

Following the success of the Opportunity Risk Management Strategy's implementation, a risk led approach is now implemented for all key projects, programmes of work and is also adopted for major undertakings and public events at Shropshire Council. The importance of integrating opportunity risk management techniques in decision-making and planning processes was recognised and acknowledged at senior levels at the Council, as was the need to raise general awareness and understanding of risk. The new strategy for Opportunity Risk Management set out how the Council intended to do this and the process for moving forward. The Leader of the Council, Council Members, Chief Executive and Senior Management Team were fully committed to the strategy and saw it as part of the Council's responsibility to deliver excellent public services.

Angela Beechey explains: "For us, successful opportunity risk management was about ensuring we had the correct level of control to provide sufficient protection from risks, without stifling our opportunities for development. The strategy set out a completely different approach by identifying and prioritising our opportunities in the first instance, then identifying and managing the associated risks which could prevent our achievement of these".

A fertile climate for innovation is required

to embed a strategy in the Council's operations, and to enable the management of opportunity risk. Awareness of the constraints should not stop people coming up with ideas and putting them forward. "One of the key messages we give staff is to identify all opportunities for development and prioritise them on the opportunity matrix. We can look at the associated risks and undertake the same analysis and then weigh up the feasibility of going ahead with the opportunity. At no point is any opportunity disregarded until the level of risk associated with its delivery far outweighs the potential benefit," explains Jane Cooper, the primary trainer of the strategy.

Strategic thinking

The stages involved in the Opportunity Risk Management Process are defined as 'Decide', 'Develop' and 'Deliver'.

- **Decide** – set the strategic aims and the business objectives, and identify the opportunities that can be achieved from these objectives.
- **Develop** – plan projects, appraise options and identify key risks.
- **Deliver** – deliver the aims and the detailed risk registers that accompany any project.

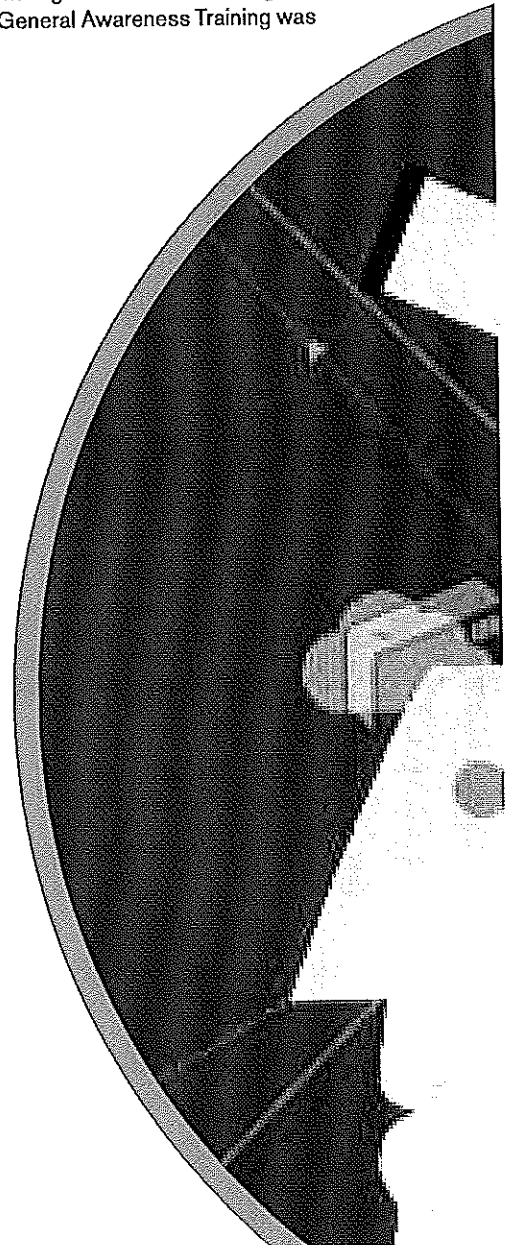
Two actions were required to embed the strategy. One was to amend the standard report template and raise general awareness. The report template

was modified to include, on the front page of every report, an opportunity risk management appraisal. Risk management is about everything and anything the Council might realistically be challenged on, including the failure to take the action or the opportunity proposed. The author of the report highlights the detail of the opportunity(ies) and details the associated risks. "This section of the report can only be completed following a detailed analysis of the opportunity and the associated risks and what mitigation can be undertaken (informed from the detailed opportunity and risk registers). This enables senior management, Cabinet and Council to make effective informed decisions", says Angela.

The second action was to raise awareness of opportunity risk management through the development of training programmes. These were developed, facilitated and delivered by the Risk Management Team. "The regular General Awareness Training was

Opportunity gazing

During a time of uncertainty and change, Shropshire Council started a major transformation programme. To support this Angela Beechey, Risk Management Team Leader and Alarm Board Member, and Jane Cooper, Risk Management Officer, review their approach and launched the Opportunity Risk Management Strategy was born. In response to their inspiring workshop at the Alarm Forum, here they outline the development process.



modified and extended to include practical exercises in the development and completion of opportunity and risk registers. This was rolled out to any member of staff, senior manager or officer who had involvement in projects, programmes of work or operational and strategic risk management," explains Jane.

A Member training programme was also developed based largely on the general awareness training for managers and officers. "This on-going programme provides Members with an understanding of the process that is undertaken prior to the completion of reports. It leaves them with a heightened awareness of the role and benefits that opportunity risk management plays within the Council and demonstrates how it can be used to realise our opportunities, support initiatives, improve performance and achieve the

Council's key priorities. This deepened and detailed understanding of the methodology enables Members to apply these principles of opportunity risk management to their own effective decision-making," says Jane.

Strategy success

Recent undertakings include the successful transition of the Public Health function to Local Authority control, the foundation of a transformation programme for Adult Social Care, plus the development of the new delivery model for Shropshire Council and the on-going transfer of services into it. The approach has been successful in supporting the

application for funding to support the restoration and preservation of the Flax Mill Maltings (the first iron framed building constructed in the world) and its on-going project management.

During 2012 Shropshire Council and partners hosted a pageant for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee at RAF Cosford. Says Jane: "As the lead Authority it was crucial that the management of the event and associated risks were tightly controlled and justified. We also hosted the Olympic Torch Relay twice through Shropshire during 2012 and again the strategy was used to support the event. In such public arenas it is critical reputationally that the tangible benefits to effective and robust risk management are evidenced and demonstrated".

All of the undertakings were started with an Opportunity Risk Management Workshop. This often included input from external stakeholders and partners. These workshops are the foundation stones for setting the risk appetite and subsequent management of the project, programme of work or event. They are invaluable for forming robust dialogue, consistent approaches and effective management of the opportunity and associated risks, in developing the governance arrangements and on-going exception reporting.

"Opportunity Risk Management is a process where the benefits are tangible. The key is to ensure the management of the related risks is not dealt with in isolation, but is embedded in every piece of work the Council does. Opportunities will be risk assessed and will therefore be more likely to succeed as the risks are identified and controlled at an early stage. All stakeholders and Members will benefit through having the confidence that projects and programmes of work and their associated risks, have been considered properly and that Council's resources are being applied realistically and proportionately." concludes Angela. ●



The Council's Members and senior management team supported and endorsed the work of the risk management team in embedding an opportunity risk management culture across all levels of the Council's operations.

Angela Beechey (angela.beechey@shropshire.gov.uk) Risk Team Manager at Shropshire Council and Alarm Board Director, and Jane Cooper (jane.cooper@shropshire.gov.uk) Risk Management Officer at Shropshire Council are willing to share their learnings on Opportunity Risk Management with Alarm members.