

Client need

The year end financial accounts closure process at this council had been identified by both the senior management and external auditors as being in need of improvement. Deadlines were being missed and a number of material errors were picked up during the audit process. This had a knock on impact on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (“CPA”), in particular on the Use of Resources.

The council asked maltway to develop a programme to raise the knowledge and skills of the staff involved in the year end close process to:

- Improve the quality and efficiency of the accounts closure process
- Make the financial accounts more accurate
- Develop communications between the central and departmental Finance teams.

maltway approach

We responded quickly to develop a programme that had a clear **focus on improving the outcome of the process** as well as helping the council meet its statutory responsibilities. The clear priority was to ensure that all staff involved in the process knew what their roles and responsibilities were and were able to produce quality information and evidence on a timely basis.

This was achieved through a combination of a one-day training event supported by improved communication and planning between the Corporate Finance team and the departments. The training covered not only the accounts closure process within the council and but also included sessions aimed at improving the participants’ skills, particularly in relation to working papers and evidence to support accruals and reconciliations (which had been highlighted by the auditors as a particular weakness).

In the second year of our involvement the training audience was split into 2 groups. Those new to either the council or the process received foundation level training to ensure they were equipped with the essential knowledge and skills, whilst for more experienced staff the emphasis was on further improving the quality and efficiency of the process, for example through better review and resource management.

Outcomes

The training received exceptional feedback and the results were transformational. In the first year of our involvement a significant improvement in the quality of working papers was noted by the auditors and by the end of our second year, far from being an area noted for improvement the quality of supporting information was seen as a positive strength. In 2008, for the first time no material errors or adjustments were made by the auditors.