

Adapting the PMDU Model

The creation of a delivery
unit by Haringey Council,
London: a case study

Zina Etheridge and Peter Thomas



*Inside*OUT

*A series of personal perspectives
on government effectiveness*

INSTITUTE
FOR
GOVERNMENT

12

Foreword

The delivery unit model has been one of the most interesting, and influential, initiatives of the past 15 years in trying to improve public services, not only in the UK but also internationally. While it has been applied at [a state and local level in the USA](#), Haringey Council in north London was the first local authority to create its own version of this model in 2013 in its Corporate Delivery Unit.

This case study is a fascinating account of the adaptation of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit model by two authors with extensive experience at both national and the local levels. Peter Thomas, one of the co-authors and a Senior Fellow of the Institute for Government, was interim head of the PMDU and has written about [its operations and impact](#) for the Institute. And Zina Etheridge, the council's deputy chief executive, has also worked at a senior level in Whitehall.

The authors go through the steps needed to set up a successful delivery unit, comparing the PMDU approach as pioneered by Sir Michael Barber, with that taken in Haringey. There are clear lessons about focus, wider capability and the need for a broad coalition and open-minded leadership to embed delivery.

This InsideOUT should be read not only by local council executives seeking to improve their performance but also by national politicians and officials grappling with the perennial problems of public service reform.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PJR Riddell" followed by a horizontal line and two dots.

Peter Riddell

Director, Institute for Government

Contents

Executive summary	1
1. Introduction	4
2. Why copy the PMDU?	5
3. The Haringey delivery challenge	8
4. Creating a delivery unit.....	10
5. Is CDU succeeding?.....	31
6. Adapting the PMDU model: some lessons.....	40
7. What next for Haringey and the CDU?	45
Bibliography	47

About the authors

Zina Etheridge is Deputy Chief Executive of Haringey Council, having joined as Director of Strategy and Performance in February 2013. Previously she held a range of senior roles in the Civil Service: Director of Strategy and Change at the Home Office; Executive Director, Civil Service Reform in the Cabinet Office; and Director of Strategy and Communications at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. She spent two and a half years from 2009 at Barnet Council as Assistant Chief Executive. She was private secretary to cabinet secretaries Lords Turnbull and O'Donnell, holding the brief for delivery, reform and capability – during the heyday of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and O'Donnell's Capability Review programme.

Peter Thomas is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government, where he leads the Institute's research on civil service reform, on which he has published numerous reports. He directed the Institute's research on *Civil Service Capabilities* in 2013. He is co-author of the recent research reports *Civil Service Reform in the Real World* and *Leading Change in the Civil Service*. Away from the Institute he is an expert adviser to governments and public service organisations on delivery, capability, performance and reform. He also works with boards, management and teams to help them develop their strategy, business model and capability. Before joining the Institute in 2011, Peter was Director of Strategy and Change at the Ministry of Justice. Previously, he developed and ran the Capability Review programme in the Cabinet Office and was interim Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Earlier in his career he ran public sector research programmes at the Audit Commission and was a senior leader in local government.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Haringey's members and staff for their openness in sharing their views and the time they spent reflecting on emerging findings.

Early drafts of the report benefited greatly from the critical review provided by Marc Kidson, Nehal Pancharia and Jen Gold of the Institute for Government.

We are very grateful to Marlon Bruce of the Delivery Unit, who co-ordinated and supported the external evaluation of CDU, on which this report draws heavily.

Thanks are also due to Sir Ian Magee and Tom Gash for their quality assurance of the report, and to Andrew Murphy for his patient and careful production of the final report.

Our account of how PMDU works draws heavily on IfG research into successful reform, the role of the centre, and policy implementation, and also on Sir Michael Barber's various books. This research is augmented by the experience of one of the authors as a member of PMDU and interim head of the unit after Barber left in 2005.

A list of sources can be found in the bibliography.

Of course, any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

Executive summary

In 2001 the Blair government created the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) in response to frustration at the failure of government departments to turn policy intentions in key areas into sustainable delivery of outcomes. The PMDU model has been much copied and adapted internationally at all levels of government.

In 2013 Haringey Council in north London became the first local authority to create its own version of the PMDU model. This report aims to draw out the lessons in adapting this model for local government, based on an evaluation conducted in autumn 2014. It will have relevance for other local authorities in the UK and internationally, as well as those seeking to create a delivery unit at other levels of government. The report is designed to enable anyone interested in models of improvement to understand Haringey's experience, as well as to provide guidance for those considering a similar innovation.

Haringey is a borough in north London of around 250,000 residents. It has all of the challenges associated with an inner-city borough – substantial diversity, poverty and poor outcomes across a range of areas. It also has substantial strengths and opportunities. The council is 18 months into a transformation programme with the aim, in the words of its leader, 'of changing Haringey and life chances, the local economy, changing the place in its fullest sense'. In 2013, although some good outcomes were being delivered, it lacked the capacity to deal with the challenges posed by the financial situation, the legacy of recent service failures and the scale of the improvement required in performance. The council decided to set up a corporate delivery unit deliberately modelled on the PMDU.

The full case study goes through each of the 11 elements required to set up a successful delivery unit, comparing the PMDU approach with that taken in Haringey.

Establishing a small team focused on performance

1. Making the case for a delivery unit.
2. Establishing the delivery priorities.
3. Designing the operating model.
4. Establishing, staffing and training the delivery unit.

Gathering performance data to set targets and trajectories

5. Engaging and communicating with leaders of delivery priorities.
6. Clarifying ambition, success and measures.
7. Developing and assessing delivery plans and delivery trajectories.

Having routines to drive and ensure focus on performance

8. Reporting updates on delivery.
9. Carrying out delivery stocktakes.
10. Carrying out priority reviews to solve delivery problems.
11. Engaging with delivery priority leaders.

2 InsideOUT

Haringey's creation of a corporate delivery unit (CDU) has been remarkably successful in a short time. An external evaluation of the unit was carried out by one of the authors of this report, Peter Thomas. It found that the delivery unit model has proved highly effective when adapted for a local government. It has provided a sharp and rapid focus on priority areas and been a driving force for the overall transformation of the council.

- Council officers see CDU as effective and successful. It has assured the chief executive, the leader and other stretched senior leaders that someone is focusing on key issues. There is now widespread awareness of success stories and progress on delivery against targets in planning applications and safeguarding children.
- The CDU has exposed problems of capacity and lack of strategy, ambition or operational grip in some areas. This has led to staff moving on or out.
- Staff providing council services see the CDU as adding value, bringing much-needed capacity and capability. The unit's ability to ask more strategic questions, and to produce data analysis and trajectories, is highly valued for the insight and compelling picture of performance it provides.
- Priority and other reviews are highly regarded, particularly by middle managers given the opportunity to be involved. Some reviews have reframed unproductive debates and moved discussions on. Design reviews and priority reviews have exposed major capability and strategy issues.

Assessed against a framework of PMDU success factors the CDU does very well. The way it works, its tools, the quality and diversity of the team would be recognisable to anyone who worked in Sir Michael Barber's PMDU. The technical quality of work on delivery plan assessments, priority reviews and trajectories is as good as the best of PMDU. The skills, mindset and credibility of the CDU staff are excellent.

The CDU has identified three areas where it is taking action to address some weaknesses identified by the external evaluation:

- Engagement with politicians – the CDU was designed explicitly to support the chief executive and council leader. It has not taken sufficient account of the role of other cabinet members. This is being addressed in two ways. Cabinet members are now closely involved in delivery reporting. Performance 'deep dives', chaired by the deputy chief executive and involving the relevant cabinet member, have also been set up.
- Lack of organisational capability – in some cases even where the CDU, with a council service, has produced a recipe for improvement a lack of leadership capability within the service has meant little progress has been made. In these cases it has sometimes been hard for the CDU to withdraw from intensive work, or for it to demonstrate that it can drive real improvement. However, it has been an effective way of laying bare those capability problems so that they can be resolved.
- Accountability – the CDU has periodically been drawn into explaining a service area's performance for it. This has risked weakening accountability, though on some occasions this has been difficult to avoid given the lack of leadership capability in the area in question.

To transplant a reform from one institution to another is risky. But Haringey has shown that it can be done by adapting the PMDU model successfully.

We have identified some important lessons for others adopting the PMDU model:

- Know the context of the reform you are adapting, and how it differs from your own context.
- Team diversity and ways of working really matter and are hard to create.

- Resist distractions and stick with delivery.
- Pay attention to wider capability; you may need to pause and fix it.
- You need a broad coalition and open-minded leadership if you want to embed delivery.

We are grateful to Haringey's leaders for their willingness to let us tell their full story – the difficulties they face as well as their strengths and successes. To date, the unit has been highly effective in delivering its objectives, and with a small number of adaptations it will continue to be so.

1. Introduction

This is our case study of Haringey's adaptation of the PMDU model. It tells two stories.

- First, it looks at how a successful central government reform has been adopted at the heart of an ambitious transformation programme in local government, acting both as a catalyst for improvement in key services and as a practical symbol of the new, ambitious 'Haringey way' of working.
- Second, it illustrates the choices and challenges involved in adapting the PMDU model for a different setting. We provide insights that will help others in local public service in the UK as much as those overseas who admire and want to adapt the model in the centre of their council or government.

While we have sought to write this case study as objectively as possible, we both have multiple interests in the delivery story past and present. Zina Etheridge is the proposer of, and senior leader accountable for, the introduction of the CDU in Haringey; Peter Thomas was the former interim head of the PMDU following Sir Michael Barber's departure and carried out the external evaluation of the first 18 months of the CDU's life.

We have tried to tell the story honestly and openly because we want others to learn from our experience and avoid some of the complications we encountered. We believe that the PMDU model works very well in local public service. It has the potential to have a wider, more sustainable impact than it did in central government.

We are grateful to Haringey's leaders for their willingness to let us tell the full story – the difficulties as well as the strengths and successes. Like many London councils, Haringey's history is complex. Its leaders acknowledge they are only partway towards their aim of transforming both the council and Haringey itself, as a place to live a successful life.

2. Why copy the PMDU?

The UK is one of the most enthusiastic reformers of public services worldwide. Of the many reforms in the UK Civil Service over the past 40 years, the PMDU has been the model of choice for politicians, officials, advisers and institutions in many other countries as they wrestle with the seemingly universal challenge facing governments – how to ‘grip delivery’.¹ This owes as much to the advocacy of Sir Michael Barber and Tony Blair as it does to the demonstrable effectiveness and impact of their original PMDU.

The initial reform on to which PMDU was grafted was the introduction of public service agreements (PSAs) by Gordon Brown in the early years of the first Blair government. PSAs had simple aims. They were: to define clear, long-term, outcome-focused goals; to provide ambition and a sense of direction; and to represent a contract between the public and government, adding a degree of accountability and transparency rarely seen before.

The early implementation of PSAs in 1998 was characterised by weak political leadership and virtually no operating model. However, the PSA regime was revitalised by the Prime Minister’s impulse to grab hold of the public services agenda after the 2001 election. The creation of his delivery unit by Barber and Jeremy Heywood accelerated the drive to change the course of delivery in four departments to meet 17 ‘priority’ PSA targets. Prime ministerial support was integral to the operating model, governance and incentives. There was some initial resistance from officials, but Barber, head of the PMDU, had the credibility and leverage to persuade departments to accept the importance of delivery. He carefully secured the support of the Treasury. The core approach was highly effective when focused on a limited number of priorities with sustained prime ministerial interest.² This strong operating model drew on a well-resourced, diverse team and a collaborative style of working.

The PMDU was formally integrated into the Treasury in 2007, accompanied by a highly ambitious move to cross-cutting PSAs, whose outcomes cut across a number of departments and ministers. Even with substantial investment in new, cross-departmental governance arrangements, these PSAs made inevitably variable progress as they came up against the federal nature of the Civil Service at the fractious end of a third Labour government.

Along with PSAs, the PMDU was abolished in 2010 by the Coalition, who wrongly saw them as a symbol of Blair’s ‘command and control’ system of government. The recent re-emergence of much of the approach and tools of the PMDU in the guise of the revamped Implementation Unit suggests that many saw this as a mistake.³

The performance management machinery of PSAs and the PMDU was greatly valued by many of the officials and ministers who worked with it.⁴ PSAs offered a framework for setting long-term priorities and aligning organisational resources behind them. As one official explained, it was clear that the government cared about certain issues such as health waiting times or school standards, which meant that, even if ministers came and went, the department nonetheless continued to know where to focus attention and resources. Essentially, the PSA machinery provided a ‘guiding star to the policy direction

¹ Gold, J., *International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation*, Institute for Government and Mowat Centre, October 2014, p. 15.

² Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World: Patterns of success in UK civil service reform*, Institute for Government, 2014, pp. 48-50.

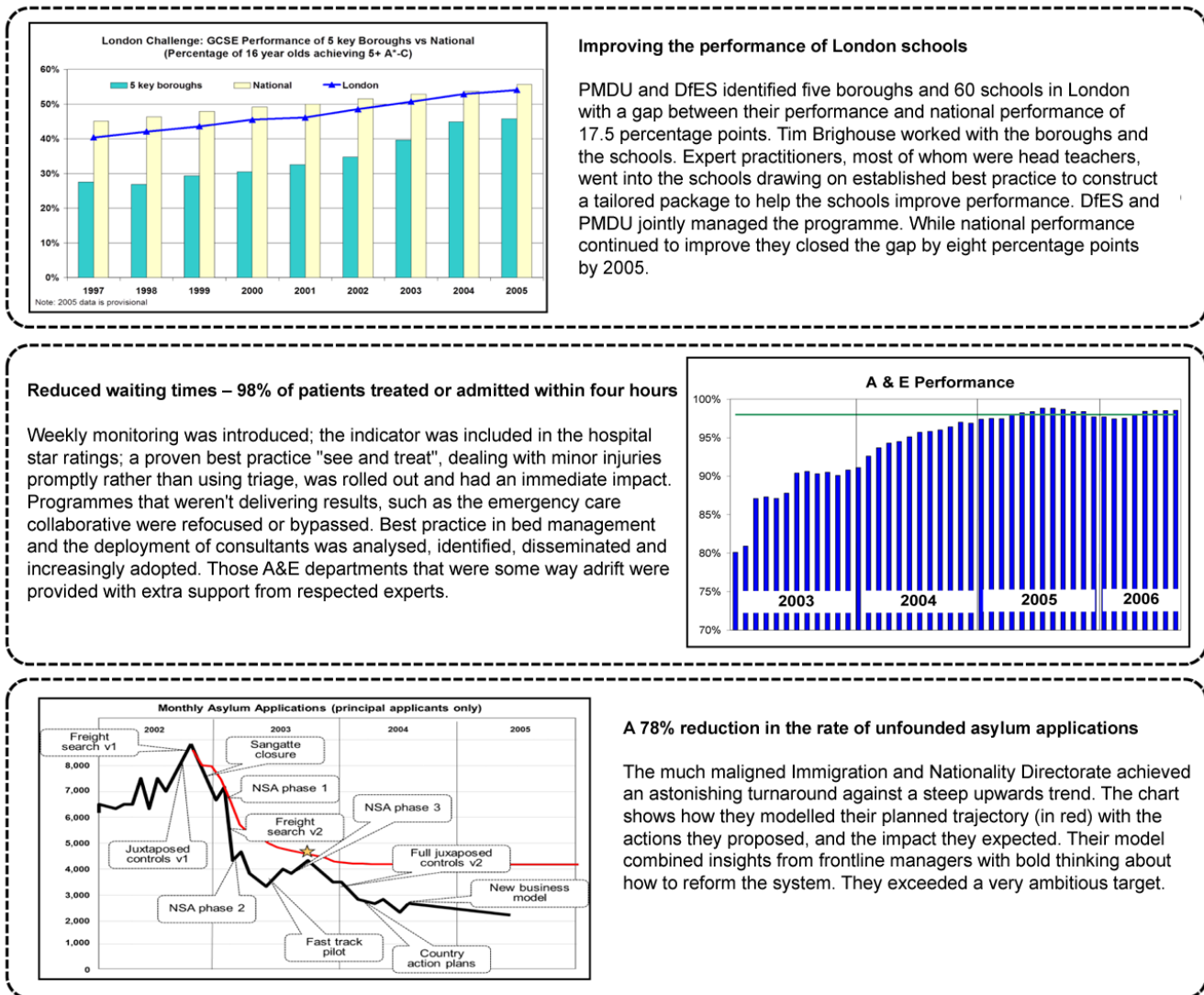
³ Harris, J., Rutter, J., *Centre Forward: Effective Support for the Prime Minister at the Centre of Government*, Institute for Government, July 2014, p. 66.

⁴ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *op. cit.*

of the whole government'.⁵ In those areas where the PMDU focused sustained attention there is a strong legacy of departmental delivery success stories, some of which have been sustained long beyond the decline of the reforms (see Figure 1).

However a reform's success cannot simply be judged in the moment by progress of specific priorities. The ultimate test for successful reform is whether it has changed the capability of the institution.

Figure 1. PMDU delivery successes



Source: Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World*, Institute for Government, 2014.

Eleven years on, the PMDU approach has transformed the accountability of civil servants and ministers for delivery.

[The PMDU] just changed the entire game ... on accountability and responsibility. It fundamentally said: 'You as ministers, and you as civil servants, are responsible for delivery. It is not enough any more to just launch the policy and think, that's the job done.' And that, in a sense, sounds so obvious, but you remember, back then, that just wasn't people's mentality, so I think you cannot underestimate that. (Permanent secretary)

Every perm sec knows that delivery is a massive chunk of what their job is about now. And that just wasn't the case 15 years ago. (Permanent secretary)

⁵ Ibid.

The PMDU reform embedded a set of ‘positive routines’. Some departments put PSAs at the core of their board reporting system, which increasingly focused on the delivery of long-term outcomes regardless of political cycles and day-to-day priorities.⁶ Many of the measures and reporting formats live on in the departments’ own internal performance management systems.

[PSAs and the PMDU] was a great step forward in clarifying what departments were for, and beginning to measure that in some systematic way ... It allowed me in managing the department to assess a sort of balanced scorecard and so on and so forth against some clear objectives ... It gave me a ... starting point for outcome-based management, and it helped me make sure that in the thick of handling events, making statements, launching initiatives, we didn’t lose sight of the fact there was a longer-term purpose here. (Permanent secretary)

The UK has been successful in developing a fairly comprehensive performance and evaluation system that embraces everything from central government ministries down to frontline services ... The system has become increasingly outcomes-focused ... This system has contributed to substantial improvements in actual performance in a wide range of policy areas ... like health, education and criminal justice. Improvements in service delivery have been most marked.⁷

And many policymakers continue to use some PMDU tools. The Coalition’s Implementation Unit is carefully adopting and relearning the key tools and routines of Barber’s PMDU, less than five years after the delivery unit was abolished by the Coalition as one its first acts in government.

The legacy is partly the tools inside the organisations. The word ‘trajectory’ is still used ... I think that evidence-based policy ... actually showing you can deliver ... that culture has changed right across the four departments [the PMDU worked with] ... The other legacy is some of the people that are now around the system and champion it ... [The models are] simple and they work. I think there’s a legacy of just, ‘This is how you do performance management properly, but you need to want to do it.’ If you don’t, then you’re not going to manage. (Senior civil servant)

That discipline [PMDU tools and processes] was something that departments came to understand, to know how to do and understand and actually value, and I think that probably spilt out into other parts of those departments’ agenda. (Senior civil servant)

Adopting and adapting the PMDU model

To transplant a reform from one institution to another is a risky business. The transplant will thrive only on the basis of a sound understanding of the context and design of whichever incarnation of PMDU is being adapted – alongside a strong appreciation of the local context and setting in which the PMDU model is being deployed.

Haringey is the first council in the UK to adopt the PMDU model. Our case study looks in depth at the choices and changes made as it adapted the PMDU to fit its ambition and context (Chapter 4). It goes on to look at the early impact of the unit (Chapter 5) and highlights the opportunities and potential pitfalls for those adopting the model. In Chapter 6 we draw out some lessons from Haringey and elsewhere with a view to helping those copying the PMDU model. Finally, Chapter 7 looks at the areas for action being developed to build on the CDU’s initial success and to address the issues raised in this case study, and the external evaluation that underpins it.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Talbot, C., *Performance in Government: The Evolving System of Performance and Evaluation Measurement, Monitoring and Management in the United Kingdom*, ECD Working Papers, no. 24, World Bank International Evaluation Group, 2010, p. ix.

3. The Haringey delivery challenge

A large borough with 256,000 residents in the north of London, Haringey is often described as an outer London borough with inner London challenges. For any council it is a time of remarkable challenges. London local government is facing a 60% real terms reduction in core funding between 2010-11 and 2018-19.⁸

For Haringey that means saving a further £70m from 2015 to 2018 (about a quarter of what remains of its current budget) on top of the £117m that it has saved since 2010.⁹ As well as acute financial pressures, Haringey carries additional burdens: a reputation battered by traumatic events in recent years – from tragic child protection failures to riots in Tottenham in 2011. More recently, in 2012, it was labelled the worst planning authority in England by Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and threatened with special measures.¹⁰

Haringey is now 18 months into a major transformation programme, having recruited a new chief executive, Nick Walkley, in 2012 to lead it. But this transformation is about much more than dealing with financial pressures or tackling underperforming services. As the Leader of the Council, Councillor Claire Kober, puts it:

The job of the council is not just the delivery of basic services to a mediocre or a good standard – what we are about is changing Haringey and life chances, the local economy, changing the place in its fullest sense.

Many staff are positive about the change in ambition, are eager to be led, and want to learn how to work and succeed in the new world. They hear clear and consistent messages from senior leaders about the change.

You either go with this approach, or leave – [the chief executive] is black or white about it – you are either coming on this journey or you aren't. There is no mid-ground at the moment ... [new senior leaders] have created this environment at the highest level, which constantly feeds messages about the state of play.
(Priority leader)

There are already some achievements and opportunities that provide a positive story about Haringey's capacity to change and improve:

- the most improved borough in the country for GCSE results since 2010
- improvements in street cleanliness and recycling rates
- much quicker processing of major planning applications, up from 17% to 100% within the target time
- bringing in an extra £1 billion of investment through regeneration over the next three years.

But Haringey's past, its culture, its capability and the impact of sustained cost reductions provide significant barriers to successful transformation. Performance management is variable and very weak in some areas. Some managers and senior staff do not take responsibility for performance – and lack good management and performance routines.

⁸ Haringey Council, Medium Term Financial Strategy, 2015-18.

⁹ Haringey Council, Draft Corporate Plan, 2015-18, December 2014.

¹⁰ *Planning Resource*, 16 November 2012.

People would rather tell you why they can't do something than come up with a solution – the team is just not responsive ... Leaders quite struggle to shift their mindset to them being responsible for doing stuff. (Priority leader)

[Some] people have been here a long time and don't know anything else. [They] just compare how things were before – [and say,] 'Things aren't much different from before, that's OK, so why change?' (Service manager)

And some crucial corporate functions, structures and systems are underdeveloped. Newer leaders at the top are hugely stretched and overloaded with multiple problems, including staff shortages and efforts to develop savings options.

4. Creating a delivery unit

Sir Michael Barber describes three key components of the PMDU approach, with a fourth strand that runs throughout:

- establishing a small team focused on performance
- gathering performance data to set targets and trajectories
- having routines to drive and ensure focus on performance.

Through each of these components runs a critical thread: relationship building ... senior leaders [must] first think through the way relationships are built – among an organisation's top leaders and those responsible for delivery, as well as among the delivery staff and line staff responsible for implementation.¹¹

We have added to this and broken parts of it down into 11 elements or stages of creating a delivery unit. Some overlap or run in parallel:

Establishing a small team focused on performance

1. Making the case for a delivery unit.
2. Establishing the delivery priorities.
3. Designing the operating model.
4. Establishing, staffing and training the delivery unit.

Gathering performance data to set targets and trajectories

5. Engaging and communicating with leaders of delivery priorities.
6. Clarifying ambition, success and measures.
7. Developing and assessing delivery plans and delivery trajectories.

Having routines to drive and ensure focus on performance

8. Regular reporting and updates on delivery.
9. Delivery stocktakes.
10. Carrying out priority reviews to solve delivery problems.
11. Continuous engagement with delivery priority leaders.

This chapter goes through each component. For each we outline how it worked in Barber's PMDU, and then how Haringey adapted it.

1. Making the case for a delivery unit

The genesis of the PMDU was Tony Blair's frustration with the lack of progress made during his first term. He wanted to use his second term to push through radical public service reform – and he wanted to be able to demonstrate that his government had achieved something. He was determined to seize the areas that were traditionally seen to be Conservative territory, such as reducing crime and enforcing law

¹¹ Barber, M., Kihn, P., and Moffit, A., *Deliverology: from idea to implementation*. McKinsey & Company, 2011, p. 33.

and order. Labour's 2001 election manifesto commitments therefore focused on improving public services in four key areas: education, health, crime and transport.¹²

The Civil Service responded to these frustrations in the run-up to the 2001 election. Barber, then head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the Department for Education (DfE), worked with the most senior official in No. 10, Jeremy Heywood (then principal private secretary to Blair), to develop an approach that applied the success of the DfE model to other top priorities for government, but within the slow-evolving PSA machinery.¹³ Immediately after the election, in June 2001, the PMDU was created in the Cabinet Office, headed by Barber, to provide support and scrutiny on a selection of the government's high-priority PSAs. These broadly related to the 2001 manifesto commitments, and Ed Balls, then chief economic adviser to the Treasury, helped negotiate the 'alignment' between them.¹⁴

Haringey

Zina Etheridge joined Haringey as interim director of strategy and performance shortly after Nick Walkley was appointed chief executive. They both quickly encountered the frustration of many leading councillors with the slow pace of improvement and the seemingly regular, very public and unwelcome, service failures. The chief executive felt that too many parts of the council had retreated into a defensive bunker, unwilling to take responsibility for sorting out problems, paralysed by the huge cuts under way. Previous corporate planning and performance systems were in disarray, and the central teams that supported them were generally understaffed and lacking either a model or the capability to turn things around. Corporately "it was a devastated landscape".

During her time as private secretary to the Cabinet Secretary, Gus O'Donnell, covering the portfolio of delivery, capability and civil service reform, Etheridge had seen at first hand how the PMDU operated and the mix of factors that were crucial to its success, its later decline and abolition. She felt that the Barber-era delivery unit was a powerful model to use to create a small, central team that would help give the leader and chief executive confidence that delivery of key services was being achieved.

It proved remarkably quick to make and agree a case for the introduction of a PMDU-style delivery unit in Haringey. Having received initial support from the chief executive, she produced a short note for the leader of the council, setting out how the creation of small team at the centre could help senior leaders improve their grip on the organisation. The note went to the leader on a Friday and was agreed in principle the following Monday.

Her rationale for the unit chimed with the transformation that the leader and chief executive had already started, and addressed the frustrations both were experiencing with service problems, and the pace and progress of change.

...what we are about is changing Haringey [the place] ... [we] can't do that if we can't process planning applications or assess children in time. *(Council leader)*

[I] need a set of devices that get a grip so that I would make promises that I think I can keep – better analysis and diagnostic of what the issues are, different lenses to see the organisation through and diagnose its wider problems. *(Chief executive)*

Etheridge proposed three objectives for the corporate delivery unit (CDU):

1. To help the organisation focus on priorities
2. To challenge and support to priority services
3. To build Haringey's capability to address future challenges.

¹² Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op.cit., p. 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver: Fighting to transform Britain's public services*, Methuen Publishing, 2008, p. 56.

The third objective, to build the capability of Haringey, makes this a much wider organisational intervention than the PMDU ever sought to be in government. The PMDU had a sporadic interest in capability and then only in respect of specific priorities.

To a considerable extent both the leader and chief executive were taking the proposition on trust. It was not entirely clear to them how it would work, or how CDU would be more effective than other corporate functions that had not really had the right impact. The unit was given 18 months to prove itself, with no commitment by the council beyond that.

2. Agreeing the delivery priorities

A non-negotiable prerequisite for any delivery unit is absolute clarity about the priorities it will work on. The organisation needs to know these priorities will have the attention of the most senior leaders for the foreseeable future. In PMDU these were a sub-set of the PSAs that had already been set out by the Treasury. The Prime Minister picked public service priorities that chimed most closely with areas he saw as being of greatest concern to citizens. These in turn were often close to the 1997 election campaign promises made in Labour's election pledge card, which helped ensure they were recognised and accepted by most ministers.¹⁵

This ownership and continuity were crucial factors in PMDU's success. The PSA priorities provided a 'guiding star to the policy direction of the whole government' that survived the departure of ministers and secretaries of state. Without this clarity, delivery units quickly default to a standard central performance management team struggling to drag updates and data out of a reluctant organisation.¹⁶

The aim was to fundamentally change the course of delivery in four key departments – the Home Office, Department for Health, Department for Education and Department for Transport – to meet the government's priority objectives across 17 PSAs.

A common story from those creating delivery units overseas is how difficult it is to get a clear mandate from political and official leaders on the most important delivery priorities – let alone persuade them to spend their time and personal capital by following through on those priorities.

Haringey

The rationale for the priorities the CDU unit focused on was not contentious. It was a pragmatic mix of problems that needed solving and services that really mattered to politicians.

Because the council's corporate planning system was largely in disrepair by mid-2013 there was no alternative route for picking the priorities for CDU. Nonetheless while officials accepted the list, they were unsure about the process, and for some councillors it was not clear why some priorities were in, and others not.

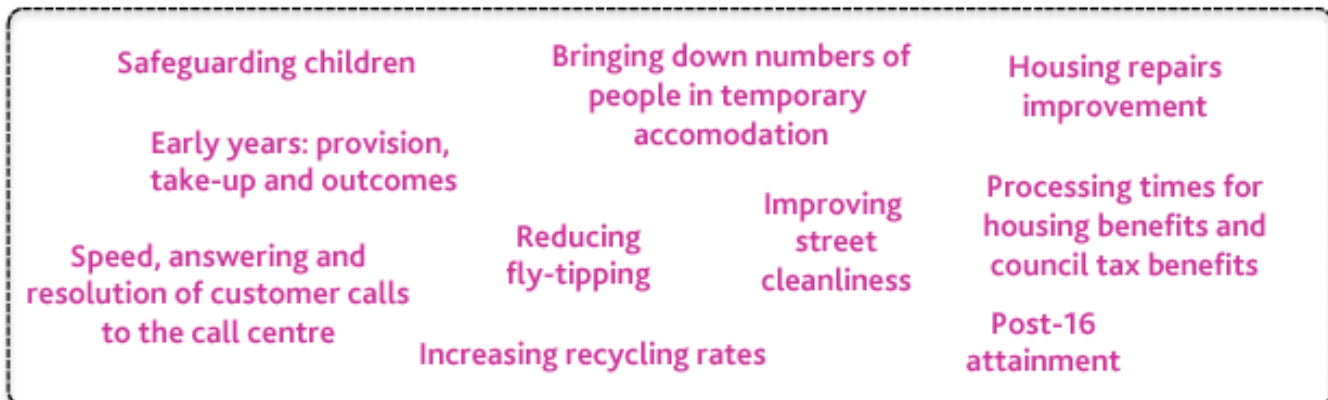
The priorities had very different characteristics. Some were expressed as explicit targets to improve performance – for example, to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation to 2,800 by April 2014 – while others set a direction of travel without a target. A few priority areas started out more as key questions that needed to be answered before specific outcomes or delivery plans could be considered – for example, early years provision, or the challenge to set goals for recycling in the borough beyond delivery of the existing target.

¹⁵ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op. cit.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Figure 2. Delivery priorities for Haringey

The leader and the chief executive agreed 10 priority areas.



Source: Evaluation fieldwork.

Since mid-2014 there has been a major effort to create a corporate plan for 2015-18 with the explicit intention that it will provide the menu of priorities for CDU to work on in the future. This effort has produced a much more developed and widely owned set of outcomes, descriptions and measures than was the case for the initial 10 priority areas.

3. Designing the operating model

There are some essential components of the PMDU approach that all adaptations of the model require. Barber summarises these very well in the form of five questions that you keep on asking.

Figure 3. Five key questions that shaped the work of PMDU

PMDU asked five questions, repeatedly and persistently, until it received satisfactory answers.

Question 1: What are you trying to do? [defining success, measures, targets]

We asked this question to establish clear priorities and ensure that each priority was paired with a clear definition of success. Our goals were intentionally ambitious. We called them “targets,” a word that became controversial. The word is unimportant—what matters is the clear, measurable definition of success.

Question 2: How are you trying to do it? [creating and challenging delivery plans and trajectories]

Once the targets were agreed upon, we asked the relevant departments to prepare delivery plans setting out how they intended to meet the targets. This alone was a revolutionary act; white papers, beautifully written and then shelved, were then the norm. We wanted real, coffee-stained plans that drove action. Above all, we wanted a trajectory. How would they measure progress over the period of time that would elapse between setting the target and hitting it? This simple request required officials to think systematically about the link between proposed actions and their impact. Of course, even the best planned trajectories don’t always turn out to be right. They do allow progress to be monitored. And when reality deviates from the prediction, they enable lessons to be learned.

Question 3: How, at any given moment, will you know you are on track? [establishing regular delivery reporting and stocktakes]

Crucially, we established routine ways to monitor progress. We insisted on regular data collection so that officials knew whether progress was being made in close to real time. People often say that this sort of ongoing performance evaluation is not too difficult. This is never true. We introduced quarterly monitoring meetings, which we called “stocktakes,” between the relevant ministers and Blair, advised by my team and me. In each stocktake, we examined the data, had an honest conversation, and made decisions, which again was revolutionary. Most governments spend their time running to catch up with crises and events. These routines changed all that. They put data rather than spasm at the heart of decision making.

Question 4: If you are not on track, what are you going to do about it? [carrying out problem solving priority reviews and design reviews]

Once you have proper routines in place and working, problems are identified before they become crises. In my experience, problems can always be solved. Some problems are relatively simple to fix; others are much harder. For the latter, what matters is that you try something—and if that doesn't work, try something else, and keep trying until you get a result. When there is a problem, the first instinct in government (encouraged by the media) is too often to allocate blame rather than solve the problem. Always solve the problem first; if blame needs to be allocated, that can be done later.

Question 5: Can we help? [carrying out problem solving priority reviews and design reviews]

The PMDU didn't just monitor the performance of government. It also rolled up its sleeves and helped solve problems. When it succeeded, it congratulated the relevant department rather than taking credit for itself. We never yelled at people. Instead we built trusting relationships. We took the view that we shared responsibility for the outcomes.

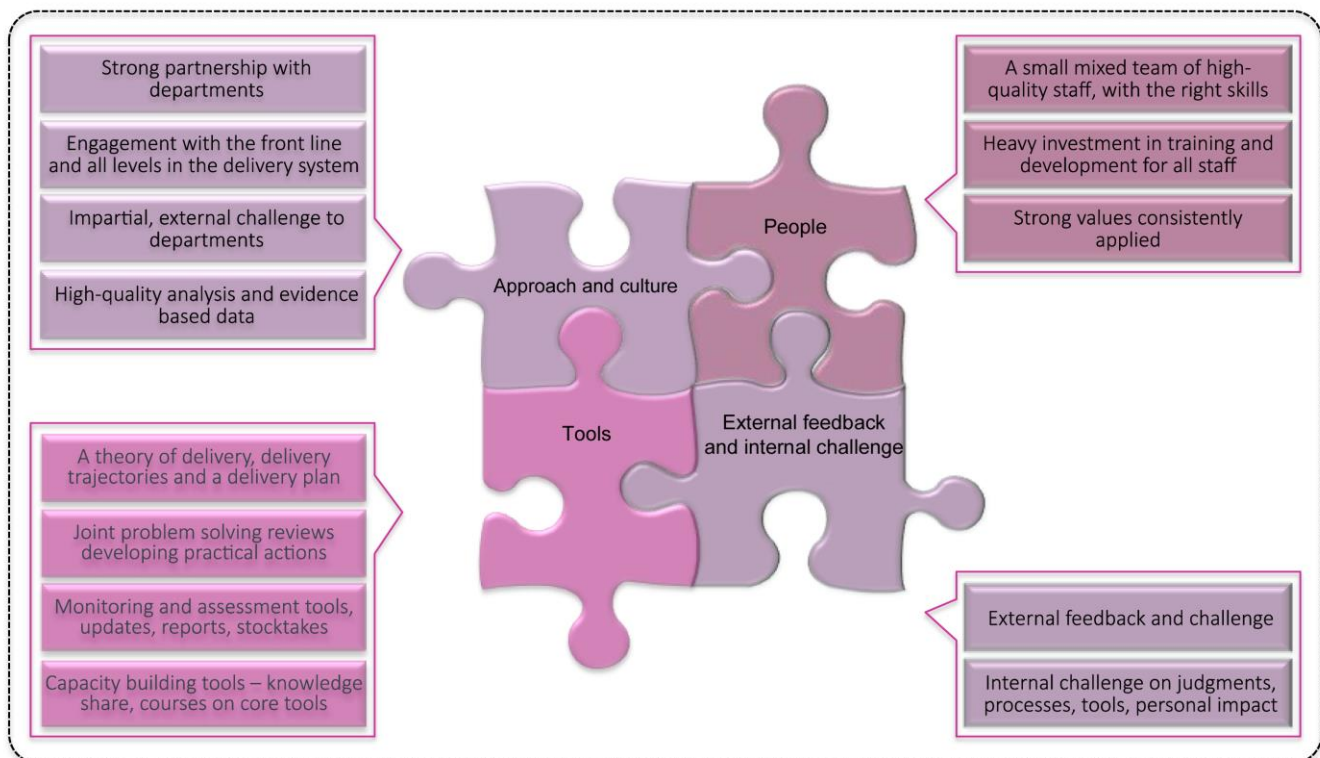
Source: Barber, M., *The Origins and Practice of Delivery*, McKinsey on Society, vol. 5.

PMDU had a clear operating model and Sir Michael Barber was very clear how he wanted to work. The model was developed by building on some of the routines established by Barber's Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfE. PMDU's new chief analyst, Tony O'Connor (also from the Standards and Effectiveness Unit), developed and refined the concept of trajectories and established the critical role of data in PMDU routines. Two other founding members of the team, Richard Page-Jones (previously with Ofsted) and Adrian Masters (an ex-McKinsey consultant), developed the priority review model and ran all the early reviews. Barber himself established some very clear values and principles. He also drew on the experience of city management in the US, in particular the New York City CompStat model.

The unit regularly took stock of how well it was working. A number of success factors were identified as part of the unit's quarterly internal scorecard to challenge its health and fitness for purpose. The description of some factors was further refined in Barber's books.

Figure 4. PMDU success factors

The success factors fall into four groups: approach and culture, people, tools, and feedback and challenge.



Source: Adapted from PMDU internal documents and Barber, M., *Deliverology 101*, Corwin, 2011.

Haringey

Etheridge's inside experience of the PMDU regime gave her a good understanding of the reality of PMDU and the context in which it thrived, evolved and was ultimately abolished. She knew that the quality and diversity of the unit itself, the way it worked, and the backing of senior leaders would all be critical to its success.

She discussed her plans with former members of the PMDU and sought advice on how best to equip her team with the confidence and capability to adapt and use the methods and tools of PMDU. She hired a small consultancy to help with this task – the Isos Partnership, which had advised nationally and internationally to help states, institutions and governments to apply the PMDU methodology, often working with Barber himself. As founder members of Barber's delivery unit, the Isos consultants knew the PMDU model intimately. They were retained to provide services tailored to the needs and progress of the team. The appointment of Isos proved to be a very good choice.

4. Staffing and training the unit

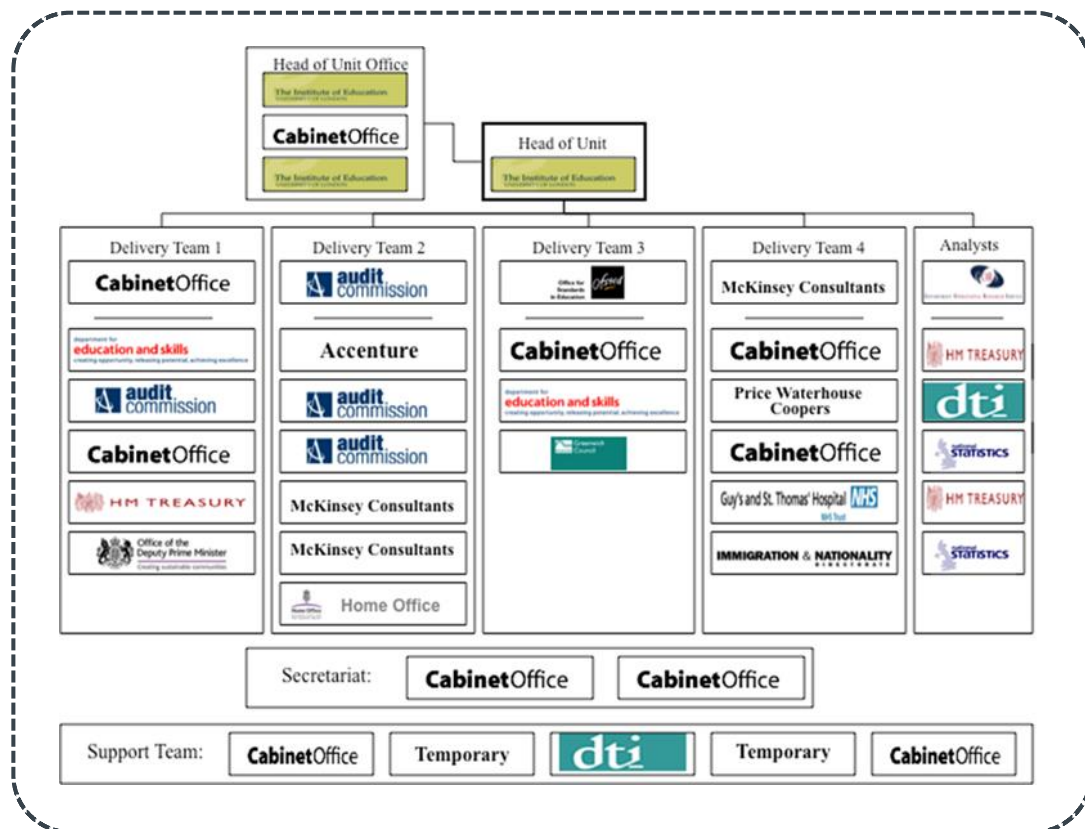
Much of the drive, energy and vision for a successful reform comes from the dedicated central team or unit set up to support it, which in turn tends to thrive on the permissive and open-minded leadership from the owner of reform. Dedicated capacity is not enough, however. The composition, credibility and way of working are critical to combat the default assumption that the team is 'just another central unit' that chases progress and updates reports in a way that creates a bureaucratic burden, but adds no value.¹⁷

¹⁷ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op. cit., pp. 87-8.

PMDU deliberately recruited a mixture of insiders and outsiders. This proved critical to its ability to develop and apply an effective operating model. The presence of maverick, disruptive thinkers with experience, skills and connections beyond Whitehall meant that lessons from analogous programmes in the private sector and elsewhere in government were used to inform the design, while the presence of career civil servants meant that the unit was tailored to the working methods of the Civil Service.¹⁸

Figure 5. Diversity of PMDU in 2003

PMDU staff came from across government, and the wider public and private sector.



Source: 'Previous work locations of Delivery Unit staff, 2003-04' in Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver*, Methuen, 2008, p. 407.

The values and way of working were also crucial. PMDU required staff to show empathy for departmental challenges, work hard to engage and connect with departmental agendas, and earn credibility by adding value to them.

PMDU are unique in that they think their job is to ask the right question – not to know the answer. (Director general)

They work alongside us – and feel like partners. (Director general)

[I never felt] threatened by PMDU interest. PMDU add value, always positive. (Director general)

The unit was deliberately kept small, focused but well-resourced with high-calibre people – Barber was delighted when a select committee asked how large his unit was to the nearest hundred, and he was able to reply: 'Zero.'¹⁹

Haringey

The first step for Etheridge was to recruit the team. She was looking for a mix of credible insiders who knew Haringey well, and some outsiders who would bring fresh perspectives and additional skills.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver*, op. cit., p. 63.

In May 2013, David McNulty, then head of local democracy and member services, joined as the head of the delivery unit; he had worked at Haringey for six years, and had previously worked for Transport for London. During August, two team leaders were rapidly seconded into the team: Kate Dalzell, who had worked for seven years in Haringey, with a background in partnership, policy and regeneration; and Sanjay Mackintosh from the Cabinet Office, who had also worked in the Home Office and the NHS. Marlon Bruce joined the team with a strong background in youth engagement and outreach in Haringey and elsewhere. Also recruited was Emma Davies, who had joined Haringey seven years earlier as a graduate trainee from the Birmingham Regional Development Agency; her previous work for the council had included roles in procurement, waste management, cabinet support and the leader's office.

In November the team was expanded by another secondment from the Cabinet Office, Nicola Simpson, who had worked in the Commercial Directorate and the Efficiency and Reform Group. Finally, Ben Ward had joined Haringey as a graduate trainee and had used his analytical skills in both the corporate performance and business intelligence function.

The diversity of the team mirrored that of the original PMDU. The team possessed experience in a number of frontline services, in policymaking, working at the centre and working with councillors in Haringey. The outsiders brought experience of policymaking in government and some PMDU-style tools. The analyst was a crucial addition without which the team would have found it hard to apply the full range of PMDU methods. Somewhat accidentally, some members of the team had strengths in the design and facilitation of problem-solving sessions. These sessions became an integral part of much of the team's work with priority leaders.

I see it as a model of a high-performing team ... mixed, open, flat, minimal hierarchy, proactive, taking responsibility ... It is successful because of the people in it. (Senior leader)

There is something about the mix of individuals that is really good – range of different backgrounds, range of different personalities. Because we are open with one another it can lead to a little bit of tension but it's generally about, let's improve this piece of work or get to the right answer – that feels good. (Team member)

Once Etheridge had assembled the initial core team, she, McNulty and the Isos Partnership set up and ran a number of intensive induction and training days that also acted as team development days. The Isos approach is one of building capability rather than doing the work for the CDU, an approach refined through experience of helping other governments and institutions create delivery units.

[Our approach starts with] teaching some of the delivery theory up front, and then to work through some of the process that worked in PMDU but tailor them to the particular context of the local authority. We then aim to get alongside the team. (Isos partner)

We did a session on tools. They then took away a number of them, worked them up, came back and tested them on us – but we didn't do the work for them. (Isos partner)

Isos soon noticed the quality of the team. The consultants were able to move much quicker than planned, and adjusted the level of support they provided.

They really impressed us and we were able to be more hands off than we normally would be, as they were really getting going. They took real ownership early on ... I was shocked how quickly and intuitively they got it ... We came back more intensively to support them on the first priority review. (Isos partner)

This approach worked very well for the team:

What they did very well was teach us about the PMDU approach. Rather than tell us, 'This is how you do it', they would ask us questions, for example, 'How will we communicate with priority leaders?', and we asked them questions back like, 'What did you do?' or 'What were the pitfalls?', and then we thought about how we would apply that in Haringey. We were in team meetings all the time with flip-chart paper and brown paper around the walls – that provided a solid basis to build on. (Team member)

It was an ideal way of doing it – it's up there with the best team set-ups I've ever been part of. It was planned well by David and Zina. (Team member)

The way the team worked in this early stage – a flat, non-hierarchical team, providing challenge and support to each other – has continued. The team functions very well and has been able to resolve contentious issues through discussion rather than falling back on hierarchy.

I have been consistently surprised and impressed by CDU's constant drive to work through issues within the team, identify each other's strengths and weaknesses ... that leads to a real sense of continual improvement. (Senior leader)

It is not by accident that this way of working reflects the approach and mindset that PMDU sought to bring to its work with delivery leaders across government.

The whole team was given copies of Barber's *Deliverology 101*.²⁰ It is an unusual book, written in the style of a workbook for doing delivery the PMDU way. It is packed with templates, checklists and examples that proved remarkably helpful for the team members, who found the approach intuitive and intelligible:

The approach is all very intuitive ... it's a framework ... all the tools are helpful frameworks and handles in order to penetrate other people's systems and be clear about what we are trying to achieve ... and establish some rhythms ... We adapted them a bit for the Haringey context but not massively. (Team member)

I got a lot of it through osmosis – being aware of the routines of the team. I was given *Deliverology 101* to read. A lot was through doing rather than learning the theory ... a lot of what is involved is quite immediate and obvious. (Team member)

5. Engaging and communicating with delivery leaders about the delivery unit approach

One important element of the PMDU model was the provision of support to help delivery leaders unblock barriers to performance – while ensuring these leaders took the credit for success. This is quite different from the default style of central units, who tend to ask for lots of data and updates on performance, offering criticism and ratings without ever adding anything to the priority leader's ability to deliver or improve. It is perhaps the hardest part of the PMDU model to replicate.

Nonetheless, at the beginning, PMDU faced considerable scepticism and some influential resistance. At first, the Treasury was highly sceptical, believing that PMDU would undercut its authority and work on PSAs. Heywood invested a significant amount of time in negotiating with and reassuring Sir Andrew Turnbull, then Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, while Barber developed a personal relationship with Nick Macpherson, then managing director of public services, whose support was key to the early success of the unit. Efforts were made to align the 15-20 prime ministerial priorities to the 120 Treasury PSAs. This increased the receptiveness of the Treasury, which gave PMDU the 'permission' needed to drive the agenda.²¹

Departments initially viewed the agenda as another central diktat to avoid. Later Barber ran capacity-building sessions for priority leaders and developed personal relationships with all the relevant officials to persuade them to accept the role of delivery in government. But early on it was down to the first staff in PMDU to start working with the priority leaders, to build trust and demonstrate the approach and value of the unit. Barber was able to open the door to departments and get them to engage with PMDU staff early on, due partly to the reputation he had built for transforming the performance of schools and partly to the strength of his existing relationships with key ministers.²²

²⁰ Barber, M., et al., *Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders*, Corwin, 2011, p. 133.

²¹ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 49.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Haringey

Because the CDU proposal had strong backing from senior officers as well as the leader of the council, there was no equivalent of the Treasury to convince or manage. However, priority leaders were no less sceptical about a team from the centre claiming it was ‘here to help’.

Isos Partnership spent a day with the CDU helping them think through their approach to engaging and working with priority leaders. And as in the early days of the original PMDU, much of the burden for establishing the purpose, credibility and value of the team fell on team members as they started working with delivery leaders.

I didn't know what to expect – in our first meeting their invitation was, ‘We want to talk to you and make sure we get improvements’ ... It took two meetings before we really worked alongside ... It was not a load of people coming in and telling me what was wrong, but a method of making sure people have their minds clearly focused on the outputs – but the ownership remains with the people who are responsible. I think that was really the trick of this. (Priority leader)

They introduced their role as bringing challenge and rigour ... to really consider what the service was proposing to do, how it contributed to the corporate priorities, how robust the plan was to deliver it and how confident could we be ... It was helpful they could say, ‘These are the sorts of things we think would make a robust plan.’ They worked with us on early iterations rather than waiting until we had finished. (Priority leader)

6. Clarifying ambition, success and measures

The simple view of a delivery unit's job is that it receives agreed priorities from politicians or senior leaders and then works with priority leaders to assure and support delivery. The reality is – and needs to be – quite different. Priority areas are initially often vague, ill-defined or simply too wide in scope. In other cases they display the well-documented flaw in public policymaking: poorly evidenced and spuriously specific too early on – a result of ministers' tendency to make bold policy announcements and rush to delivery without knowing what is involved in delivering the outcome they seek.²³

The more a delivery unit is involved in co-developing and defining the priorities they will be working on, the more likely it is that their subsequent work supporting delivery will be successful. And it follows that until the ambition and outcomes sought are clear, there is limited value in defining success and key measures. Sometimes targets will be useful, sometimes not – but to set a target before understanding the intrinsic degree of challenge and knowing at least the outline of a delivery plan risks unintended and sometimes dysfunctional consequences.

Barber deliberately chose to focus on a selected number of priorities where PMDU had relevant expertise and the targets were clearly measurable. This realism about what PMDU could achieve would be critical to its success.²⁴

Haringey

In Haringey, many of the priority areas chosen did not have an explicit target. Some had well-established success measures; others didn't. This was a good starting point. It enabled CDU and priority leaders to explore and develop them as part of their early discussions. The resulting ambition, outcomes and measures were reviewed and signed off at the first stocktake for some priorities. For other areas – such as early years provision and post-16 education – work still continues to establish the right formulation of outcomes, measures and ambition. It is essential to recognise that a delivery unit needs to work in a different way when still establishing clarity of outcomes and measures, compared with when it is relentlessly driving delivery on a priority with a clear delivery plan and trajectory.

²³ Hallsworth, M., Parker, S., Rutter, J., *Policy Making in the Real World: Evidence and Analysis*, Institute for Government, April 2011, pp. 40-1.

²⁴ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 49.

7. Developing and assessing delivery plans and delivery trajectories

The foundation of all that a delivery unit does is the delivery plan and delivery trajectory for a priority area. The plan sets out your strategy for delivery, and the interventions in the system that you will make to achieve your ambitions. The trajectory sets out visually the sequence of interventions and their expected impact on performance.

These two elements provide the focus for initial discussion between the delivery unit and each priority leader. They enable the delivery unit to determine whether plans to deliver the priority fit the degree of challenge posed by the priority.

Barber sets out three steps for the thinking that is required to assemble a delivery plan and create a delivery trajectory:

1. Determine the theory of change – this articulates your system's belief about the best way to achieve its aspiration ... it is the organising force for your strategy ... The foundation for this is a thorough understanding of the delivery challenge ... understanding past and present performance, understanding drivers of performance.
2. Identify the interventions that could improve delivery. This might be changes to what is already done in the delivery system, or new activities that you have developed through your thinking on the theory of change.
3. Select and sequence interventions to develop. They need to be powerful in their own right, providing a good impact for the cost. They should be integrated with each other so that they build to have an effect greater than the sum of their parts; and be sequenced to reflect interdependencies, your resources over time and constant need to build momentum and sustain energy.²⁵

And he defines the trajectory as:

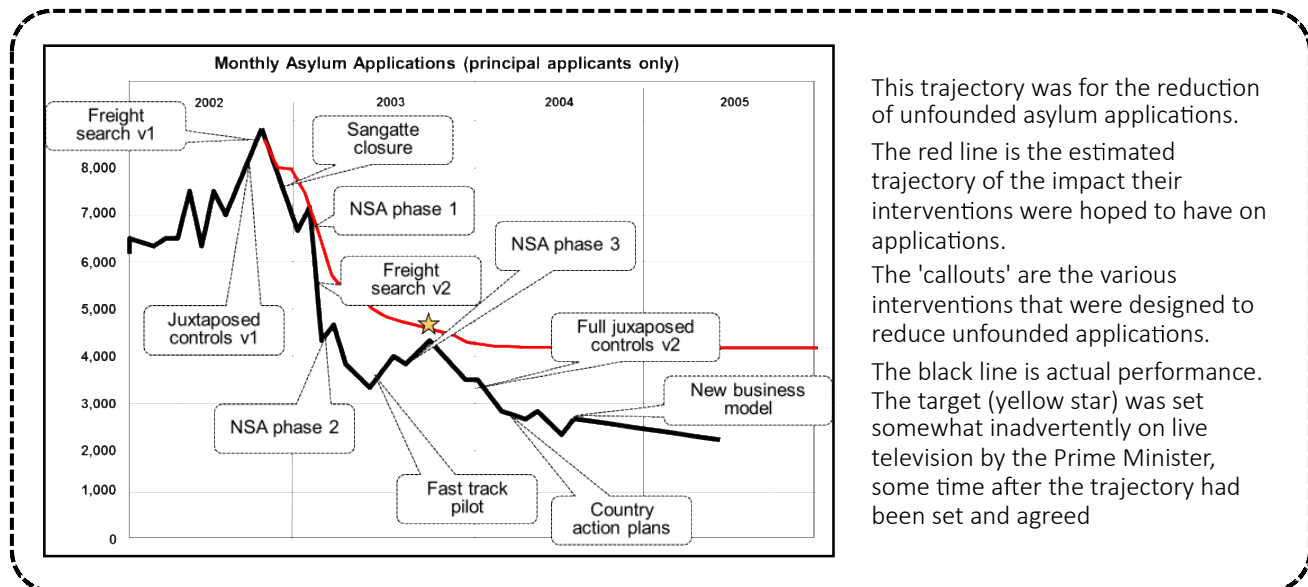
... an evidenced-based projection of a metric's path over time from its current level to the level suggested by your delivery ambition ... It is your best estimate of the levels of performance your system will achieve en route to achieving its overall target.²⁶

Some of the best trajectories are essentially a series of good-quality hypotheses and estimates. Once finalised, the trajectories and delivery plan are the basis for monitoring, reporting on progress, being revised. Good delivery plans and trajectories are regularly revised and updated to reflect what is learned – to take account of what seems to be working and what doesn't. This cycle of monitoring and learning is how you improve and refine your hypotheses and estimates.

²⁵ Barber, M., et al., *Deliverology 101*, op. cit., pp. 76-90.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Figure 6. An example of a delivery trajectory from PMDU



Source: Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World*, Institute for Government, 2014.

Haringey

A preparatory task for CDU was to adapt the standard PMDU framework for assessment of delivery plans so that it would work in Haringey, which the team did with the support of Isos.

The CDU team spent time, supported by Isos, working through their assessment framework and testing how they would assess plans. They benchmarked their initial assessments within the team and were challenged by Isos on their ratings. This was necessary to ensure consistency and to develop a shared standard in the team. The peer review approach would become an integral part of the team's way of working. It is a much more effective way to create consistency in assessments than to rely on formal, hierarchical quality control through the management line.

We looked at a good plan and a bad plan that Isos gave us and developed our own benchmarking tool ... We tested our conclusions with each other to check we were all on the same page – and to be really clear what an amber-red rating looked like. (Team member)

There was no standard format imposed on priority leaders for their delivery plan, in order to accommodate those who already had or were developing plans to deliver. The challenge from CDU was to the content of the plans, not the format. The approach and requirements were explained as part of the initial set-up meetings with priority leaders.

Different priority areas were in a very different state of readiness – some already had plans in place; others had plans under development. Some priority leaders had targets embedded in contracts, whereas others were still trying to understand the problem and work out how success might be described, let alone measured. This variation required CDU to tailor its approach and focus to the specific priority area. In some areas CDU needed to do much more than assess a delivery plan.

Isos said the first thing we should ask for is a plan – but how do we engage when some have one and some don't? (Team member)

Where people had a plan we apply our assessment framework and take a couple of meetings to go through that material, giving an initial view with a RAG rating. We would sit down and identify areas for improvement and take it from there. (Team member)

I was surprised at the extent to which people didn't necessarily accept it as straightforward good management that they would have this stuff in place. (Team member)

The team had agreed early on that they would use collaborative workshops to engage with priority teams to work through their delivery plan and the CDU's initial feedback. These were bespoke depending on whether there were already plans under development or they were starting from a blank sheet of paper.

CDU have been fabulous ... no preconceptions – being incredibly astute, intelligent to take things on board and understand the implications and connections. It's helpful not coming from this background and being able to ask questions, 'Why would you do that?' That combined with half a day going through the trajectory – and people seeing what would work. They facilitated it. (Priority leader)

Some needed much more intensive work over months; others responded rapidly to fairly limited early engagement to clarify what was required. A guiding principle through this phase was CDU's certainty that delivery plans had to be owned by the priority leaders who were responsible for their delivery – and that CDU should never produce plans for them. This makes the process time-consuming when there is no plan, or a poorly developed plan.

We refused as a team to do their plans for them – we got clear on that early on. We gave them the first go, 'Here's a template.' We'd do lots of unpicking, not editing, and ask questions like, 'I don't really understand this', then spend time with them building it up so they got an idea of planning ... We were coaching them to do it better. (Team member)

This framework works really well because it still leaves the ownership with the team that is delivering the service ... The way they have done it [has] helped us come to a conclusion quicker than I would have done – and [provides] a tool for seeing it all the way through to impact. (Priority leader)

Service leaders were understandably sceptical as people without a background in their services came to them to challenge their plans. It was through the process of working together that trust and understanding was established, even from some initially tricky early meetings.

I was a bit wary early on – thought it would be a stick to beat us with ... It's been challenging ... I now know and respect these officers and can take friendly criticism from them – and I know they will still be here in two or three months' time with the best interest of the council at their heart ... and I'm motivated to work collaboratively with them. (Service manager)

The team operated in the way they had discussed and established in their work with Isos and in team meetings, being careful to provide constructive challenge and support, while always leaving the ownership with the priority leader.

They were quite helpful – helping me ... They were in their own process of forming ... None of them understood planning, but it was about looking at it together ... They took time to understand my issues, acting as a critical friend or challenge – at the same time they appreciated the difficulties of the business. When they presented in a wider forum they did it in a balanced way, recognising maybe there were some resource issues I needed help with ... a good combination, not just me procrastinating. It became a corporately owned position. (Priority leader)

I [came to see] CDU as a critical friend to help me along and through the method – highlight some things I would miss. (Priority leader)

CDU and priority leaders worked hard to have their assessments of delivery plans ready to report to the first formal stocktake in October 2013, where they were reviewed and formally signed off, or further work commissioned.

Once analyst Ben Ward arrived his immediate task was to support production of trajectories. To do this he built on the relationships and engagement already carried out with priority leaders.

I liaised with services on what data should be in that and how to map impact of activities on to the trajectory... We started by collecting the performance data we had on historical performance, then produced the basic model accounting for annual trends and changes through the year, picking it up as a baseline, and then went

around to speak to various heads that own particular indicators... We'd go to them with an initial trajectory without new activity applied to it and say, 'This is what our performance has been and is going to be', and then work through the activity plans, asking what impact they think they will have when – in some cases this was a more difficult thing to do. (Team member)

The fact that Ward had come from an analytical role elsewhere in the council meant that, as he says, he 'knew about the data and could draw on links and connections ... I haven't had any problems getting data from people.' However, the legacy of years of cuts meant there were seldom staff in service areas or elsewhere who had the capacity to do the analytical work directly for their service. Those roles had been centralised some years previously and then cut once again at the centre. This has meant a heavy burden for the single analyst in CDU.

By November, most priorities had a populated trajectory in place. They then formed the core of the delivery updates that are provided every two months.

8. Regular reporting on delivery

The serious business of delivery only starts once priority leaders are implementing their delivery plans and progress is being monitored and reviewed. These routines were at the heart of the PMDU model and provided the rhythm for the unit's work. There were two reporting routines: six-monthly delivery reports and regular delivery notes to the Prime Minister in between.

The monthly delivery notes would summarise progress for each of the big four departments, and covered all the Prime Minister's priorities in that department. Some notes were more frequent – weekly in the case of unfounded asylum claims. They were short and data driven. Barber describes how he saw them as a way to keep delivery on the agenda:

I urged my staff to prepare a note on each major department every four weeks, which would mean that Blair would get a note a week from us routinely ... it was important to ensure our visibility at the vortex ... I also insisted that the notes told him what we planned to do about the problems we described. Often I then asked him to confirm he was happy with the course of action. The simple routine act of reporting progress to the PM consistently ensured the gentle pressure we required.²⁷

Six-monthly delivery reports were designed to be a comprehensive assessment of the state of play for all the Prime Minister's priority areas in a department, written by the PMDU delivery leader for the Prime Minister, and copied to the secretary of state and lead officials. They were usually discussed in draft with the lead officials. Each priority's delivery report was just one page of A4 paper and was intended to:

- report progress against trajectories for the priority
- outline what success looked like for the priority over the next six months
- determine the best path forward and identify key actions that needed to be taken
- reveal areas of disagreement between the delivery unit and the department
- act as a reference document against which to chart progress.²⁸

Haringey

CDU decided not to replicate the centrepiece of PMDU's reporting – the six-monthly delivery report. Instead, delivery updates are produced every two months in the run-up to the formal stocktakes.

To kick off each reporting cycle, the CDU lead produces a provisional update, which they then discuss and agree initially with the priority leader.

²⁷ Barber, M., et al., *Deliverology 101*, op. cit, p. 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

The approach we have taken is to discuss the update with them, look at any issues and talk it through, checking in on what action has been taken. We do this before the stocktake regardless of whether they are on the agenda ... face to face rather than just emailing around. (Team member)

CDU then briefs the cabinet member for that priority. The priority leader is not present for these briefings.

With cabinet members we go through the summary and draw attention to key issues – some pick up on the data; for others it's just like a briefing session ... We brief them before every stocktake and engage them in relation to any specific work. (Team member)

They come to me with their [traffic light] ratings ... on the [service] challenges and give me an update on progress and what they are worried about. (Cabinet member)

They are very good at giving me a snapshot on ... performance, clear and logical. Other officers are a bit woolly. What I like about the CDU approach is it feels very clear and very logical. They've done all the background work – as a politician you can grapple with it. (Cabinet member)

Once the delivery update is sent to the leader and chief executive, CDU has a face-to-face briefing with them both to agree the detailed agenda for the stocktake.

We take an hour to go through all the priorities, not in detail ... saying this is where they are at and how we see it. We agree the agenda for the stocktake, looking at where to dig in a bit deeper if helpful ... In the early stocktakes we went through all of [the priorities] but now we tend to focus on specific areas of work. (Team member)

Some delivery updates are always on the stocktake agenda, but are rarely discussed in depth or reviewed formally in the stocktake itself.

[The updates] are really helpful. I sometimes think we don't spend enough time on them at stocktakes. (Leader)

For the first four to six months, CDU also produced a monthly summary update of progress on priorities and the activity of Haringey CDU for the chief executive.

We did provide periodic updates – but these lapsed ... For the first four to six months we were doing a note every month ... to say this is where the areas are at, these are the action points ... We stopped doing them because there wasn't feedback on them ... We should have asked him. (Team member)

9. Delivery stocktakes

PMDU's operating model was based on an open and supportive style of working, which involved taking joint responsibility for progress and collaboratively solving problems – yet at its heart was a stocktake process in which the relevant departmental minister or officials were held directly accountable for performance in front of the Prime Minister.

Direct prime ministerial interest was integral to the effectiveness of the operating model, governance and incentives – especially in the early stages of PMDU. Blair's interest actively engaged ministers alongside their officials, most powerfully in the periodic stocktakes on delivery progress that he chaired:

Stocktakes ... seem to me to be disproportionately important because it meant Patricia Hewitt was sitting there, opposite Tony Blair, discussing what was going on in Health. Or Charles Clarke for Education or whoever it was at the time. In the departments where the PMDU was most active, it meant the politicians at the top of those departments were active. It all comes back to: can you get a combination of the civil service leadership and the political leadership both thinking this thing is important? And if you can, then you've got a chance to succeed. (Permanent secretary)

The incentive to improve rested solely on personal accountability arrangements. The Prime Minister invested a significant amount of personal time – sometimes as much as half a day a week – in conducting regular stocktakes for the 17 priority PSAs. The stocktake meetings took place every couple

of months for each of the four departments, and lasted from one to three hours. The Prime Minister, Barber, the Cabinet Secretary and departmental representatives (the secretary of state, permanent secretary and the senior responsible officer) all attended along with the lead delivery unit staff.

Barber deliberately designed the stocktake process to provide a strong sense of theatre in the cabinet room to make ministers and officials feel accountable to the Prime Minister for performance.

The key thing was Blair's interest ... he harried us to do better and be tougher. (Director general)

Preparation was meticulous and often a key lever to get departments to focus on developing the right story and identifying plausible actions to help get back on trajectory. Departmental officials were very concerned to help their minister look good by being on top of the priority in the front of the Prime Minister. Each meeting began with a short presentation from Barber focusing on one particular delivery challenge. They relied heavily on the clear presentation of data. Trajectories were a key part of each discussion; a data presentation from the delivery lead would look at actual performance compared with the trajectory.²⁹

Stocktakes were designed to:

- ensure that there was focus, clarity and a sense of urgency on issues affecting delivery
- hold individuals to account
- update the Prime Minister on progress
- discuss options and gain agreement on key actions needed (often on the basis of a priority review's conclusions)
- identify new policy needs
- ensure cross-departmental co-operation
- celebrate success when key milestones were met.³⁰

Haringey

In Haringey these routines have been adapted. Formal stocktakes take place every two months. The leader and chief executive chair them together. Each meeting lasts two hours.

The early stocktakes had a distinctive focus, reflecting the stage of CDU's engagement with priority leaders. The first in October considered the assessment of delivery plans; the second in November 2013 looked at the trajectories that were developed; and the third in January 2014 started to look at specific priorities to test the progress of delivery actions.

In addition CDU provided periodic reports to the stocktake on overall themes and issues emerging from work on the priorities, and agreed measures to address those issues.

Below is a typical agenda of a recent stocktake (July 2014). The first two items took 90% of the meeting time.

1. Recycling priority review
2. Post-16 phase 1 priority review
3. CDU focus for 2014-15
4. Priority updates: early years, temporary accommodation.

The classic PMDU stocktake is designed around priority leaders attending stocktakes to account for performance against trajectory and to explain what is being done to sustain or improve delivery. In Haringey it has proved more complicated. Cabinet members and priority leaders are invited when their priority area is an item on the agenda. The chief operating officer and the deputy chief executive also

²⁹ Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 84.

³⁰ Barber, M. et al., *Deliverology 101*, op. cit., p. 134.

attend, along with the head of CDU. Other service managers and CDU members attend as and when an item they work on is reached on the agenda.

Some priority leaders have attended and taken their responsibility seriously. They want to be the ones who tell the story and engage with the leader and chief executive on their performance. But in the early days of CDU some senior managers failed to rise to the challenge. For the leader and chief executive, this has been a valuable if messy part of the stocktake process.

[Stocktakes] outed ... weakness at head of service and senior level. You need people who bring an awareness of good performance. (Chief executive)

The behaviour of [some] service heads ... absolving themselves of their responsibility ... tells you something about the challenge we have to create the officer cadre that is going to deliver our ambitions for the borough and the place. (Leader)

There have been occasions when cabinet members or priority leaders did not attend the stocktake for their item, making it hard to establish the face-to-face accountability that Haringey knows is the goal for stocktakes. This sometimes, but not always, reflects the high turnover in senior leaders during 2013 and the first six months of 2014. There is a danger this becomes the norm, with CDU left to account for progress.

It can end up with CDU being held to account because the cabinet member is not asked, and the head of service is almost off the hook – good ones will say, 'I want to be in that conversation.' I can understand why we ended up here, but I do feel it's settled into that too much. We need to shift responsibility and expose people to take it rather than cover it over. (Senior leader)

It sometimes feels like the director is off the hook – it feels like CDU are on the hook. (Cabinet member)

Stocktakes are valued highly by the leader, the chief executive and some other senior leaders. The leader would like more time to spend on stocktakes, and to allow for more direct conversations with priority leaders and CDU leaders.

The last [stocktake] meeting was a real breakthrough meeting for me. The quality of the presentations was really good – it gave me loads. (Chief executive)

Really quite fascinating – the data was presented in a form that really challenged some of the assumptions we had ... seeing the poor performance ... really helpful ... genuinely enlightening and eye opening. (Leader)

I sometimes think that we don't spend long enough at stocktakes ... It sometimes feels that you want to move the conversation to a different level, i.e. it's not working, what do we do now? Where do we go? The stocktake might not be the right place but there needs to be something that ensures those conversations do take place and time is given over to that. (Leader)

Time for discussion of trajectories is crowded out by priority reviews and design reviews, which dominate the stocktakes. PMDU used other forums (meetings with junior ministers and director generals) to discuss those reviews – at the stocktake it just reported headline findings from the priority review and the action proposed.

The mechanisms for recording and disseminating discussion and action points from stocktakes are informal.

Feedback from the leader and chief executive, including any comments made at stocktakes, would be fed back to the priority leaders by their CDU lead and followed up in order to provide a feedback and update loop into the next delivery update. There were no formal write-out or action points from the updates to the chief executive and the leader ... or the stocktake. (Team member)

10. Carrying out priority reviews to solve delivery problems

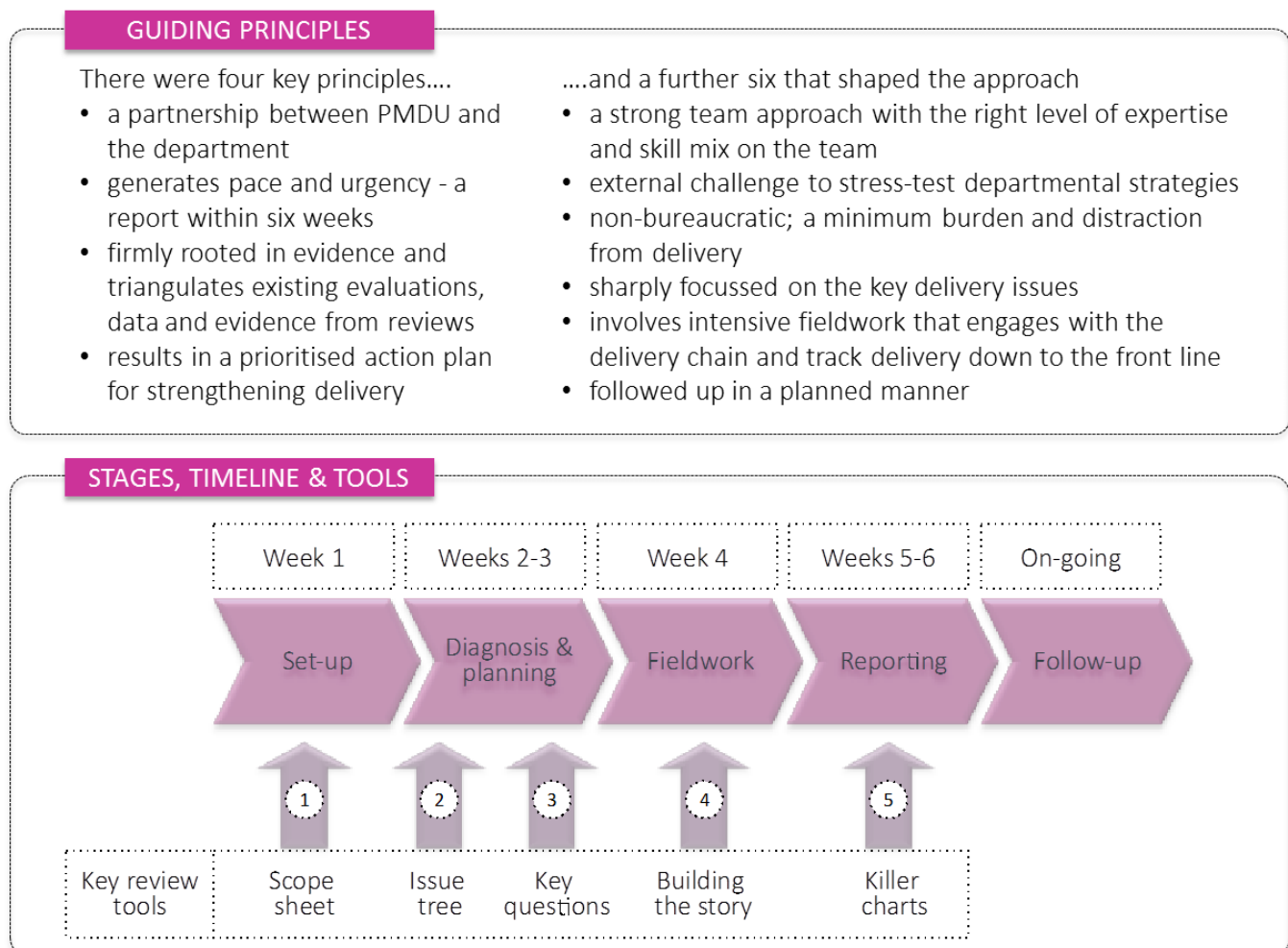
The priority review was the most important and effective tool that PMDU used. It was developed in PMDU in 2002 by Richard Page-Jones (ex-Ofsted), supported by Adrian Masters (ex-McKinsey

consultant). It was described as ‘a rapid analysis of the state of delivery of a high-priority strategy and identification of the action needed to strengthen delivery ... [reported] to the Prime Minister, ministers and the permanent secretary’.³¹

Exceptionally for the centre of government at that time, the reviews were done collaboratively, set up as joint teams with those leading the delivery of the PSAs. They brought pace, structure and support to help priority leaders overcome delivery problems, or break out of a performance plateau. While it was never described as such, it was a powerful open policymaking tool that took the required outcome as its starting point and examined the problem through the lenses of customers, the front line and analogous services in the UK and overseas. This re-energised the delivery process and stimulated new thinking.

Barber was seen as someone who is helping departments cope with what is seen as a deficiency in delivery – departments saw it as a deficiency ... [His message was:] recognise the pressure from the top; this is the new world; I’m not telling you what to do; I’m going to come and work with you; you decide what you measure and how you do it – we will give you some tools. (*Permanent secretary*)

Figure 7. The principles, stages, timeline and tools of a priority review



Source: Khutti, A., Priority Reviews, PMDU, 2006.

Haringey

In Haringey, the first priority review was commissioned after the initial stocktake, in response to the head of service arguing that nothing could be done to turn around performance. The review was led by Isos as a practical way to teach CDU and equip them to lead subsequent reviews themselves, with tapering support and coaching from Isos.

³¹ Khutti, A., Priority Reviews, PMDU, 2006.

Since then the team has run a steady stream of reviews. Some were classic PMDU priority reviews, aimed at a specific delivery problem – others had the characteristics of strategic reviews, consuming significant resources and lasting longer than the ideal of six weeks. The reviews have proved effective at getting beneath tough delivery problems and helped both officers and members get to grips with key strategic issues.

[The priority review was] genuinely enlightening and eye-opening. (Leader)

When we did the priority review it was not just about hitting a target; it was about where we are going with the contract and future contract ... One of the challenges CDU and Nick brought to this was – why aren't we achieving 60% or 70%? Why can't Haringey achieve this? ... The impact on us was like, sort of, wow ... What CDU has helped to do is drive a bit of energy and momentum ... really getting us round the table, getting us all thinking. (Priority leader)

Initially it felt like it was being done to my area ... we'll go off and look at this ... but it changed ... In order to explore the priority you have to go out and check with those who understand it – that brought people closer together ... We developed a mutual understanding through the process – because of the conversation and the way you come together, you understand this better. (Priority leader)

Reviews have also been a key factor helping CDU to develop stronger relationships with many priority leaders and service managers. Service staff involved in them were often energised and motivated by the experience.

It provided real value to our [policy/project officer]. He really enjoyed it. They all enjoyed going out to other authorities. I think for someone like him it added real value in terms of his own development. He really liked working with a team of similar mind and thought – they worked really well. (Priority leader)

The visual, analytical style of outputs from the review has been an important factor in their impact.

It has been revolutionary for Haringey to have very visual analysis rather than great long documents. (Senior leader)

One of the key success factors for priority reviews is establishing the right scope. It needs to be narrow enough to be tractable, yet cover enough ground to get to the key issues. And priority leaders need to own the scope. Sometimes the scope was right, but in other reviews scope was a significant problem that slowed down the process.

If the service area is poor there is a danger of ending up with a massive agenda rather than looking at the data to find the key issues and then focus. (Isos partner)

It's about asking the right questions and getting to the heart of the issue quicker ... They are good at it but [sometimes] it has taken too long to get to the right question ... that exposes you and leads you into a different conversation. (Isos partner)

At times it was hard to get the right level of engagement among other managers and the front line. In some areas a good cross-section of service staff was involved; in others, service managers felt the review was taken away from them. It is essential that reviews are collaborative, solving joint problems – this is how commitment to acting on the findings of the reviews is created. If those who need to act on the findings are not engaged somehow, prospects for implementing findings are seriously undermined.

The [service manager] was very bought into the process and did some of the legwork with us ... was involved in the analysis and field work – we learned lessons from the other reviews. It helped that they wanted to get out and saw the value of going to other authorities ... We shared writing the report. (Team member)

They were going to do it with largely non-service people. My assumption was there was a desire to have fresh eyes, or perhaps there was concern about the capability within the service. But the impression it left with people was that it is being done to your area. (Priority leader)

If the service was more connected in the review maybe it would have moved forward. (Team member)

And there were some significant gaps in capacity and capability in the service area. CDU has recognised engagement was a critical factor in ensuring the review was acted on, but even good engagement was insufficient if there were capacity problems in the service. CDU is increasingly sceptical of the value of investing its resources to follow up if there is a substantive problem of this sort.

The difficult bit was that there was a good review, a good strategy, but no team to take any of it forward. (Isos partner)

In [this service there is] a huge challenge of the vacuum in leadership – quite a challenge in terms of no-one to take forward the recommendations. CDU has stepped in and tried to maintain the momentum and [ensure] that [actions] get taken forwards. (Service manager)

It is the follow-through we struggle with – if the capability in the service is low, it's a lot of effort. You can't handhold for ever – you have to step away at some point. We can't drive everything from the centre – there has to be more ownership from the service areas. (Team member)

Capability has become a more significant consideration when scoping later reviews. CDU has been experimenting with an adaptation of central government's capability reviews in more recent priority reviews, to try to provide a view on whether services have the capacity to carry through the conclusions of a priority review. Now that the new senior team is in place and is beginning to fill important gaps in the next level of management, this problem should become less acute.

11. Continuous engagement with priority leaders

When adopting the PMDU model there is always a danger that the high-visibility elements of the delivery routines – stocktakes, delivery reports and priority reviews – conceal the most important aspect: continued one-to-one engagement between the delivery unit leader and the priority leader, underpinned by trust and mutual respect.

The spirit of the delivery unit ... was sharing a sense of purpose and creating the right relationships with departments. With the right relationships we could achieve anything (and often did) – without it we could achieve nothing. (PMDU team member)³²

Haringey

The engagement between CDU and priority leaders has been through a cycle of more and less intensive engagement.

It became really helpful and positive. It was good to have new eyes – it adds to our capacity ... It started off with looking at the priority with fresh eyes, then they aligned more with the service area, working mutually [on the design review] and then stepping back a little bit and working in a more remote way in helping to take things forwards. (Priority leader)

Sometimes the engagement is intense and almost full-time, for example during priority reviews. These were often a catalyst for a closer relationship and a greater understanding of the service area. But in the early days the team would sometimes find senior leaders did not accept responsibility for delivery, and resisted scrutiny or challenge. When priority areas lacked capacity or leadership, the answer would not necessarily be to help them move things on, since that would delay addressing the fundamental leadership and capacity issues.

[The continuing] role of CDU is good in focusing the minds ... engaging directly with heads of service to feel confident they are following through the areas that need tackling. Once CDU have left there isn't that following through – [you need] someone holding them to account face-to-face. (Service manager)

In a number of the priority areas that were problematic initially, CDU found it possible to engage productively only once new heads or teams were brought in.

³² Simon Rea quoted in Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver*, op. cit., p. 139.

Being involved in key governance meetings and performance management helps avoid duplication, and is an easy way to stay in touch with progress without increasing the burden on the service managers.

They took time to understand my issues, acting as a critical friend or challenge at the same time [as] they appreciated the difficulties of the business. (Priority leader)

You are getting something back – they are doing stuff you haven't got capacity for, or the skills. They came to liaison meetings and saw updates first hand – you don't have to double up. (Service manager)

Just by having the conversations with individuals and getting alongside them, you have shifted a whole number of areas ... Those delivery conversations have pushed service areas to think in a different way and develop new ways of working ... That feels like a big culture shift ... in individual areas. (Isos partner)

5. Is CDU succeeding?

Fifteen months after CDU was set up, Haringey commissioned an external evaluation³³ that sought to examine progress and prospects through a number of lenses:

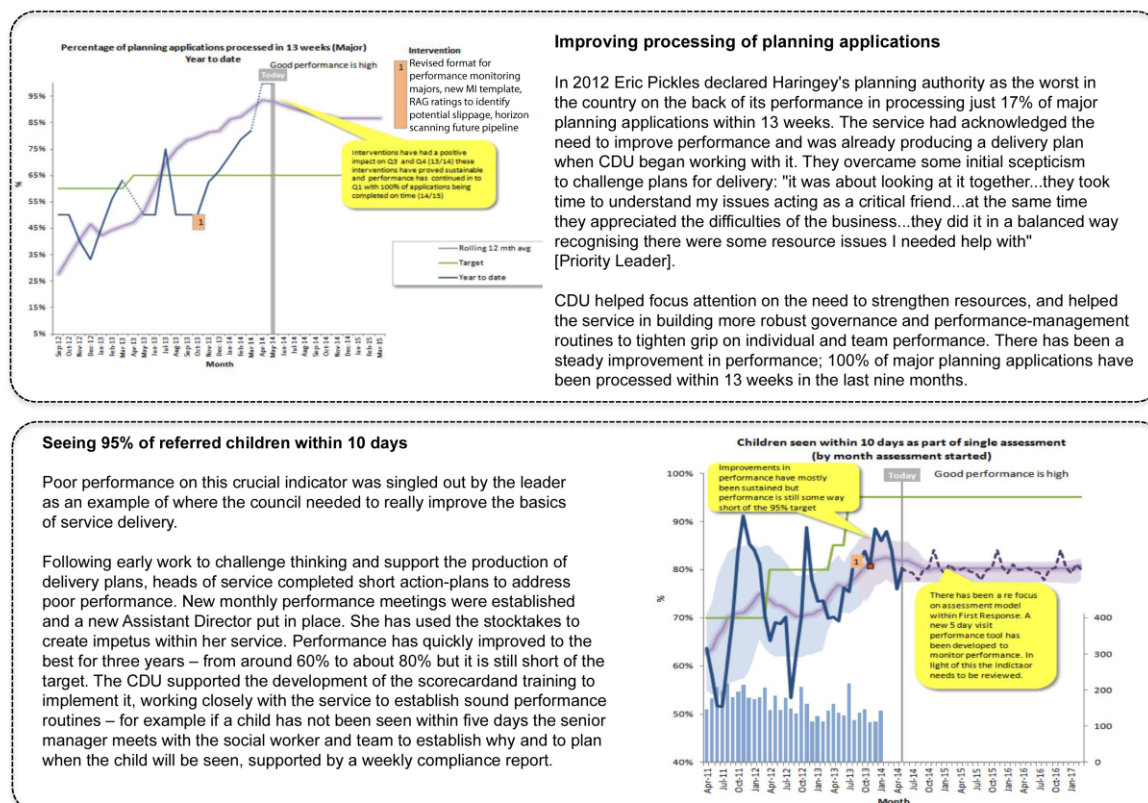
- case studies of examples cited as symbols of the delivery successes supported by CDU
- the perceptions of officials and members who have worked with and in the unit
- the views of the two leaders who commissioned the unit and co-chair the regular stocktakes on delivery
- the extent to which CDU has the PMDU success factors in place.

Early delivery successes

Officials and members consistently cited two early delivery successes: turning around performance on the time taken to process planning applications, especially major planning applications; and getting to grips with the basics of safeguarding children by ensuring that many more who are referred to social services are seen and assessed swiftly.

Figure 8. Early delivery successes

Planning applications and safeguarding children are seen as successful examples of the new 'Haringey way'.



Perceptions of success and impact

Officers who have had some engagement with CDU see it as effective and successful. It has provided assurance to the chief executive, the leader and other stretched senior leaders that someone is focusing on key issues. There is widespread awareness of early delivery success stories in planning applications and safeguarding children.

The work is seen to have exposed problems of capacity and lack of strategy, ambition or operational grip in some areas. There are symbolic examples of action following the exposure of those issues – for example: staff moving on or out.

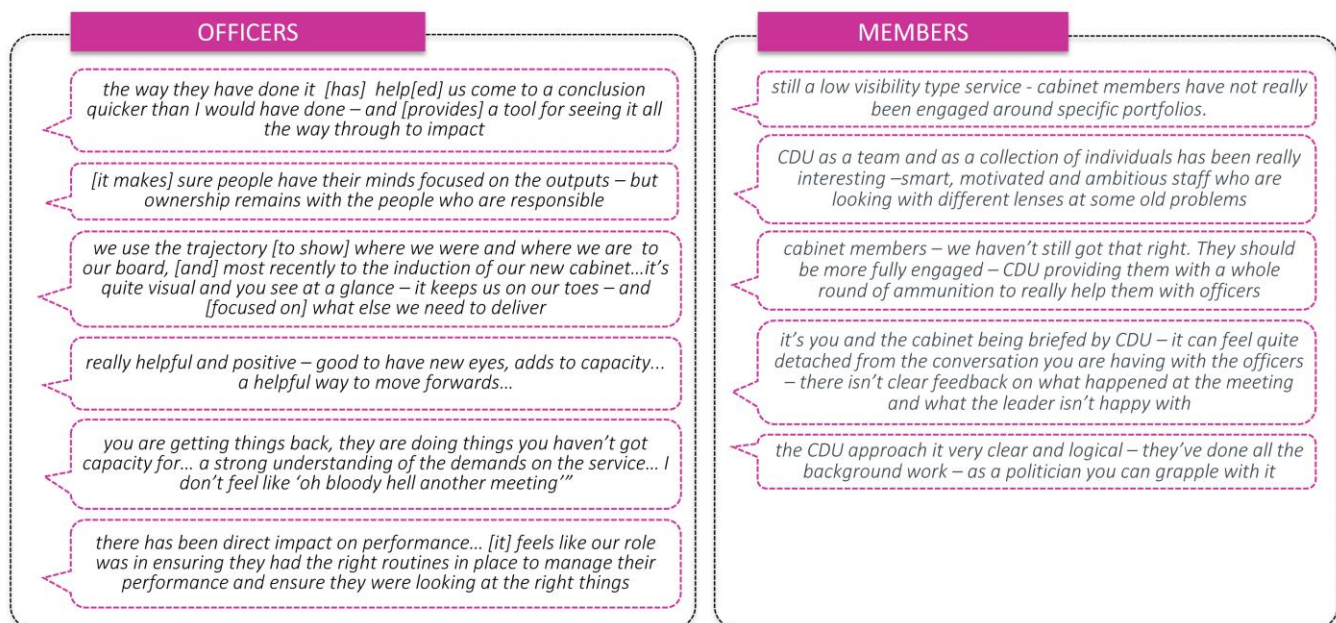
Services generally see value added, and cite a positive impact. CDU brings much-needed additional capacity and capability. It has created time to ask more strategic questions. Data analysis and production of trajectories provide new insights and a compelling picture of performance. The leader and chief executive found the design reviews carried out by CDU useful for exploring big strategic questions. Those leading work on the corporate planning process and delivery frameworks highly value CDU's support.

Priority and other reviews were also highly regarded, particularly by middle managers given the opportunity to be involved. Benchmarking visits – when the review team visited other councils with interesting practice and good reputations – made managers aware of a different approach and higher levels of ambition, as well as confirming good practice in Haringey in some areas. Some reviews enabled the reframing of unproductive debates and moved the discussion on to more productive issues. Design reviews and priority reviews have exposed major capability and strategy issues.

Cabinet members' experiences are more mixed. The leader is extremely positive and knows it is time to engage other members in the delivery approach. Some members are peripheral and relatively unengaged – albeit generally supportive. They are briefed, but with a couple of exceptions seem not to get engaged in understanding and using the data. They receive and are interested in priority reviews. They see CDU as something that goes on at the side – and while welcome, it is not at the centre of how they hold their officers to account or keep a grip on performance and delivery.

Figure 9. The views of officers and members on the impact of CDU

Officers are very positive about the impact, credibility and value of CDU. Members' views are more mixed.



Source: Evaluation fieldwork.

For now, CDU is very much seen as the leader and the chief executive's 'thing'.

There is a CDU system for leader and chief executive – [but] cabinet members feel very much over there [while] other people are doing it. That's good because it's being done – but I'm not helping very much.
(Cabinet member)

But the leader and chief executive are increasingly and consistently enthusiastic about the value it adds:

[It gives me] a better understanding of the data and what the data is actually telling me across the organisation – that's hugely helpful. (Chief executive)

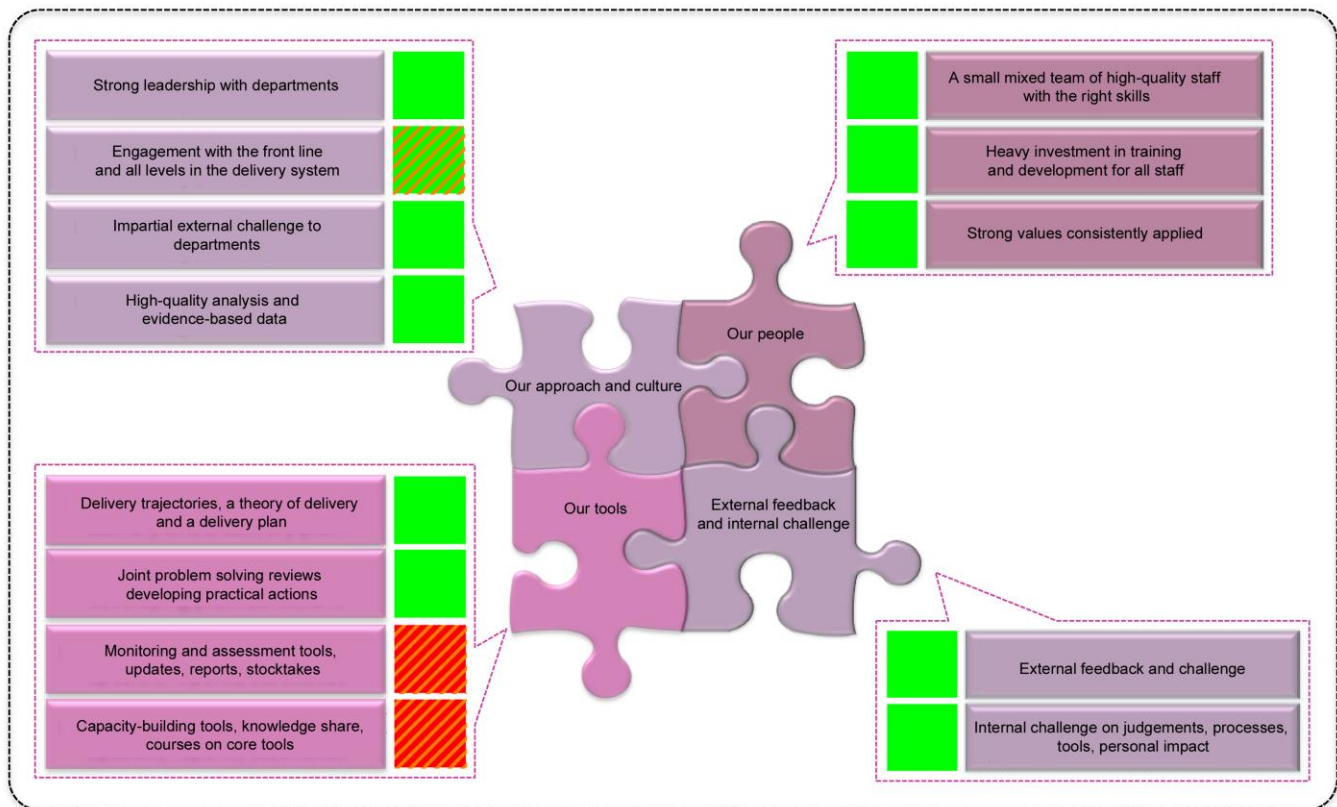
Great progress in particular areas – in other areas [it has generated useful] thinking underlining the fact that there are some fundamental problems and blockages ... It has been really positive on a number of levels.
(Leader)

Are the PMDU success factors in place?

The PMDU success factors set out in Figure 3 were used as a framework for assessing the extent to which CDU had those factors in place. The overall picture is very positive. There are just two areas where significant action is required – and one of those is simply the corollary of leadership and capability gaps in some service areas, especially in the early days of CDU. If these are acted on, and attention is given to the sustainability and renewal of the CDU staff team itself, CDU is well placed to continue to develop strongly and enable Haringey to transform delivery.

Figure 10. An assessment of whether the PMDU success factors are in place in CDU

CDU performs very well against the assessment, but two areas need significant attention.



Source: Evaluation analysis.

Each group of success factors is taken in turn. The individual factors are summarised, and then a comparison is made with CDU.

Approach and culture

There are four PMDU success factors here:

1. strong partnership with departments to ensure a shared understanding of issues and a shared commitment to action
2. engagement with the front line and all levels in the delivery system to understand the impact of existing policy and the benefits and risks of proposed action
3. impartial, external challenge to departments to add real value to delivery planning and implementation
4. high-quality analysis and evidence-based data to monitor progress against trajectory, identify the impact of key policy elements and focus on the things that really matter.

CDU performs well against these tests. One area that could be strengthened somewhat is the consistency of engagement of service staff and managers in priority reviews. It is such engagement that builds commitment and energy to act on the findings of the review. Service staff are also an invaluable resource to the review. CDU is aware of this issue, and knows that it made some pragmatic choices that usually reflected the lack of commitment or capacity of service leaders at the time.

Assessment for each factor:

- CDU has a positive attitude to departments. The team empathise with the challenge of service delivery. They are trusted to brief responsibly. They listen, respond to and act on concerns

raised by services. Their initial communication with services and staff was very clear. Their approach and tools are well understood.

- CDU provides constructive, respectful challenge to delivery plans and progress. The skill and sensitivity CDU staff bring to this has been essential. As they build relationships and content knowledge, they are seen to add substantial value to the service leaders. CDU staff are not afraid to have awkward or tense discussions.
- The priority reviews and design reviews have generally involved or covered all levels of the delivery system. External benchmarking is valued, and enjoyed by service managers. CDU could involve more service staff as full review-team members more often.
- CDU adds value through its analyses and external perspective. Data has underpinned the team's work. Analysis is seen to add new insights to data that people had been producing but not doing much with for years. The recruitment of analyst Ben Ward was crucial.

People

There are three PMDU success factors here:

1. A small mixed team of high-quality staff with the right skills in problem solving, relationship management, data analysis, feedback and coaching, together with a delivery mindset
2. Heavy investment in training and development for all staff in core tools and skills: problem solving, facilitation, presentation, negotiation and engaging the front line
3. Strong, consistent values: open to challenge, plain speaking, empathy with delivery leaders, refusal to take credit from others, persistence, urgency, no opinions without evidence, shared ownership of problems.

CDU rates very well against these factors. It is seen as a model central team in terms of function, capability and way of working. One area that the head of the unit is rightly focused on is the relative fragility of the team. PMDU settled at a size of around 40 people, and could handle turnover reasonably comfortably. But in a team of six it would only take a couple of unexpected or unmanaged departures and the team would lose a great deal of capacity and knowledge.

Assessment for each factor:

- Having some people known and respected across the council meant CDU was seen as a team with a stake in the future of Haringey, not another set of external consultants who dip in and dip out of the council. However, the external members of the team are a crucial part of the mix, bringing different skills and perspectives to the council. Some staff were concerned about the lack of open recruitment to the team, and were disappointed not to have had the chance to apply for roles in the start-up CDU.
- The use of the Isos Partnership to train and coach the team in the core tools, and some of the softer issues around communications and way of working, has been very successful. Ben Ward has been a crucial addition to enable the team to assemble excellent trajectories and bring quality analysis to bear in the priority and design reviews.
- The team is very clear on their core values and how they want to work with departments. Their behaviour is consistent with those values. They are highly regarded by those they work with – and repeatedly overcame the initial, 'How are you going to add value when you are not from the service?' view of some areas.
- The team has generally paired up on priority reviews, or on the priorities they lead on. There is also good, valued support for the development and responsibility of more junior staff. Team members continue to find the experience of working in CDU highly beneficial. They have

provided frank feedback and support to each other in team-development sessions, as well as in their one-to-one development discussions.

Tools

There are four PMDU success factors here:

1. Delivery trajectories informed by an explicit theory of delivery, supported by a delivery plan
2. Joint problem-solving reviews carried out with service leaders, looking at delivery issues from the frontline and customer perspectives, developing practical actions to get delivery on track
3. Monitoring and assessment tools. Self-assessment frameworks, delivery updates and delivery reports to stocktakes and senior leaders
4. Capacity-building tools – knowledge share, courses on problem solving and delivery planning, trajectories and other core tools, joint reviews, ad hoc support.

In Haringey, these factors form a more mixed picture. There is an excellent story in relation to the first two. CDU has learned and applied the core tools extremely well. In the case of the third factor, the relative lack of time spent on discussion of performance against trajectory at the set-piece stocktakes is a significant weakness of the monitoring routines in Haringey. The reasons for this are understandable – above all, the high turnover of senior officials – but the limited face-to-face accountability of priority leaders, the frequent absence of the lead cabinet member, and the lack of time to really dig into the story behind progress urgently need to be addressed.

Now that the senior leadership team is in place, priority leaders' relative lack of personal, face-to-face accountability for their performance can also be dealt with. In part, this will be addressed through the new corporate plan and associated governance for performance. In future it should always be priority leaders who are accounting for progress at stocktakes and briefing cabinet members on performance and problems.

There is a need to rethink the cycle of delivery updates, briefings, and how they are used at stocktakes. CDU should consider the reintroduction of regular notes, and tighten up the recording of actions and decisions at stocktakes.

Assessment for each factor:

- The quality of trajectories, the assessment of delivery plans, and delivery updates is excellent. CDU worked constructively with departments to create trajectories and assess delivery plans. Sometimes this required the CDU team to support a process to produce both from scratch.
- The quality of priority-review outputs is very good. Those involved in the reviews enjoy them and find the insights and analysis invaluable. The CDU team have taken on some very tough issues. The customer focus and external benchmarking work well. But service staff should always be full team members. Follow-through is hampered by very variable – albeit improving – service leadership and capability.
- While the technical quality of the monitoring updates is good, the lack of sustained, face-to-face accountability among service leaders as well as lead members is a major weakness. CDU tends to brief and account for performance. Stocktakes have neglected trajectories to focus on priority reviews. The lack of a forum in which trajectories are discussed and reviewed in depth, on single priorities with politicians and senior officials, is also a serious weakness. There is considerable work needed to create consistent, face-to-face briefing and stocktakes.
- Stocktakes have not yet settled into the right routine. Early stocktakes focused heavily on delivery plans and trajectories; more recent stocktakes have tended to spend significant, valued time on findings from priority reviews and design reviews. The lack of minutes, action points and a formal feedback process are weaknesses that need to be addressed.

- The scale of the capability gaps across the council means the classic PMDU model cannot work in some areas – if there is no leader with whom to engage, or who is willing to take responsibility for delivery. In the short term, this is unavoidable. But unless there is council-wide effort to build capability to deliver, using the core CDU methods and tools, the unit will be using too much energy to substitute for capacity and leadership gaps in too many of the priority areas.

External feedback and internal challenge

There are two PMDU success factors here:

1. External feedback and challenge – regular feedback from departmental leads; evaluation of products and processes
2. Internal challenge – moderation of delivery reports; review of how well process, tools and relationship are working; reflection on personal impact and development priorities.

PMDU was in part successful because of its almost obsessive attention to detail. Team sessions where draft assessments were peer reviewed were an integral part of its working. Barber would get the whole team into a room to help him practise and revise crucial presentations to the Prime Minister or Cabinet. The unit spent time learning about what worked, and changing what didn't.

Again, CDU is a model of what these success factors should look like in practice. The team's preparedness to reflect on and challenge their approach and capacity is very impressive. In turn, the most senior leaders are open to rethinking and refreshing the model to make sure it evolves and adapts to changing capacity and priorities. Helped perhaps by being smaller than PMDU, CDU has a greater capacity to handle a wide range of challenges and development issues within team discussions, rather than falling back on the head of the unit to resolve them.

Assessment for each factor:

- The CDU applies peer review and challenge to products as well as the team's own personal development. Staff periodically seek feedback from the consultants who supported their set-up. And they actively and energetically supported the external evaluation.
- The team has a very open, flat structure and use open, peer challenge to improve products and reflect on their individual strengths and development areas. They review and challenge progress and are their own harshest critics. They have identified, if not resolved, all of the key issues the external evaluation raised.

Opportunities and complications

A number of other significant issues emerged from the evaluation fieldwork. Some are positive and create opportunities to make this new approach to delivery an integral part of the new Haringey; others are complications that need to be addressed to ensure CDU has the maximum impact.

CDU's delivery tools are understood and valued; people want to learn how to use them. The challenge for Haringey is how to help service managers and leaders across the council learn these methods and tools so that they become embedded as part of business as usual.

There is an appetite in the organisation to learn this stuff. CDU is phenomenally influential – people look at CDU and say, 'That is what we want to be more like' – but [they] don't know how to do it ... [We should be] up-skilling people who have some of the capacity to get on with it. (Service manager)

However, CDU's tools and methods only really work in services with the necessary leadership, ambition, ownership and capability. In some priority areas there remain significant gaps. This has made it hard to engage in some cases, and in others it means that however good a problem-solving review may be, there is no one to act on it and implement actions that will improve delivery.

After the review, the service didn't have the capacity to manage the action plan ... We did a review five months later and progress had been far too slow. Leadership and management was always a challenge in this area ... Maybe we needed to be clearer about how to tackle that in the original review. (Isos partner)

Excellent framework, excellent people but what the council needs cannot be delivered solely by them ... It needs the trickle-down, cascading, and creating champions in all parts of the organisation. It is not sustainable in a small group of people. (Priority leader)

As well as being dragged into continued engagement with service areas that lack the capacity to follow through priority reviews, CDU has also been co-opted on to other important work, such as the corporate plan and the governance review. This raises two issues: CDU is overstretched, and there is a danger it may lose focus on the drive towards delivery that is always needed to get results in the PMDU model. These issues arise because of the lack of capacity elsewhere in central teams.

There is a trade-off between follow-through and relentless grind on delivery – with the need to start fixing the broken machine so that CDU is increasingly working with people who get it. (Team member)

It's one of the things that keeps me up at nights ... not driving delivery consistently enough because of capacity ... I worry in some areas they feel they haven't seen much of us between delivery assessments ... I don't like that. (Team member)

I can't help feeling we are probably trying to do too much, particularly with the priority reviews – they tend to take precedence over core ongoing work. (Team member)

A final complication, which is unsurprising at this relatively early stage of the delivery unit's development, is the lack of engagement of members other than the council leader.

There is a CDU system for leader and chief executive – [but] cabinet members feel very much over there [while] other people are doing it. That's good because it's being done – but I'm not helping very much. (Cabinet member)

I worry that members need to learn the value of this stuff to help them get to grips with challenge and assurance about things they are [worried] about happening ... without that it's not sustainable ... We haven't got this right – we should not be sitting down with cabinet members by ourselves [when briefing on delivery updates]. (Team member)

This is an important issue for the next phase of development of the delivery approach. Delivery-unit methods could work as well for cabinet members as they do for the leader – enabling them to better oversee the delivery of council priorities in their portfolio. Adoption of this approach by at least some cabinet members would improve the sustainability and consistency of Haringey's effort to transform delivery. But cabinet members would need support from the centre, allied with new governance arrangements for performance and an improvement in the capacity of services to work with cabinet members in the new way.

Conclusions

Haringey's creation of CDU has been remarkably successful in a short time. The way it works, its tools, and the quality and diversity of the team would be recognisable to anyone who had worked in Sir Michael Barber's PMDU. The technical quality of work on delivery plan assessments, priority reviews and trajectories is as good as the best of PMDU. The skills, mindset and credibility of the CDU staff are excellent. Early delivery successes show this approach works in Haringey.

The team and Zina Etheridge have made a few necessary changes to the PMDU model in order to reflect Haringey's circumstances. These choices were logical at the point they were made – but there is now a risk that some of them become established as the norm, even though circumstances have changed and they are no longer the right answer. Eighteen months on from the set-up of CDU, now that the senior leadership team is almost complete, it is important to take stock and refresh the approach.

Senior leaders want more than the delivery of priority services. They rightly see CDU as a vital catalyst for the wider transformation of Haringey. These ambitions, alongside significant capability, leadership and management gaps, significantly increase expectations for CDU. Some elements of the Haringey model are not strong enough yet to meet these expectations.

6. Adapting the PMDU model: some lessons

This penultimate chapter reflects on the lessons that can be drawn from the Haringey case study, along with other work at the Institute for Government on international delivery units and successful civil service reforms.

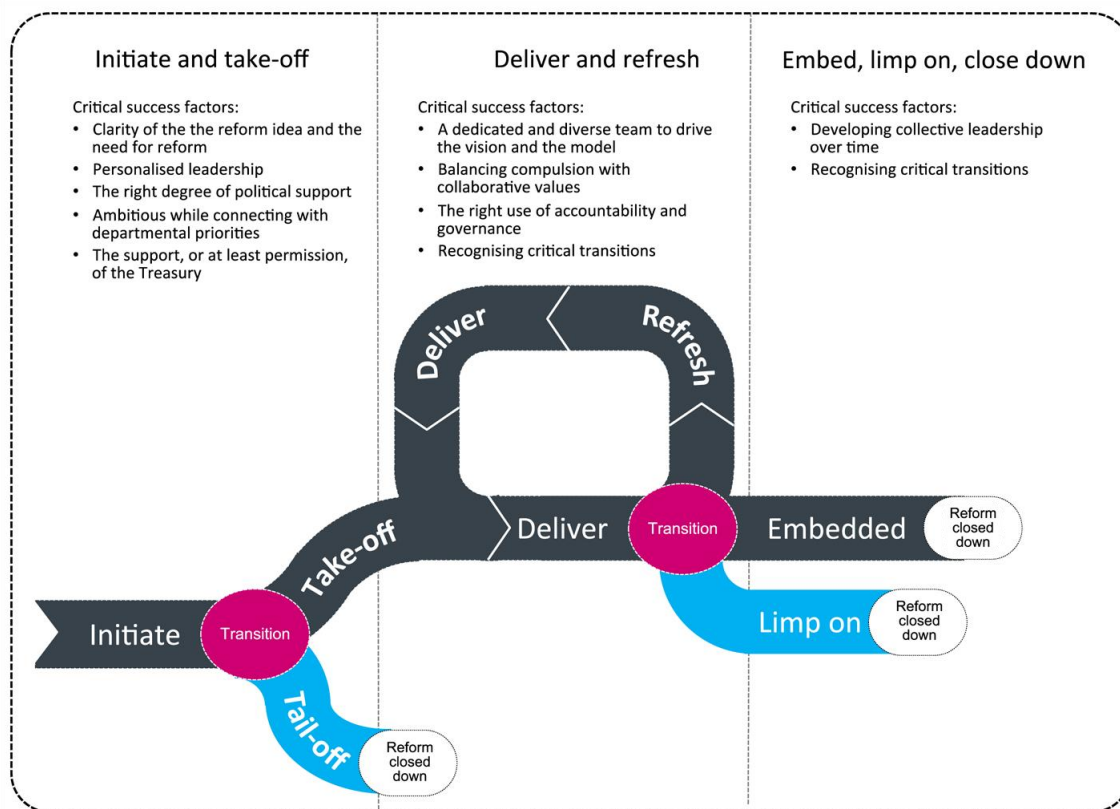
All reforms need to be refreshed and renewed

There were three phases of PMDU between 2001 and 2010 – each with quite distinctive successes, challenges, leadership and operating models. The Barber PMDU was designed for the blend of personalities and politics, and for the culture and incentives of the UK Civil Service, at that time. PMDU had a very different focus at the start of a parliament compared with the last year of that parliament. The active leadership of Tony Blair, with a fresh electoral mandate, had an electrifying impact in 2001 – in contrast to the struggle to keep ministers' attention when Blair and Gordon Brown were in their respective unhappy final years in charge, understandably distracted from delivery, first by war and then by recession.

When PMDU was working on established priorities, the rhythm and focus of its work was determined by the relentless grind to deliver. But at the start of a new spending period or government, faced with new priorities and with departments that had not worked with PMDU before, it took time to build trust and capability. The focus necessarily shifted to developing delivery plans and carrying out design reviews to establish a plausible theory of delivery and trajectory.

Research by the Institute for Government on successful reforms – including PMDU – shows that all reforms evolve, thrive and at some level fail during their life cycle. The most successful are those that have embedded new 'transformative routines' in the organisation, which live on beyond the life of a reform programme or central team. A number of critical success factors were found to lift or drag down a reform at different stages. They explain why PMDU flourished at some points and struggled at others.

Figure 11. Factors that lift a reform



Source: Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World*, Institute for Government, 2014.

The PMDU model is well suited to local public service

It is often forgotten that city management models from the US heavily influenced the design of PMDU – notably Police Commissioner Bill Bratton’s CompStat, set up in 1994 in New York City. Further iterations of that model have cross-fertilised with PMDU’s tools and methods. Given these origins, it is no surprise that the approach sits comfortably in local public service organisations.

Officials in the US who have worked on these models at both state and city level reflect that it is much easier to run a delivery unit/stat initiative at the city than at the state level, because cities have more direct responsibility for frontline services.³⁴ PMDU and departments had to work through multiple external partners, such as train and infrastructure companies, to drive delivery.

Local public services in the UK are more likely than national government to have the sustained focus on priorities that is an important part of PMDU/Labour’s delivery successes. Councils tend to have leaders, officials and priorities that stick for many years – in stark contrast to the short tenure of ministers and senior officials in central government.

Reforms in central government are frequently hampered or extinguished by transitions – a new minister, new permanent secretary or director general, or a new government. The greater longevity of its officials and members means that local government is probably better placed than Whitehall to receive the full benefits of the PMDU model.

³⁴ Freeman, G., and Gold, J., *Data-Driven Delivery: Lessons from the O’Malley administration of Maryland*, Institute for Government, January 2015, p. 5.

Key differences between the PMDU and Haringey models

Perhaps the biggest difference between PMDU and CDU is the context and setting in which they operated. PMDU existed in a world of highly competitive, somewhat dysfunctional central units. Neither the Cabinet Office nor the Civil Service had anything resembling corporate leadership.

The Cabinet Office is not a conventional department. It is more often described as a court – with various senior leaders competing for the patronage of the prime minister and cabinet secretary and for the attention of departments. This can waste energy, and the situation is exacerbated by the lack of anything resembling effective corporate leadership across the Civil Service. Sir Michael Barber worked assiduously to ensure that PMDU was the most useful and visible of a number of units set up at the same time in the Cabinet Office (for example, the Office of Public Service Reform).

In Haringey, there was no other central unit seeking to drive transformation. With the clear support of the council leader and chief executive, and reporting to the deputy chief executive, service leaders were in no doubt of the primacy of CDU and its approach to delivery.

The CDU made relatively few changes to the core tools, templates and processes of PMDU – they worked well in Haringey. But there were four significant differences between the classic PMDU model and the model that evolved in north London. Two of them do not matter and make sense in the Haringey setting. The other two are differences that need to be rethought in Haringey and avoided by others because they weaken face-to-face accountability and undermine the relentless drive to deliver that is a non-negotiable element of the PMDU model.

Figure 12. Key differences between the PMDU model and CDU

PMDU model	CDU adaptation	Does it matter?
Six-monthly delivery reports and monthly notes to the PM.	Delivery updates every two months aligned with the stocktakes.	Probably not. Other adaptations of PMDU model overseas have also not opted to use six monthly reports.
Stocktakes focus on a single priority and progress against the trajectory.	At least five or six items on agendas. Trajectories and delivery updates not usually discussed.	Yes, it means there is not a place where cabinet members, the leader and the chief executive are holding the priority leader to account for progress.
Secretary of state and permanent secretary account to PM for progress.	Cabinet members are briefed by CDU, but don't hold accountability for delivery.	Yes, cabinet members feel outside the process and are not equipped to hold their senior officials to account.
A 'big beast' is needed to lead the Delivery Unit and open doors.	A relatively flat team supported by an experienced senior manager.	No. Strong leadership by the most senior officials and the Leader provides the necessary backing for the unit to work.

Source: Fieldwork analysis.

Lessons for others from Haringey

Haringey's experience offers some valuable pointers for any organisation considering using the PMDU models.

1. Know the context of the reform you are adapting, and how it differs from your own context

- Haringey's adaptation is successful because the CDU team really understood the context of the original reform and how that compared with their own context and history in Haringey. They knew what it was about the PMDU that they wanted in Haringey.
- The approach works very well in local government. People find the tools and methods easy to understand, and the basic tools require minimal adaptation. This is in part because much of it was invented in local public-service settings.
- Connecting a delivery unit to a wider programme of transformation increases the potential impact and value of the reform, but also increases expectations of the delivery unit.

2. Team diversity and way of working really matter and are hard to create

- The values, way of working and culture of PMDU are a non-negotiable part of any adaptation; they will always trump toolkits and processes. This is perhaps the least understood and hardest aspect of PMDU to replicate. But the training, support and coaching that were given to CDU in its set-up phase show how it can be done.
- The quality and diversity of the team, together with excellent initial training and support by people who really understood the PMDU model, were the foundation of the unit's success. High-quality analytical staff are a non-negotiable requirement for any delivery unit.

3. Resist distractions and stick with delivery

- It is tough to stay focused on the relentless grind of delivery, but the unit and its sponsors must keep challenging and testing whether it is paying sufficient attention to driving the performance numbers in the right direction. Once you create an effective and well-regarded unit, there will be a steady stream of reasonable-sounding demands to use the unit's staff – and the unit can quickly lose its focus.

4. Pay attention to wider capability – you may need to pause and fix it

- To create the most productive context for the delivery unit to operate in, you may need to put in place an ambitious programme to equip staff across the organisation with the confidence and capability to use PMDU methods and tools.
- If leadership are not taking sufficient responsibility for delivery of priorities, or if the service area lacks capacity to take the actions required to deliver, you should not expect the delivery unit to substitute for that leadership and capability. To create sustainable delivery, you change the leadership, and pause to put in place the right capacity.

5. You need a broad coalition and open-minded leadership if you want to embed delivery

- An important lesson from government reform is to have leaders who are prepared to review and refresh their reform – this creates the potential for long-term success. Such leaders understand that the reform will take time to settle, and each stage must build on the best of what went before, while making adjustments to what is not working.
- The council has set itself the aim of embedding the CDU approach as the new, 'Haringey' way of delivering. This will require a wider coalition of actively engaged cabinet members and senior leaders who have adopted the tools and methods of delivery. This wider ownership will ensure the approach survives the inevitable changes in senior leaders.

Learning from other adaptations of the PMDU model

The PMDU model developed over time in the UK, in good and bad ways. Its many overseas adopters have also developed and sometimes improved it. The Institute for Government and the Ontario-based Mowat Centre recently published a report looking at international innovations in the centres of government.³⁵ The report was launched at an event hosted by the Institute, showcasing the delivery unit of Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland. The report's author highlighted four innovations from the development of delivery-unit models that others might draw on:

- **Transparency:** Maryland has updated the delivery-unit model for the era of open, data-driven government. The Governor's delivery unit maintains an online performance dashboard that shows the progress being made on strategic priorities. Citizens can see in almost real time whether the government is 'on track', 'progressing', making 'insufficient progress' or 'lagging' behind proposed timelines. Departmental performance data is also posted online, as are summaries of the stocktake meetings, along with visual aids used in them.
- **Undertaking front-end scrutiny:** Barber's PMDU, like most delivery units around the world, tended to scrutinise priorities once they had gained political approval, although in the final phase of the PMDU, under Ray Shostak, considerable effort was put into developing the priorities collaboratively with key players. Without such preparatory work, the danger is that poor policy design behind the agreed priority offers a poisoned chalice to those tasked with implementation. Australia's delivery unit (the Cabinet Implementation Unit) spends much of its time scrutinising the feasibility of departmental proposals before they become agreed policy.
- **Building distributed capability:** It is too easy for delivery units to focus their efforts on challenging departmental performance. As centres of expertise in delivery they also need to help build capacity. Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit, for instance, offers training in implementation planning to policy professionals across the Australian Public Service.
- **Innovation labs:** Most delivery units develop action plans to resolve implementation problems in partnership with departments and heads of government. But this approach is not always enough to solve particularly complex challenges. Units in Malaysia and Tanzania have enjoyed success in using pop-up 'delivery labs'. These six- to eight-week labs bring together a more diverse range of stakeholders (from inside and outside of government) to develop an action plan.

The Institute for Government has just published a briefing on the Maryland Governor's delivery unit and its adaption of PMDU and 'stat' models, which sets out the evolution of the approach from the original CompStat model, and shows how it borrowed from PMDU to meet the challenge of operating at state rather than city level. These challenges and insights are to some extent reflected in Haringey.³⁶

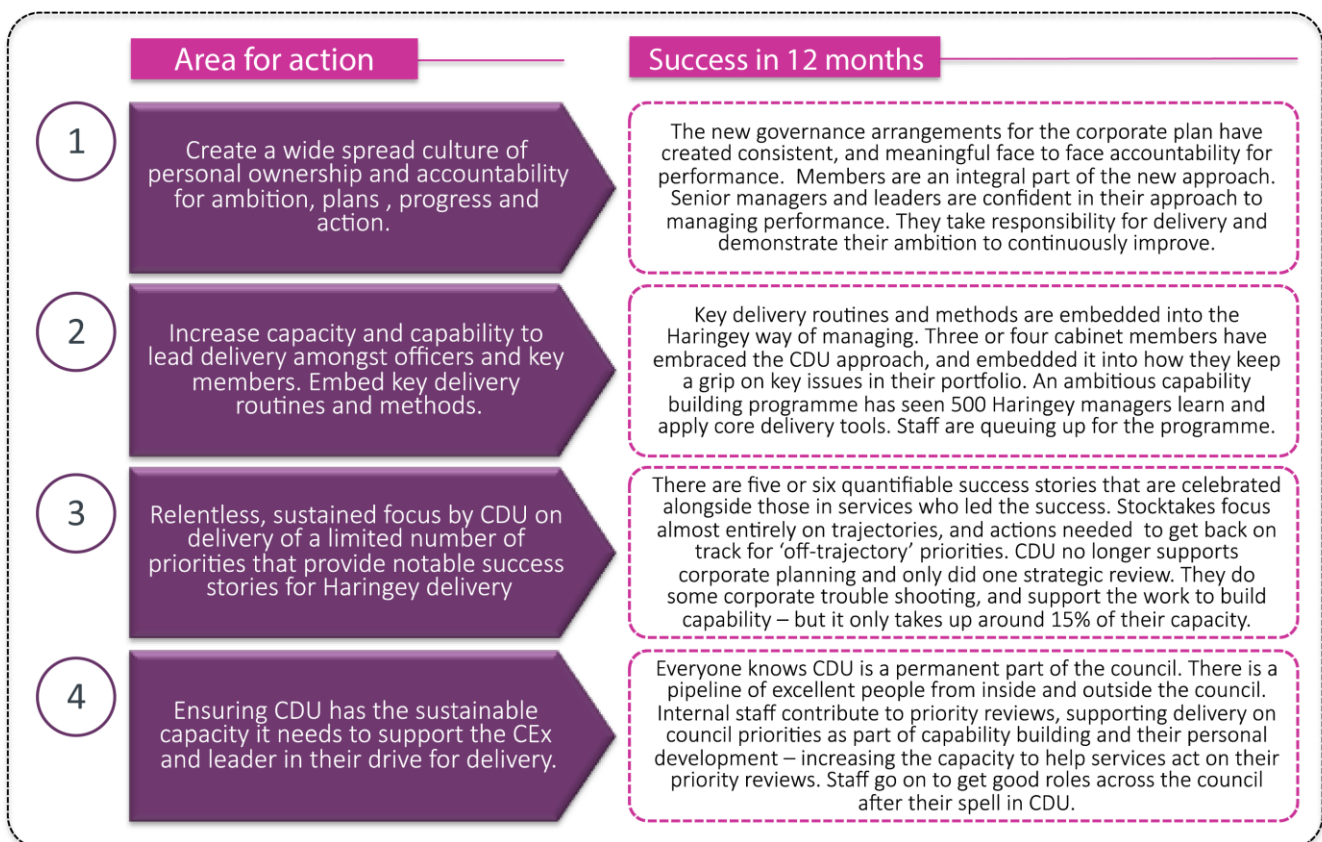
³⁵ Gold, J., *International Delivery*, op. cit.

³⁶ Freeman, G., and Gold, J., *Data-driven Delivery: Lessons from the O'Malley administration of Maryland*, Institute for Government, January 2015.

7. What next for Haringey and the CDU?

The findings of the external evaluation carried out by Peter Thomas have been used in workshops with the CDU, groups of service managers, the senior leadership team and the larger senior leader group (around 25 officials). These workshops established four areas for action to strengthen delivery in Haringey and maintain CDU's early success.

Figure 13. Four areas for action to ensure capability to deliver is embedded in Haringey



Source: Evaluation analysis following workshops.

These actions are intended to be an integral part of the transformation that is being led in Haringey. They address all the most important issues raised by the external evaluation. If the CDU team are able to implement them and achieve the success they strive for, they will be well on the way to transforming the capability and confidence of the council and much better placed to meet the goals set by its leader:

The job of the council is not just the delivery of basic services to a mediocre or a good standard, or to ensure that getting the basic right. What we are about is changing Haringey and life chances, the local economy – changing the place in its fullest sense.

Bibliography

Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver: Fighting to transform Britain's public services*, Methuen, 2008.

Barber, M., et al., *Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders*, Corwin, 2011.

Bouchal, P., Kidson, M., Norris, E., and Rutter, J., *Doing Them Justice: Lessons from four cases of policy implementation*, Institute for Government, July 2014, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Cleary, S., *The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU), 2005-2007: What impact did the machinery of government and leadership changes have on the PMDU?*

Freeguard, G., and Gold, J., *Data-driven Delivery: Lessons from the O'Malley administration of Maryland*, Institute for Government, January 2015, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Gash, T., Hallsworth, M., Ismail, S., and Paun, A., *Performance Art: Enabling better management of public services*, Institute for Government, December 2008, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Gold, J., *International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation*, Institute for Government and Mowat Centre, October 2014, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Hallsworth, M., Parker, S., and Rutter, J., *Policy Making in the Real World: Evidence and Analysis*, Institute for Government, April 2011, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Harris, J., and Rutter, J., *Centre Forward: Effective Support for the Prime Minister at the Centre of Government*, Institute for Government, July 2014, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Page, J., Thomas, P., Pearson, J., Panchamia, N., and Traficante, J., *Leading Change in the Civil Service*, Institute for Government, February 2014, retrieved 16 January 2015.

Panchamia, N., and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World: Patterns of success in UK civil service reform*, Institute for Government, February 2014, retrieved 16 January 2015.

The Institute for Government is here to act as a catalyst for better government.

The Institute for Government is an independent charity founded in 2008 to help make government more effective.

- We carry out research, look into the big governance challenges of the day and find ways to help government improve, rethink and sometimes see things differently.
- We offer unique insights and advice from experienced people who know what it's like to be inside government both in the UK and overseas.
- We provide inspirational learning and development for very senior policy makers.

We do this through seminars workshops, talks or interesting connections that invigorate and provide fresh ideas.

We are placed where senior members of all parties and the Civil Service can discuss the challenges of making government work, and where they can seek and exchange practical insights from the leading thinker practitioners, public servants, academics and opinion formers.

Copies of this report are available alongside other research work at:

www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk

February 2015

© Institute for Government 2015

2 Carlton Gardens

London

SW1Y 5AA

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7747 0400

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7766 0700

Email: enquiries@instituteforgovernment.org.uk

The Institute is a company limited by guarantee registered in England No. 6480524

Registered Charity No. 1123926