



Scottish Local Government Digital Partnership

# Case Study

Agile in Fife

## Executive Summary

Fife council have adopted Agile methods within their Customer Solutions Team. This has enabled them to deliver projects in smaller development time-boxes using Agile sprints. Not only has this improved ongoing release of deliveries from the Customer Solutions Team, Agile methods have shown significant improvements to team cohesiveness, communication and workload prioritisation.

## Background

The team was large and varied with very differing workloads. Work was coming in from numerous places and there was a feeling amongst the team that they had no oversight of workloads and capacity - they all felt that they were not always doing the right things for the right reasons.

The team wanted to work in a way that helped them gain an understanding of what was being worked on, which helped them work better and more efficiently and help them work more flexibly utilising resources when and where they were needed. An Agile approach was chosen to help the team manage their workload more effectively.

## Drivers

Agile was selected as the team believed this would help to:

1. **Provide clarity on current workloads and ongoing requests:** Agile techniques such as a Kanban board can provide quick visualisation of current project tasks;
2. **Increase flexibility:** use of a Kanboard allows tasks to be amended, removed or added to very speedily enabling a flexible response to change requests;
3. **Improved productivity:** using methods such as Agile sprints would help the team develop in a quicker, more focused manner, and deliver smaller products earlier.

## Results

Within a short period of time, Agile methods showed benefits to the team of:

1. **Increased team engagement:** the best results were people results... the team are more engaged, openly work together to push tasks on and remedy potential blockages and feel satisfied that everything they are doing has a purpose;
2. **Improved team efficiency:** leads are able to identify capacity quickly which allows them to 'pull' work through the board more quickly;
3. **Improved team communication:** the team found Agile communication techniques less tedious than team meetings and it helped create conversation and collaboration which were not present when individuals worked on tasks in silo and had no need to share what they were doing.

"VISUALISING WORK AND REPORTING BACK ON IT MEANS THAT EVERYONE IN THE TEAM TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN WORKLOAD AND MANAGES THEIR OWN CAPACITY. COMING TOGETHER AND TALKING THROUGH WORK HAS ALSO MEANT THAT WE BOUNCE IDEAS OFF EACH OTHER, AND, WHERE WE HAVE CAPACITY, CHIP IN TO HELP EACH GET TASKS FINISHED"

Ossie Heffell, front -end developer and team member

## Agile Summary

Although the team strived to use Agile in its entirety this just wasn't possible. It was going to take the team a while to get used to the approach and tools. Agile as an approach makes this possible as it is not as rigid as methods like Prince2.

The visualisation and prioritisation of work coupled with stand up meetings proved the most beneficial. It made it easier for leads to see where capacity was available and also where blockages were occurring; two years later the team still use their Kanboard and post-its to visualise their workload

## Agile Tools/Methodologies

The team use a Kanboard as a visual representation of workload with backlog, work in progress, test and live column. They previously had stand up meetings once a day which proved too much for the team so this was reduced to twice weekly and now weekly.

They work in line with the Customer Board so sprints, a complete project iteration, last around 6 weeks. This forces the team to assess and break down tasks so that they fit within this timescale.

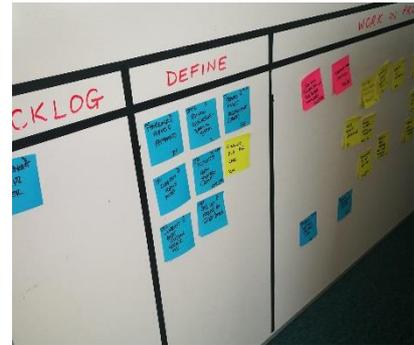


Figure 1 Project Kanboard

## Implementation

The team have just started on their Agile journey but have already enjoyed successes in delivering improved online services including:

- Housing application forms
- Business rates accounts
- Housing options assessments

"AGILE IS QUICK AND EASY WAY TO GET THE WHOLE TEAM COMMUNICATING. KANBAN STAND-UPS ARE A GOOD EXAMPLE OF CREATING INTERACTION WHEN MOST OF THE TIME WE HAVE OUR HEADS BURIED IN OUR LAPTOPS! I CAN SEE AT A GLANCE WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT NOW AND IF WE'RE ON TRACK. BY WORKING THIS WAY, WE CAN CONCENTRATE ON SMALL CHUNKS OF WORK AT A TIME, KNOWING THAT IT'S ALL CONTRIBUTING TO THE BIGGER PICTURE."

Karen Kelly, Improvement Advisor – Project manager and scrum

For each of these service improvements, Agile has been used to help keep the team focused on that specific delivery and helped them clearly identify the tasks they needed to complete for that deliverable.

The team found the visualisation and regular communication to be one of the biggest benefits of using an Agile approach as it clarified task responsibility and enabled them to support each other as required during the sprints. It helps to break down larger pieces of work into more manageable tasks so the team can maintain momentum without getting, potentially, side tracked onto less relevant activities.

## Prototyping

The team found iterative development and testing to be incredibly beneficial. As they worked through the board, they would test their products in small chunks and were able to quickly iron out problems to prevent them becoming bigger. They involved their customers, the council tax team, within the prototype testing which resulted in the improved council tax service being released with no critical errors. Working side-by-side with the services in small iterations enabled the product to be developed and tested much quicker than using alternate methods.

## Biggest Challenges

The biggest challenge encountered was merging Agile with a service design approach. Taking the time out to figure this out made it easier for those in charge of service design and Agile to work together and anticipate what tools should be used when.

These methods overlap throughout end to end delivery and should not be treated in isolation. Service design is very much about understanding the customer and their need, identifying problems, ideating solutions and prototyping the end product... this needs to be aligned with Agile delivery sprints.

Service design cannot be forgotten when workflow begins neither as testing requires constant customer testing which is part of the service design journey.

Taking the time out to blend approaches together definitely causes less frustration.

## Recommendations/Lessons Learned

1. **Start light and build up:** start by simply getting all your workload on the board and getting staff in to the habit of formalising and talking about their workload;
2. **Make sure stand-ups don't drag on and are focussed:** they are there to keep everyone up to date and on track and ensure there are no barriers that need to be addressed;
3. **Keep track of all the completed tasks:** track the time they went on the board and the time they came off so that you can track performance and ascertain timescales for future work which may be similar;
4. **Keep asking staff:** what could be done to improve ways of working/what's missing;
5. **Agile takes a bit of getting used to:** not everyone will be on board at first. Some people may feel awkward about talking through their work in front of others, some people may see the stand ups as a useless task etc. so you have to stick with it and push through the negativity inviting feedback on how to make the process better

## Participant Details

1. Judith Quinn, Improvement Consultant - Fife Council