 85%.

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has initiated its vulnerable people workstream, introducing a broad-ranging training package for staff and rigorous performance management. The Force has also worked to implement incident and crime management changes that can be rolled out across 12 divisions. Kevin Mulligan, a Chief Superintendent in GMP, says:

*"QUEST...has lifted the mist around a whole range of previously intractable management and resourcing decisions. The bottom line is that, thanks to the work of Salford Division and QUEST, the service we provide to our community has greatly improved".*

## Quiet revolutions

QUEST takes officers and staff with a variety of different skills and experiences and shows them how to effect 'quiet revolutions'. Officers learn how to draw on 'canteen culture' – the idea that casual conversations can be used to spread the word - to persuade and influence. They sell the benefits of productivity, value for money and culture change to their peers and then feel honour and obligation to deliver a better service for their colleagues and

service users. QUEST also re-ignites the role of leaders as listeners and facilitators. Senior management must take responsibility for fostering the adoption of an organisational culture in which working level staff are expected constantly to identify new ideas for improvement, while line managers are expected to embrace and progress those ideas and realise measurable benefits.

This is the keystone to QUEST's success; it is built on the premise that frontline staff know what stands in the way of their doing the best possible job. Katherine Govier, Assistant Chief Constable in Bedfordshire was struck by the empowering nature of the work:

*"I am delighted with the response of officers...it's allowing them to use their discretion to resolve issues and will increase victim satisfaction and public confidence".*

This element of the work is supported by a relentless focus on building skills. Long-term sustainability rests on an organisation's ability to replicate improvement itself. To help build this capacity QUEST incorporates:

- (i) individual coaching and skills development through supported, hands-on learning;
- (ii) the establishment of robust benefits management regimes,
- (iii) development of the supporting mechanisms and processes required to implement and manage new projects.

### **QUEST Moving Forward**

The success of QUEST points the way for other public sector organisations to follow and we are developing the programme further to support forces in a flexible manner.

The emphasis, however, will remain on local ownership and not national mandation.

The revolutionary programme challenges traditional practices and this is something David Crompton, ACPO lead for Continuous Improvement and a Deputy Chief Constable, believes can have dramatic effects on the organisation.

He concludes by describing the culture that sweeps through the organisation:

*"when the force first used QUEST, there was mystery amongst divisional commanders. Positive results filtered back. A demand was created. Eventually there was a bidding war. Everyone wanted to be the next to implement it".*

James Brady joined the Home Office in 2004 and has worked predominantly on improving policing efficiency. For the last three years he has worked to embed QUEST across the Police Service and has also worked with colleagues in the Treasury and Cabinet Office to deliver a cross-public sector strategy on continuous improvement.

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