



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann  
Tipperary County Council

# *A Local Authority's Experience of an OPR Review*

## Tipperary County Council's Experience

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Tipperary County Council

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# Introduction

## My Background

### My Main Role as Director of Services

- Develop & Oversee Organisational Structures & Resources
- Delivery of Work Programmes, Functions & Services
- Strategic Change Management
- Risk Management
- Delivery of Efficient Services and VfM
- Motivation of Teams
- External Stakeholder Relationships
- Make Decisions on the Future Direction of Our Services



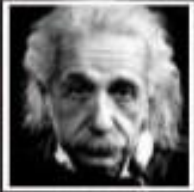
# My Presentation

## A Local Authority perspective

- Why be a pilot?
- My Perspective as Director of Services
- Our experience of the Review Process
- Progress on Implementation of Recommendations
- Outcomes & Outputs to date



# Why did Tipperary volunteer for the Pilot?



“

In the midst of every  
crisis, lies great  
opportunity.

”

Get more on [RelicsWorld.com](http://RelicsWorld.com)

- Albert Einstein



# What were the Risks?

- Reputational Risks if the Findings were negative
- Unrealistic Recommendations – Undeliverable
- Staff Morale & Performance from negative feedback
- Additional Workload involved in the Review Process on top of a busy work programme
- Commenced a CDP Review – Our Reputations & Relationship with elected members and the public



# What were the Opportunities?

- *Develop a Constructive Working Relationship with the **OPR***
- *Opportunity for Better Understanding of each others Work*
- *A new Senior **Team** in Tipperary's Planning Section in 2020*
- *Team Building – A **Shared Vision** of the future*
- *Team's **Challenges and Issues** – **Shared Solutions***
- *Create a new **Team Development Plan** – **Shared Values***
- *Improve **Motivation & Morale***
- *To develop a **Culture of Continuous Improvement***



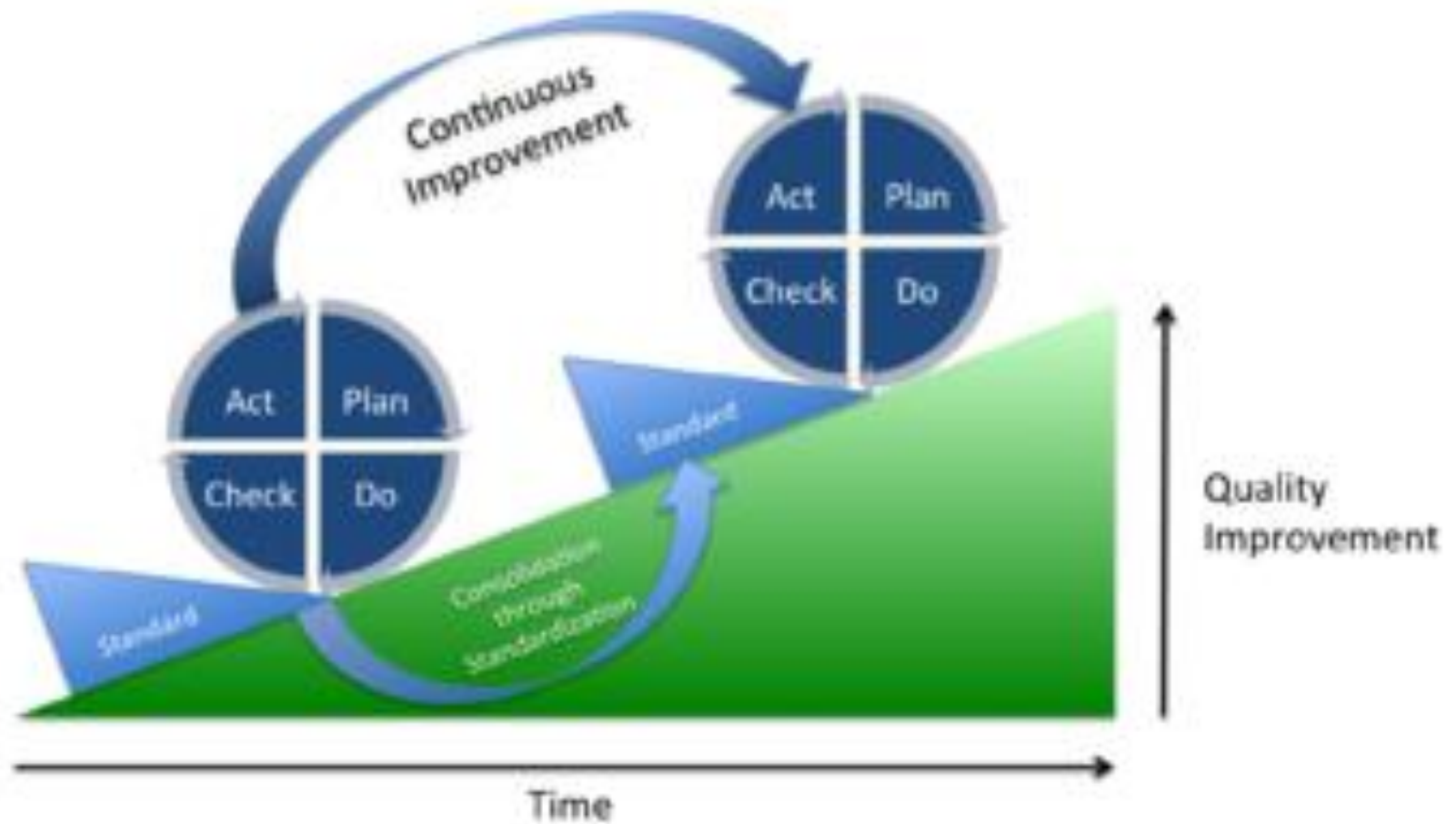
# What were the Opportunities?

- *Create a new Shared Strategic **Vision** for the Planning Section*
- ***Evolution** of our Planning Services - e.g. Project Ireland 2040*
- *Support for **Future Changes & Demands** - e.g. New Legislation*
- *Needed to carry out a **Situational Analysis***
- *Assess our current **Capacity & Future Proof** the Service Delivery*
- *Review the **Post Merger Situation***
- *New **Structure & Processes** - since 2014*
- *Examine our **Processes & Systems** – Consistency in 2 Offices*



# Continuous Improvement

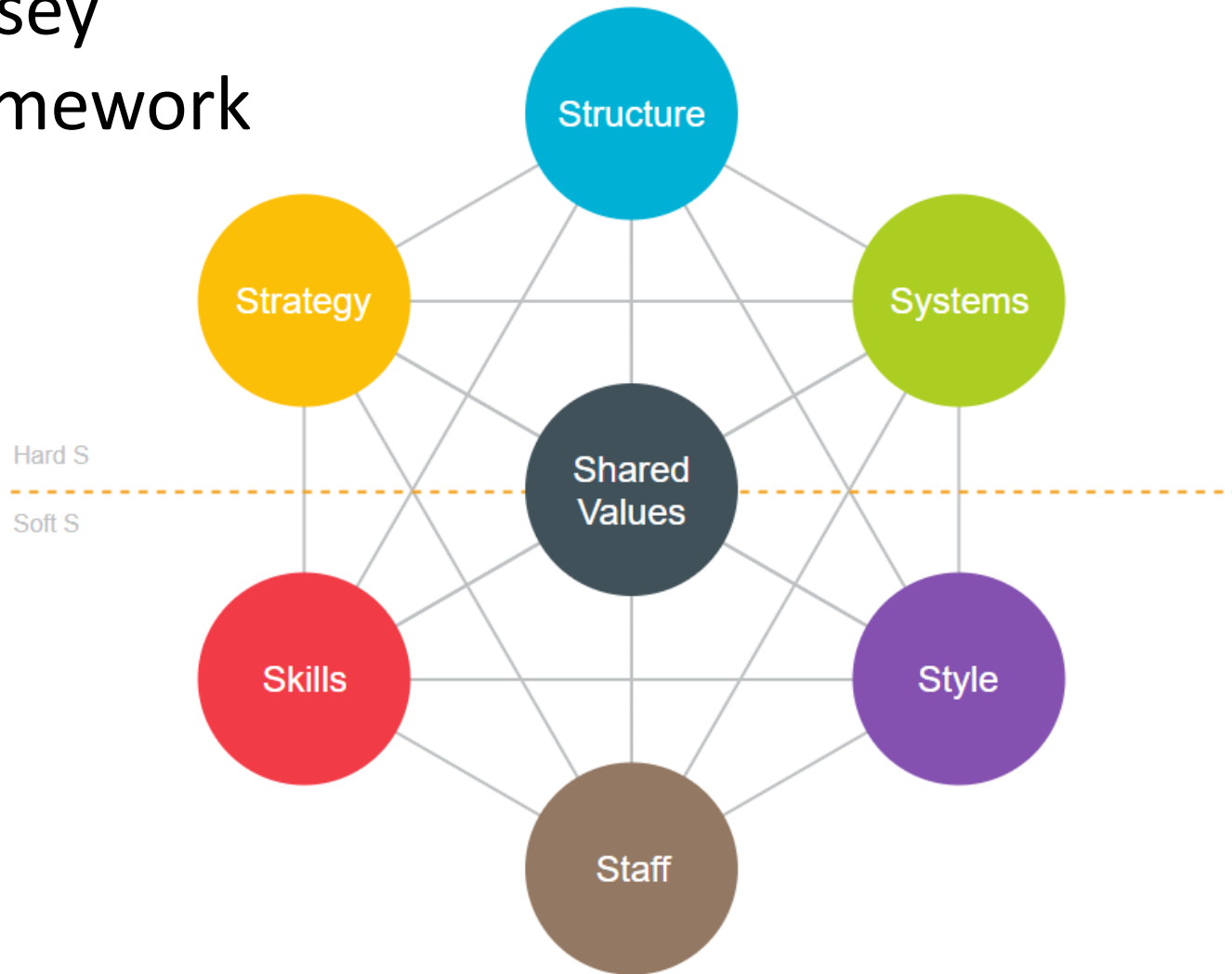
## The Deming Cycle





# Situational Analysis

## McKinsey 7S Framework



# Reputation of the Planning Section

- Importance of Reputation as a Planning Authority
- Previous Reports by some external organisations
- NOAC Performance Reports – Indicators
- **Independent Review** of our Practices & our Effectiveness
- Acknowledgement of the Challenges for Planning Authorities
- Acknowledgement of our Strengths – Innovative
- Very Important for a Merged Council



# Future Proofing & Staffing Levels

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- ***Changing Role of Planning Sections & Planners***

*Policy - Strategic Planning & Economic Development*

*Climate Action & Renewable Energy*

*Low Carbon Economy and Society*

*Project Ireland 2040 - Place making*

*Reimagining our Towns - Town Centre First Policy Approach*

*– Tackling Vacancy, Dereliction, Liveability, 10 minute towns*

*County Development Plan process has changed significantly*

- ***Staff Retention***

*High Staff Turnover & Recruitment Challenges*

*Internal Business Case*



# The Review Process

- OPR Statutory requirement to carry out reviews
- Section 31AS of the Planning and Development Act
- Our Review Process commenced in November 2020
- Tipperary was the first to be completed
- OPR published the Review in September 2021
- A very comprehensive process
- It was far more time consuming than we had expected
- It would need to be built into the Team's workload



# The Info Request

- **PART A - Organisational and Management Context** - relevant material that contextualises the overall organisational structure, management responsibilities and strategic business objectives having regard to the systems and procedures used in relation to performance of functions. (max. 10-page report)
- **PART B - Operational Processes** focuses on the systems and procedures used in the delivery of statutory planning functions. Provide a report for each of the following operational areas:
  1. *Forward Planning (max. 15-page report)*
  2. *Land Activation (max. 5-page report)*
  3. *Development Management (max. 15-page report)*
  4. *Enforcement (max. 5 page report)*
  5. *Architectural Heritage (max. 5-page report)*
  6. *Other Planning-Related Functions (max. 5-page report)*

Reports should be supplemented with any relevant written procedural manuals, relevant data/statistics, written procedures or standard operating procedures (SOPs)

- **PART C - Wider Strategic Context** is not a mandatory request, an opportunity to highlight local good practice and achievements Case Studies



# The Review Process

- Contact Person in the Planning Section – Administration Team
- Communication with the OPR via emails, phone calls and Zoom meetings
- Additional Information & Clarification of information
- Complement the teams in both Organisations



# Tips from the Process

- Understand what Information will be needed - Check out the **Info Request** on OPR website
  - Reviewed in April 2022 based on pilot experiences
- Your contact person needs to be familiar with the documents and procedures
- Keep a record management system of everything sent and when it was sent – a lot of details
- Send Information when ready - keeps the process moving
- Keep the lines of communication open with the OPR
  - We found the OPR very helpful during the process



# The Findings of the Review

- The OPR report acknowledged that the Council's planning service is **operating effectively with robust systems and procedures** in place to deliver statutory planning functions. In some areas of performance, **highly effective** practice was demonstrated.
- The review notes that the Planning department *“benefits from clear leadership, a structured corporate approach and the **commitment and talent of individual staff**. These factors have allowed the department to develop and implement good systems and procedures to guide its operational processes and to monitor and evaluate outputs”*.
- The report concluded that the planning department is **generally delivering all of our statutory planning functions effectively** which is demonstrated throughout the review.
- The independent review found that the planning department has many **considerable strengths** and it can reinforce and enhance that strong competency base by implementing the various **Recommendations** proposed in the report.
- The report includes **16 Recommendations** designed to assist the Council's planning department to continue operating in the face of ongoing and likely future additional demands or to enhance service delivery.



# 16 Recommendations

- ***Rated***

  - 0 Critical*

  - 4 High*

  - 6 Medium*

  - 5 Low*

  - 1 Advisory*

- ***Time-bound***

  - 6, 12 and 24 month periods*

- ***6 month Status Reviews***

- ***Implementation Plan required***



# Recommendations **Rated High**

## 1. Overall Forward Planning Capacity

- internal evaluation of ongoing and emerging **work demands**, resource **capacity** and **skills available**, both technical and administrative
- allocation of an appropriate level of **working time to learning and development** for all planning department staff

## 2. Mainstreaming of Conservation Architect practice

- evaluate whether current practice, which is being conducted on a project delivery basis, is **mainstreamed into standard operating procedure**
- consider the possibility of having staff dedicated to delivering this service on a highly proactive basis and the potential to include **specialist expertise within the planning department's staffing complement.**



# Recommendations **Rated High**

## 3. Invalidation Rates

- put in place a **targeted action plan** over the next **2 years** with a view to bringing validation rates closer in line with the national average. The plan should include **time-bound targets** for **improving the quality of applications being submitted** and should consider making **skilled staff available at the planning counter**
- continue to arrange **public workshops and briefing sessions** and consider what **online resources** might be effective

## 4. Organisation of Enforcement Team

Given the volume of enforcement cases being processed / awaiting processing, the Council should consider how the **capacity of the enforcement team** could be strengthened, with an emphasis on **assigning dedicated enforcement officers** to drive the progression of the enforcement caseload without being diverted to other functions.



# Outputs & Outcomes

- Implementation Plan for the 16 Recommendations
- Press Release – Positive Message - Reputation
- Shared Strategic Vision
- Focused and Targeted Plans
- Business Case – inputs from the Team
- Staffing Levels have improved
- Morale has increased
- Performance & Efficiency has increased
- Learning & Development Strategy
- Constructive Working Relationship with the OPR



# Conclusion

- The **Opportunities** were realised with really positive **Outcomes**
- The **Implementation Phase** – This is progressing very well (one 6 month review completed to date)
- Stronger **Organisational Managers** now in the Section
- **Significant Challenges and Changes** for Planning Authorities at present  
We are Evolving and Improving continuously  
We will rise to and meet these new Demands  
Planning Authorities always have done so – Celtic Tiger  
Tipperary County Council's Planning Section is in a better position now than it was before the Review Process

*I hope that a local authority's perspective can add value to the training session  
Insights into the process for those that haven't started yet*



# *Tipperary County Council's Experience of an OPR Review*



## A new Tipperary County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

### Shaping *Our* Future



Keep up-to-date on the plan process at  
[www.tipperarycoco.ie/cdp](http://www.tipperarycoco.ie/cdp)



via Twitter  
[@planningtipp](https://twitter.com/planningtipp)



via email at  
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