



## **What is Systems Thinking?**

Systems thinking is not about IT systems. It is an approach that supports the review of services as a whole (not functions)

Systems thinking is a very different approach to improving services, it challenges the assumptions we make about service design.

Using a method of 'study', systems thinking reveals how traditional assumptions are responsible for undermining service quality, driving up costs and causing low morale.

Systems thinking aims to create better service, at reduced cost with increased capacity and higher staff morale.

Systems thinking is the basis for all future service reviews and improvements to our services

## Systems Thinking – The Approach

Systems thinking is not a typical, top down approach to planning how a system or process should work.

It takes an outside-in approach (or customers view) to improving service; that is to change the work, you first need to understand 'how the work works' - change is based on knowledge.

It is very different to typical approaches for improving services. The systems thinking approach often reveals unexpected results.



## Systems Thinking – changing the way we think

**Thinking.....** Management thinking and assumptions about the work ..



**System** ... drives the design of our processes and procedures ...

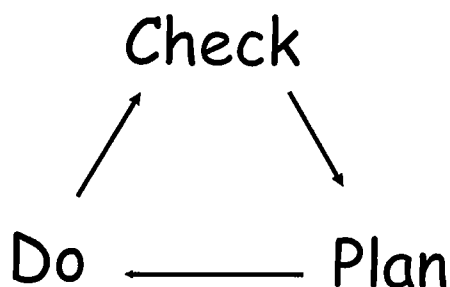


**Performance....** which in turn affects performance



## What is the Approach?

It is not possible to adequately convey here how systems thinking works. The only way to really understand its potential is to use it. It is useful to appreciate the basic concept and key phases for conducting a systems thinking review of a service. They are as follows:



## Check – the ‘what’ & ‘why’

Is concerned with understanding the current service and its performance. It is crucial that any decisions about what to change are based on evidence and learning gained during 'Check'. Check involves 6 stages:

**Purpose** - Identifying purpose of the system from the customers perspective

**Demand** - Studying demand e.g. 'I need to claim benefit' or 'I need a home'. This helps us identify what matters to customers.

**Capability** - Measuring our ability to respond to what matters to customers

**Flow** - Identifying how the work is carried out and using information about what matters to customers to identify value work and waste (e.g. duplication, handoffs).

**System Conditions** - The factors responsible for the waste in the system. System conditions may be policy, procedure, IT system, training etc

**Thinking** - It is important to relate system conditions to the management thinking responsible for their introduction. This is key to unlearning old assumptions and to start looking at things differently.

## Plan and Do

### Plan – identify how we can change

This stage takes the learning from Check to identify a new set of operating principles and 'clean flow' designed to deliver what matters to customers. Measures are agreed based on what matters and experiments devised to prove the new way of working.

### Do – implement the changes

This stage involves confirming that experiments done in the Plan phase do in fact support the work and processes underpinning the new service. In practice this means taking a small number of customers out of the current system, testing the new ways of working, solving any problems and adapting the new service along the way. As the new service evolves through experimentation so does understanding of capacity, roles and structures required to support the new way of working.



## Next Steps - Options

So Members can learn more about systems thinking.

Some suggestions:

- **Practical Orientation Sessions** – day and half. Do some 'check'
- **Interventions – visit.** Look at how 'Plan' & 'Do' is implemented.
- **Portfolio Holders** – discuss with Head of Service about visiting interventions.
- **“Seminars”** – updates from Interventions / presentations from teams (2 or 3 a year?)
- Possibly utilise **Shared Services Board** to share learning with Councillors?

