

# TRANSFORMING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THROUGH STORMWATER REGIONAL REALIGNMENT

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## **ABSTRACT (200 WORDS MAXIMUM)**

Auckland Council is the result of the combination of eight legacy councils. From 'Day One' of amalgamation on 1 November 2010, the Stormwater Operations Group (Stormwater) has focused on continuity of service provision, ensuring minimal disruption while utilising legacy processes, procedures, systems and protocols.

During the past two years, Stormwater has been moving from the initial transition state into transformation mode. The amalgamation of several entities has provided the opportunity for the streamlining of service provision, adoption of 'best practice' throughout the region, and overall improvement of the customer experience.

Two years on since amalgamation, Stormwater's maintenance contracts are in the process of being consolidated, aligning levels of service, providing more efficient service delivery, and contributing to savings.

This paper will focus on the challenges facing Stormwater's journey to transform the customer service experience, including describing how the Stormwater Unit has worked with the Call Centres to substantially reduce misdirected calls and streamline responses; align regional levels of services; and, undertake customer satisfaction surveys that inform continued improvement processes.

## **PRESENTER PROFILE**

Nikki was seconded to the Auckland Transition Agency and is currently employed at Auckland Council in Stormwater as Team Leader Stormwater Customer Response, responsible for driving operational and regional alignment including workflow, performance and achievement, process enhancement, project management and customer service.

Prior to implementing a new workflow system, which included introducing new software, training, setting levels of service and enforcing new internal structures and improving customer service at an accountancy firm, Nikki also worked 8 years at Ernst & Young.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Local Government (Tamaki Makaurau Reorganisation) Act 2009 provided the dissolution of eight councils including seven local councils and one regional council in the Auckland region on 31 October 2010.

The assets and liabilities of these legacy councils were transferred to eight new government entities being Auckland Council and seven Council Controlled Organisations (CCO).

The Auckland Transition Agency (ATA) was a government appointed body that planned and managed all matters in relation to the reorganisation. The role of the ATA was to produce the structure of the new

organisation and to meet the operational needs for Day One to enable business as usual as a starting point. The ATA focussed on designing the structure needed to survive the first 100 days, a timeframe comparable to the new Mayor, Len Brown's 100 day plan.

Part of the ATA's structure for Auckland saw the three waters split between Auckland Council and Watercare, one of the CCOs. The separation of stormwater to Auckland Council and wastewater and water supply to Watercare brought its own challenges in terms of splitting of water data, reduced system capability, developing policies and procedures and building key relationships with Watercare and other Auckland Council departments to ensure continued delivery of quality Stormwater service. This was particularly evident with the areas of Auckland that had combined sewers.

## **2 TRANSITION – EARLY DAYS**

Stormwater's operations engineers mostly comprised engineers who were previously part of the wider legacy councils' three waters teams. Many of the Stormwater Operations engineers continued to fill a substantially similar role, based in the same location, working with the same team.

Maintenance of stormwater networks was carried out by maintenance contractors with term contracts. These contracts continued through the transition stage.

As levels of service with contractors are primarily dictated by the maintenance contracts, levels of service also remained the same and would continue to do so until new maintenance contracts were tendered, awarded and rolled out. Therefore existing legacy processes and procedures, systems and protocols continued to be followed. Stormwater was also constrained with other Auckland Council departmental interdependencies such as Consents, Regulatory and Parks which also continued to operate under legacy procedures.

Management of stormwater within the region was split into four areas, South, Central, West and North. The southern area was the first to experience an operations and maintenance contract expiry scheduled for 1 June 2012. Hence the southern area was the first to move from transition into the transformation phase as this proved an optimal time to revisit Key Performance Indicators, levels of service and to revisit in general how Stormwater wished to operate its future state processes.

Hand in hand with the levels of service requirements in the regional operational and maintenance contracts, the overall customer service standards varied significantly across the region and required regional alignment. In parallel, Auckland Council was also in the process of developing its overall strategic direction which Stormwater recognized was to be used as the basis of moving forward and integrated into any initiatives that stormwater were to introduce.

## **3 TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION – CUSTOMER SERVICE**

After 18 months, Auckland Council embarked on changing its focus from transition to transformation. It was time to focus on the future, where Auckland Council is going and what its culture and values would represent, rather than living in the past, dwelling on constraints and legacy practices. Numerous Transformation Groups were set up to drive this change. Customer Service was seen as a high priority for Auckland Council with several projects underway. These included the "Every Interaction Counts" programme. This programme is about developing internal and external customer service and growing the leaders and managers within Auckland Council.

Customer service in Stormwater was given a high priority focus from the management team. Improving customer service like most initiatives needs management endorsement with a long term commitment driven from the top through consistent messages and KPIs that cascade to all staff and suppliers.

As part of a recent restructure, a Team Leader Stormwater Customer Services role was created and line management changes were made moving the existing Stormwater Response Coordinators (customer services staff) into a centralised team. Centralising this team has proved pivotal in driving Customer Service in a regional manner. The formation of this team has been instrumental in recognizing service delivery gaps, coordinating and driving new initiatives and streamlining processes and procedures.

The role of the Stormwater Customer Services Team is to support and enable stormwater engineers and maintenance contractors to give quality and outstanding customer service to the ratepayers and citizens of Auckland.

Various initiatives were started, which include improving the initial customer response, i.e. misdirected calls; customer satisfaction surveys; and alignment of levels of service and key performance indicators. These are discussed in more detail below.

### **3.1 I-KNOW CHALLENGES AND MISDIRECTED CALLS:**

One of the top priorities was I-know, the region-wide web based knowledge base used by the Call Centre, the Written Communications Team (that responds to on-line requests), and front line customer service staff to direct customer queries to the right CCO, division, department, team and person. Early analysis showed that misdirected calls for stormwater related enquiries tracked at 14.60%. This was clearly unacceptable.

Post transition legacy knowledge bases remained in use resulting in a high volume of misdirected calls as organizational changes and processes were unknown and therefore not documented in any of the knowledge bases on 1 November 2010.

Integrating knowledge content into one I-Know database started with transferring each area into the one knowledge base and reviewing to identify one best practice where possible. This process was actively driven by the Stormwater Response Coordinators and ultimately agreed by the wider Stormwater team prior to being rolled out. Today, Stormwater rates as one of the I-Know top performers.

Streamlining I-Know, training Call Centre and customer service staff, creating a Stormwater glossary and identifying Stormwater Champions within the Call Centre enabled Stormwater to work more efficiently and effectively resulting in misdirected calls in February 2013 tracking at only 1.07%.

### **3.2 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TRACKING**

#### **3.2.1 AUCKLAND COUNCIL ANNUAL CUSTOMER SURVEY**

Auckland Council undertook a stock take of the customer satisfaction in the operations area by appointing Colmar Brunton to survey the customers. In the last financial year 8,500 Requests for Services (RFS) were raised by the public in stormwater, these were used to evaluate Stormwater's performance. The evaluation was based on 400 completed survey calls. The customer remained anonymous unless they elected to take part in further video interviews or be part of the group interviews hosted post the survey by Colmar Brunton which were subsequently watched by council staff via webcam.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were set and agreed by Stormwater to increase the overall customer survey result from 51% in February 2012 to 53% by February 2013. The February 2013 result was 55% and it is intended to raise this significantly by February 2014.

The overall satisfaction target of 53% may appear low. There are other areas in Council that operate with similar satisfaction targets due to the nature of the service area. These departments deal with complex processes which often involve time frames and user pays services such as Resource and Building Consents which significantly affects the ability to keep customers satisfied. Other areas such as libraries have satisfaction targets set at 80%+ as people can use the services for free and it is hard to disappoint those customers.

### Results for 11/12 Auckland Council annual customer survey

Agreed Key KPIs for Stormwater	11/12 Result	12/13 Target
Overall customer satisfaction with stormwater services	51%	53%
Staff kept me informed on progress	41%	43%
Overall staff were helpful regarding this matter	61%	65%
I feel my individual circumstances were taken into account	53%	55%

The results indicated three areas that were important for Stormwater to acknowledge and focus on.

#### Looking at drivers of satisfaction – What are we already doing well:

- Staff did what they said they would do
- Staff were competent

#### Areas for Improvement – Where do we need to focus:

- Staff kept me informed on the progress of this matter
- Overall they were very helpful regarding this matter
- Individual circumstances taken into account

#### Hygiene Factors – What we can't let slip:

- Responded in a timely manner
- Staff listened to me
- I was treated fairly

Some of the quick wins identified through the survey were simple and easy to implement and resulted in the follow percentage gains in FY12/13:

**50% - 73%**

#### **Stormwater officers identifying themselves**

The introduction of voluntary uniforms and identification cards

**88% - 96%**

#### **Call centre satisfaction increased**

Training Call Centre staff, updating processes and procedures ie. I-Know

**37% - 65%**

#### **Stormwater officers explaining private issues adequately**

Sharing and educating engineers, it is okay to say no, it is how you say no.

There are many long term initiatives underway which have resulted from the FY11/12 survey which will not impact the FY12/13 results. One of Auckland Council's learnings is the need to stagger the research to ensure the departments are provided with results in a timely fashion to enable initiatives and improvements to take effect. For example, In February 2012 surveys were conducted for all departments and results compiled. In July the results were presented, and in August Stormwater held a workshop to identify initiatives and improvements. September customers were interviewed in February 2013 forming part of the next year's results. This year Colmar Brunton will focus on one department at a time, staggering departmental survey calls to produce prompt reporting.

### **3.2.2 AUCKLAND COUNCIL ANNUAL CUSTOMER SURVEY**

While the Colmar Brunton survey proved useful and informative, Stormwater is using a similar mechanism backed on the Colmar Brunton survey to track customer service improvement and to gain factual and useful data to develop customer service strategies. As the Colmar Brunton survey was an anonymous, unsupported annual exercise, conducting our own survey monthly enables us to:

- track our KPI progress,
- distinguish between on -site and front-line staff
- most importantly, identify the RFS the customer was basing their experience on, identify the actual issue and investigate what went wrong. Patterns have started to merge.

We have been able to drill down to see:

- what processes are failing,
- what processes need implementing,
- what materials need to be developed
- which staff need further training
- what customer values need to be installed

The introduction of some healthy competition has been agreed at management level between the areas both within Stormwater and between our maintenance contractors. The results of the surveys will be raised and discussed at the combined quarterly meetings.

The monthly survey has revealed some valuable information and customers have been enthusiastic in sharing their experiences, good and bad, which has to date been valuable. Some key findings have come to light such as the following two examples:

- A customer asked the contractor to clean up the site, the contractor told the customer they were too busy, the customer had to hire a skip bin and clean up the site themselves. **Result:** The contractor's management team was unaware this had happened and were able to take steps to ensure it did not happen again.
- A customer phoned and asked Council to unblock a council owned drain as when it next rained water would flood his property. The caller told him he would need to phone back when it flooded. **Result** This example highlighted the need to update i-Know and provide further call centre training.
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### **3.2.3 360 DEGREE RELATIONSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP SURVEY**

The next survey that has been developed but is yet to be released is a cultural 360 Degree Relationship and Collaborative Relationship Survey between the maintenance contractors and Stormwater, designed to track relationships, collegiate behaviours and practices.

### **3.2.4 SERVICE DELIVERY DEPENDENCY AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND CCO'S**

One of the key drivers arising from the customer surveys was the need to build a culture of taking responsibility for handovers of jobs from one department or CCO to another. Our staff members are required to take accountability to ensure the customer needs are met during the handover of jobs as customers view Council and CCOs as one. In a recent survey, 14 out of 40 people indicated that their job was unresolved although it was closed in Council's system. It is evident that there is the need for processes to assist and guide staff in job handover.

Post transition, building relationships across CCOs and departments proved difficult with staff and managers coming to terms with what their own roles entailed and concentrating on getting their own department and teams in order. There was initially little time or inclination to take on another departments' problems. One of the key issues for Stormwater was that often the Call Centre did not know who to contact, who was responsible for what and so jobs were bounced back and forward until accountability was taken. Out of desperation, engineers would circumvent unknown processes and would contact old workmates to assist. However such good intentions generally led lack of or slow action.

Stormwater is still in the infancy stages of streamlining processes and procedures across the CCOs, however successful meetings have been held with both Watercare and Auckland Transport. In early April a review of our most recent survey results revealed no handover complaints were made by any Stormwater customer regarding the handover from Stormwater to Watercare.

Overall the customer survey results have proved valuable. We are able to gather evidence of process failures that involve other areas of Council and CCOs to reinforce the need to change processes.

### **3.3 THE ALIGNMENT OF LEVELS OF SERVICE AND KPI'S FOR THE REGION**

The development and alignment of the region-wide agreed future state levels of service, KPIs, and terminology were instigated by the expiry of the first operations and maintenance contract post transition. The development of the contractor performance, Benchmark Scorecards, was subsequently developed after the new maintenance contractor was appointed in July 2012 in the South and is currently being rolled out to existing maintenance contractors in Central, West and North.

#### **3.3.1 MAINTENANCE CONTRACTOR BENCHMARK SCORECARD**

The customer service results are added into the Benchmark Scorecard which forms the basis for monitoring maintenance contractor performance. The focus areas for performance are:

- Health & Safety
- Quality and Environment
- Customer Response and Feedback
- Programmed Maintenance and Budgets.

In addition to meeting monthly with area managers, quarterly meetings are scheduled with maintenance contractors to meet with Stormwater Operations Management, contract engineers and customer service to collectively review the Benchmark Scorecard. The driver behind these meetings is to push for best performance, encourage innovation and sharing of best practice. To date the maintenance contractors have been supportive of following the Councils collaborative approach.

### **3.3.2 ALIGNING AND REGIONALISING LEVELS OF SERVICE AND KPI'S**

The initial powerlessness to align levels of service and KPIs has had a significant impact across the region and further highlighted the requirement for one computer system designed to house the requests for service, levels of service, KPIs based on the levels of service, work orders with the ability to have a right time contractor interface to share up to date quality data and information between Stormwater and maintenance contractors. This is an ability for the most part lost during transition.

By using the current systems, which all differ region to region, Stormwater is relying on the maintenance contractors to run parallel to their own systems spreadsheets. In some cases contractors have to double handle information by taking from their systems and inputting into Stormwater's. Stormwater is not able to extract accurate, comparable KPI data for either council engineers or contractors across the region. Carrying out any meaningful reporting or collating of data is fruitless and of more significance is the inability for accurate up to date reporting during severe rain events.

Auckland Council Information Services is developing an assets lifecycle database which will be designed to include Stormwater's key operational requirements as above. It was agreed that Stormwater would be the first unit to undergo the system enhancement. Intensive high level future state design and detailed design requirement workshops have been held with all areas of stormwater being included. Management and contractual requirements best practice was discussed and debated and from there process and business requirements as "One Stormwater" going forward have been determined.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

The initiatives described above demonstrate that Stormwater is well on the journey from Transition to Transformation. These initiatives would not be the success that they are without the commitment from all staff and contractors to improve overall service. There is still plenty to do, but with ongoing strong management commitment for customer service excellence the future for stormwater services in the Auckland region is looking good.