

## **North Yorkshire County Council transforming Children's Social Care by rising to the workforce challenge**

The last year or so has seen North Yorkshire's Children and Young People's Service gain a number of accolades including: Social Work Employer of the year in 2015, being rated as one of the best services in the country for reducing the number of looked after children, rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding in every area and being one of only a few authorities designated a Partners in Practice. Just last month the Chief Social Worker for England, Isabelle Trowler, praised our service saying it benefited from great leadership and clarity of purpose and that staff showed great commitment, worked well with families and understood the challenges of the county. Also last month we received a very good outcome from an LGA Peer Review across the whole authority, with Children's Services found by the review team to be outstanding, delivering excellent outcomes for families and children while operating in the context of a constrained budget, with outcomes achieved for vulnerable children described as genuinely inspiring.

We see all these as recognition for our efforts over recent years to turn around our social work workforce and in so doing improve services to children and young people who need our help and support. The number of looked after children in North Yorkshire has fallen by 20% and child protection cases by 25% over 3 years as a result of a transformation which delivered both savings and innovation. Despite a multi-million pound savings programme we continue to invest in front line services and new social work teams and roles, including the employment of more senior professionals to support newly qualified staff

It's not been an easy or quick journey. Four years ago the service relied on agency staff for over a quarter of social care workers and had high levels of absence and turnover. But now we have had no agency workers for the last 2 years, our vacancy level is half the national average, we retain our staff, with turnover of social workers at 9 % compared to the England average of 16% resulting in an experienced workforce with over 50% of social workers being qualified for two or more years, and sickness is significantly below national average at 6.4 days per employee. Our workforce is positive, engaged and focused on delivering excellence.

This turnaround required significant change for the whole workforce over a number of years with some critical success factors;

- A whole service transformation including every role, its purpose and function; in particular all manager roles in the new service had people and financial management as a key skill, along with a focus on transformation and innovation. This focus on performance means the service only employs managers who understand that managing staff performance is key to delivering a successful service.
- A workforce development strategy so all staff have the necessary skills. Developed to attract staff and invest in the new service it included significant investment in training, support for staff on their personal and professional development, and partnerships with universities giving staff creative ways to qualify such as modular learning and salary sacrifice. This led to a learning

and development culture which nurtures practice learning for staff who can then move through posts in the service as their skills develop. Newly qualified staff get regular support and guidance which helps retain them - only 7 of the recent 45 newly qualified social workers chose to leave. As one said, 'I have received exceptional support from my manager... supervision is regular and reflective.... I feel that my future career is with NYCC.'

- Teams and roles created around service users. With one single referral process used by all agencies and a streamlining of processes, social workers have dedicated admin support in the form of case support workers to remove some of the administrative burden enabling them to focus on spending more time with families and young people.

We continue to change and will soon have a new Family Support Service. Our focus on prevention, has key workers backed by a range of partners working in a flexible way to help a family turn their lives around so that children needing additional support or those at most risk experience timely and effective multi agency help. Like the creation of our Prevention Service last year, the model for a new Integrated Family Support Service will establish a new multi-skilled workforce, bring more flexible service delivery, enable better targeting of resources to changing need, reduce hand-offs for families, improve outcomes and release savings.

Since starting our transformation we have developed our approach with our staff via regular structured engagement sessions which provide a regular channel for ideas and views, there is always an open door for concerns and we involve, consult and listen to our staff on service change.

Also the whole council and wider workforce is involved in supporting children in the care system – it's everybody's business. We encourage staff to become foster carers and adoptive parents and provide additional leave for preparation and planning. As the corporate parent for children in care we guarantee all care leavers work experience and an apprentice post in the council if they want one, and we have a mentoring scheme involving senior managers including Directors and the Chief Executive to mentor care leavers going to university or looking to starting work by providing advice and practical help such as sorting out work experience, job shadowing, job application and interview skills sessions etc. The resources of the council as the largest employer in the county are made available to provide support and opportunities for young people in our care.

We've succeeded by working together. The service involves and values input from HR, Finance and other support services such as admin support which developed and provided new support roles. Again, doing our best for children and young people is not just the job of a particular service, it's the business of all council services. The input from HR on issues from workforce development and training to recruitment and reward has made a difference because they work closely with and understand the service's needs and because they see it as their business and recognise its importance.

So a few years from starting our transformation we continue to see the benefit of these changes, but we are not complacent, we keep changing and looking for ways to improve children's social care.

North Yorkshire adopted a whole-service approach to driving improvements in children's services. This has three key elements.

1. **Strengthening routes into children's services** – North Yorkshire developed a multi-agency customer contact centre, launched in September 2014. The aim was to ensure a single referral process was in place and the ability to target early help where it was needed most. Signs of safety was embedded across the service and has played a key role in screening referrals to children's services. This has been crucial to ensure that there is clear, consistent decision-making at the front door of the service using a solution-focused evidence base.
2. **A strategic approach to placements and permanency** – North Yorkshire have strong arrangements for managing the local care population. The Head of Safeguarding chairs a weekly pre-screening of all requests of those coming into care in based on a full and compressive assessment from the social work team. Aligned to these approach is the no wrong door service, through which tailored early support is put in place to meet the needs of the most vulnerable young people on the edge of care or entering care later in their lives.
3. **Forensic focus on consistency of practice** – performance improvement groups in particular areas, such as safeguarding and looked-after children, have been established to enable senior leaders to scrutinise performance and practice and ask the "hard questions". This ensures that there is continuous cycle of rigorous self-assessment, forensic analysis and practice improvement. This has been crucial to ensuring senior managers "know the business", can identify potential risks early, can take action to ensure practice is of a consistently high standard.

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