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CEO FOCUS -
 NOELENE DUFF

BUILDING BEST
 VALUE WITH
 CUSTOMER SERVICE

BEST VALUE GUIDE
 RELEASED

CEO FOCUS: NOELENE DUFF

In this latest of our series focusing on Chief Executives, Noelene Duff, City of Whitehorse CEO, talks about the importance of customer service in local government.

One of the most important things a local government can do is embed a strong customer service

we also saw some benefits we were not expecting. As the process developed we saw growing ownership by staff, we saw teamwork

culture within its organisation. People are always moving around in the local government sector, so it really helps if there is a strongly embedded customer service culture to ensure teams remain focused, despite changing membership.

Here at Whitehorse we felt we were starting to slide a little, because we were seeing a slow decline in community survey ratings in some areas. It wasn't a big decline, but there was a perception that some areas dealing with large numbers of transactions were not responsive enough to telephone calls and correspondence, or were not following up quickly enough. At the same time, we thought we weren't recognising our good performers enough. We discussed this in the Executive group and decided we could not allow this to continue. The General Managers, especially Terry Wilkinson, assisted by Tony De Fazio, Civic Services Manager, led the effort to formulate a program tailored to our needs. We didn't want something off the shelf, we wanted to shape it to suit us.

We have now run through two cycles of improvement project work and we can see the results in the latest surveys, which are trending up again. Along the way we learned some important lessons about what works for us and



developing and people getting more involved across the organisation, breaking down the 'silo' effect. It is a front-line, hands-on people-driven program – not the latest program coming down from management. Our people took on its leadership and became mentors to other groups picking up and participating in the exercise, so we have our own people leading it. We have tried to create continuity and ownership through the organisation.

Being empowered to examine and change our service delivery "tools of trade", for example the way we handle correspondence or the way we manage things, now goes down deeper into the organisation. It means we can

sustain the change and embed it much deeper into the culture.

These exercises give people 'permission' to advance ideas and views on how to do things better – and everyone usually has lots of good ideas. That's my experience of implementing change – it is not about me going around talking to groups of staff, its about staff getting the means to bring about change in their own workplace.

For more on the Whitehorse approach to customer service, see page 2.