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A partnership approach to continuously improve services: North Tyneside Council

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Brief description

Imaginative and innovative use of resources by North Tyneside council and its partners has significantly improved the services available to young people leaving care. Strong joint working arrangements for care leavers are in place.

Overview – the provider’s message

‘Often service areas like Commissioning and Resources are referred to in a less than flattering way as the “back office”. My take is somewhat different; support services that are efficient in size and effective in delivery are the very foundation that allows frontline service delivery to flourish and achieve.

Managing change is an essential part of the job. However, what doesn’t change is the commitment and desire of staff to deliver high-quality, cost-effective support services that help improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly those whose circumstances may make them most vulnerable, such as care leavers.

Service improvement is achieved by the integration of the roles in Commissioning and Resources with colleagues in the operational sector. All members of staff have shared priorities and responsibilities, and they jointly resolve issues as they arise. Our services to care leavers are one illustration of this partnership in action.’

Mark Longstaff, Head of Commissioning and Resources

The good practice in detail

The service

The Commissioning and Resources Division successfully delivers a range of support functions including: research and intelligence; participation and engagement; commissioning and quality assurance; and workforce development. The result is well-tailored individual support packages for care leavers provided by the council and its partners, which ensure that they

receive the best possible start to adult life. Services to care leavers are provided by a dedicated Leaving Care Team (LCT), supported by the Commissioning and Resources Division.

Everything in one place

The Youth Village provides a one-stop shop for young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. It was developed by a partnership between the council, the Youth Justice Board, health partners and a voluntary organisation.

The site accommodates:

- the youth offending team
- the young persons' drug and alcohol misuse team
- health partners
- the LCT
- the Youth Action's Motor project.



There are plans to establish a pupil referral unit at the site.

Activities include daytime services for young people and evening and weekend activities of a diversionary nature, including a Sunday lunch club. The site provides a social space for young people as well as more formal offices and the building is used extensively for youth-related activities.

Strong performance management

Effective [data management](#) is a key strength of the organisation and facilitates a strong culture of performance management in each service area. The council and its partners routinely operate well above national and comparator averages, and services constantly challenge themselves to improve. Highly effective prioritisation of services to looked after children and young people can be demonstrated by senior managers and elected members through the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Effective partnership working

A firm commitment to joint working, such as work with Connexions and training providers on the 'Go for It' programme, ensures that, against a local backdrop of falling employment opportunities, care leavers' employment prospects have steadily improved from 64% in 2008/09 to 88% in 2010/11. Performance has been consistently at or above the national average, with the most recent data placing North Tyneside 27% higher than both the England and statistical neighbour averages.

To meet the employment needs of older looked after children and care leavers, the multi-agency Care to Work Forum provides close and effective individual monitoring. For example, there are currently nine care leavers being supported through University and good financial assistance is provided by way of bursaries and bonuses to help sustain young people in education, employment and training. Incentives are provided for young people to remain in continuing education and to ensure that they leave debt free.

The Division is also responsible for workforce development and it provides strategic leadership in recruiting, training and retaining staff. A training programme is developed and overseen by the Workforce Development Manager, together with a group of training associates located across all service areas to deliver their business plan. For example, the LCT has trained 10 young people to deliver the Preparation for Adult Life course to carers,



foster carers and residential care staff. This course has been delivered by young people and the LCT on three occasions and monitoring has demonstrated an improved understanding of care leavers' needs among course participants.

The Commissioning and Quality Assurance team works effectively alongside operational managers to assess needs, identify gaps and establish evidenced-based business cases for

commissioned activities or to realign service provision. Three flats have been commissioned from a housing association designated for young people in continuing education. The partnership has also commissioned a support service for young people from a national organisation which works together with local communities to help the young homeless and prevent youth homelessness. The result is that for each of the past five years, over 93% of the care leaver cohort contacted around their 19th birthday has been deemed to be in suitable accommodation. North Tyneside has been a consistently high performer on this outcome indicator and the most recent data indicates that 100% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation. Effective quality assurance and monitoring arrangements have been established to ensure contract compliance and to maintain this outstanding performance.

Active engagement of young people is championed by the effective Participation and Engagement team. Through them, North Tyneside has established a culture of listening to and responding well to the views of children and young people. Effective partnership working with looked after children and young people and care leavers, and their influence on service development is widespread. For example, innovative project work has resulted in sustained improvements in the physical care standards offered by the council's children's homes.

LD is a young person who has been involved in work with the Participation and Engagement Team since he was approximately 12 years old. Throughout this time he has grown in confidence and ability. LD has taken part in delivering Total Respect training to multi-agency staff, ensuring that they understood the impact that they have on a looked after child's life.

As LD got older he spent more time with the team as a young volunteer experiencing what commitments are needed to be in employment which led to him being recommended for an apprenticeship at the local adventure playground.

LD now uses the skills and knowledge gained to work with the children in his care and has maintained the position for the last year. He is still involved with the team and recently supported work with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to develop their new website which is a resource for care leavers across the country. LD was proud to support SCIE in their launch event which was held in North Tyneside.

Provider background

North Tyneside Council's Children Young People and Learning Directorate comprises of three divisions: Preventative and Safeguarding Services; Schools Learning and Skills; and Commissioning and Resources.

The pattern of employment in the area has changed in recent years with the decline of older industries, diversification into light industry and the service sectors, and an increase in part-time temporary work. Unemployment rates are above the national average.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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