

**Project Report to  
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Evaluation of the Impact of the High Performance  
Development Programme for Leaders:**

**Making a Difference in the Resident Experience of  
Surrey County Council**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
SURREY**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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At Surrey Business School, the contributions of the following people were pivotal to completing the project:

- Dr. Jo-anne Kandola PhD
- Dr. Ying Zhou PhD
- Dr. Filip Agneessens PhD
- Dr. Ilke Inceoglu PhD

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- Anna Reed
- Karen Archer-Burton

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the importance of leadership in delivering services of the Council, in 2014, SCC introduced the High Performance Development Programme (HPDP), a bespoke leadership development programme for all leaders in the Council. The primary aims of the programme were:

- To build on the existing coaching culture within the council
- To increase the resilience of leaders in times of change
- To equip leaders with the skills to better empower and performance manage their teams.

The intention of the Council is that all leaders complete the programme. Separate programmes are provided to leaders and senior leaders. The programme is approximately 50% delivered with circa 500 leaders have now completed the HPDP.

In January 2016, SCC released a call to evaluate the impact of the programme, specifically addressing the issue of the impact of the training on delivery of services for residents.

A team at Surrey Business School (SBS), were engaged following a tender process to conduct this evaluation. This report presents the key findings from the research.

## BACKGROUND

The aim of the HPDP is to build greater resilience in the council's leaders and to enhance their ability to empower and performance manage their staff. The HPDP has a modular format that consists of taught components, periods for reflection, feedback input and coaching sessions.

The implications of the literatures on organizational performance and evaluation methodology were applied in the design of the HPDP evaluation project. The purpose was to elaborate the focal question of the research (the impact for residents), into a series of more specific questions, answers to which permit a case to be built to understand the impact of the HPDP programme.

The research questions emerged following a half-day workshop held with officers of SCC involved in the project, and were refined by the SBS research. The questions are reported in Table E1.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative data were conducted in the evaluation research. Interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders. In total, 19 employees (5 men, 14 women) from within the council were interviewed. Quantitative data from all employees of SCC were accessed from databases, from January 2012 to present.

Prior to conducting analyses, a substantial 'clean' of the data was required to address a number of recording anomalies and issues. This step resulted in a number constraints on subsequent analyses, and insights in improvements in data systems at SCC.

Analyses were conducted to answer the focal research questions. A variety of descriptive and inferential<sup>1</sup> statistical tests were applied.

The underlying rationale for analyses is to try to isolate the impact of the programme from general trends in outcomes across the organization.

## **RESULTS**

The main results of the evaluation research are summarized in Table E1. Both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the evaluation indicate impacts of the HPDP. These impacts are not consistently clear-cut, with some positive and negative consequences observed in the data.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The report details evidence of the impact of the HPDP. On the basis of the pattern of evidence, a series of conclusions and recommendations are drawn in key areas.

### **Scope of the Impact of the HPDP**

There is an important discrepancy between the assumed impact of the HPDP and the span of influence that is exercised through reporting lines in the organization. There is potential for the organizational development team to exert influence of the scope of the impact by careful selection and assignment of leaders to the programmes. To effect greater impact on resident services, the team should systematically identify and prioritize future HPDP who have a more direct influence on front-line (i.e. non-leader) staff.

#### *Recommendations*

- Clarify definitively the potential scope of influence of HPDP attendees through reporting lines.
- Develop systematic methods of prioritizing attendance and selecting leaders onto the programme who have potential to influence staff providing services directly to residents.
- Select HPDP participants based on data-driven analysis of service-level needs for performance improvement.

### **Understanding the Nature of the Impact of the Programme**

The general pattern of results in the evaluation study revealed some contradictions. For example, while services with higher attendance on the HPDP report higher satisfaction with their manager, and qualitatively report happier teams, absenteeism and grievances simultaneously appear to increase. At the service-level, increased attendance on the HPDP within services is associated with increasing absenteeism and grievances. The pattern of results is consistent with the positioning of the HPDP as part of wider organizational development.

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<sup>1</sup> Descriptive statistics demonstrate in clearest ways the differences between groups or trends over time. Inferential tests examine the statistical reliability of any observed effects.

### *Recommendations*

- Investigate whether effects on staff absence and grievance are generalized or isolated to specific low-performing staff in the services.
- Consider collecting bespoke evaluation data for the HPDP as its implementation progresses to understand attitudinal factors in staff performance outcomes.
- Monitor impact of the programme in the long term to establish the longevity of upward trends in absenteeism and grievances.
- Provide leaders with 'live' data about their teams on key performance and well-being metrics enabling evidence-based intervention where needed.
- Review content of programmes (particularly of the leadership HPDP) to include management of well-being, team management and motivation in the context of change.

### **Assessment and Data Management<sup>2</sup>**

The HPDP evaluation has highlighted a number of issues concerning data compilation and management at SCC. Data can help managers and leaders to make effective decisions about organizational development and in particular about human resource management and development. There are key areas where SCC could make improvement to data systems.

### *Recommendations*

- Initiate a review of performance assessment processes and procedures across SCC, with a view to enriching the measurement of staff effectiveness.
- Ensure that staff satisfaction and engagement assessment is integrated with performance assessment systems, to enable better and more complete reporting of data for leaders and managers.
- Undertake a review of all data capture and management systems at SCC with the objective of harmonizing and integrating databases currently in use.
- Assess the risk of current systems and means of recording personnel information.
- Develop means of delivering live data to managers and leaders to enable evidence-based decision making.

### **Content of the HPDP**

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<sup>2</sup> The organizational development team at SCC requested that following discussions about data gathering and management, the SBS team provide some commentary about this issue in the evaluation report.

Through the results of the evaluation, it is possible to draw some conclusions about how the content of the HPDP might be developed. It has already been recommended that the organisational development team review the content of the programmes in light of the evaluation findings, particularly in the case of the leadership HPDP. However, there are some specific content areas that emerge as potentially relevant for inclusion.

#### *Recommendation*

- As part of review and revision of the HPDP content, include the following areas of leadership and management:
  - a) High performance work systems, staff well-being, and managing high performance.
  - b) Managing teams
  - c) Evidence-based management and decision making
  - d) Leading for impact with residents and service users

#### **Final Comments**

The findings of the HPDP evaluation project indicate that the programme is associated with impact on a number of personnel metrics and outcomes across services in SCC. The effects may reflect the position of the HPDP as part of wider change initiatives at SCC. Our findings do therefore underline that the HPDP is an important component of that change.

The overall conclusion from this evaluation is therefore that it is justifiable that the HPDP continue to be implemented with leaders in the organization. This conclusion, however, is accompanied by a series of recommendations for improving and developing the programme. These are based on findings of the evaluation, and are made with a view to managing the impact of the HPDP effectively, and promoting greater impact with residents and service users of SCC.

Table E1: Research Questions of the HPDP Evaluation Project

Target of Impact	Research Question	Conclusions
Individual	What were participants' reactions to the HPDP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reactions overall by attendees</li> <li>• More positive for the senior leader HPDP</li> </ul>
	What do participants perceive they learned from the HPDP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A variety of learning came from the programme</li> <li>• Difficult conversations and confronting performance confidently were consistently reported</li> </ul>
	How do participants perceive they have altered their behavior as a result of the HPDP, and how has this impacted on organizational outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some clear examples of behaviour change: e.g.</li> <li>• Senior leaders felt they were more often able to have difficult conversations with staff</li> <li>• Leaders felt generally more confident in motivating their team</li> </ul>
	What is the subjective impact of the HPDP on the direct reports of HPDP participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited evidence perceivable by direct reports</li> </ul>
	What is the impact of the HPDP on participants' performance, absenteeism, turnover and promotion rates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence lower for senior leaders attending the programme (non-sig)</li> <li>• Performance ratings slightly higher for leaders attending the HPDP, lower for senior leaders</li> </ul>
	What is the impact of the HPDP on direct reports' (of participants) performance, absenteeism, turnover and promotion rates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lagged effect that absence of direct reports increases 12 months post attendance</li> <li>• Non-leader absence overall increases</li> <li>• For leaders managed by HPDP attendees, some trend toward lower absence</li> <li>• Performance ratings of direct reports who are leaders increase, and who are non-leaders, decrease.</li> </ul>
Organization / Unit	What is the impact of the HPDP on service-level absenteeism, grievances, turnover, and staff engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absenteeism and grievances at the service level increases alongside HPDP participation</li> <li>• Staff engagement unaffected, but satisfaction with manager higher for high-attendance services</li> </ul>
	What is the impact of the HPDP on directorate-level recruitment costs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall costs increase with directorate-level participation, variation in trend across directorates</li> </ul>
Residents / Service Users	What is the impact of the HPDP on service-level resident commendations and complaints?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No observable effect on commendations or complaints</li> </ul>





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