

CASE STUDIES

To bring to life the practice described in this report, the four case studies below explore the Human, Learning, Systems features of an organisation working on the ground, a partnership working on the ground, a funder, and a commissioner. These are a small sample of the many organisations we've worked with, and we aim to add to this bank of examples over time.

The case studies are not comprehensive profiles of the organisations, but an exploration of how they are working in a HLS way. Each case study includes links to further reading if you would like to find out more.

CHARITY PROVIDER: CORNERSTONE

Overview

Cornerstone is a Scottish charity that provides care and support in the community. It works in around two thirds of local authority areas across Scotland and has approximately 2,000 staff. Prompted by the crisis in social care, in 2017 Cornerstone adopted a radical new strategy. This new strategy to 2020, Local Cornerstone, aims to put the people Cornerstone supports at the

heart of everything it does. It seeks to do so through developing self-organised teams who are embedded in the community and have the autonomy to make local decisions based on their local knowledge and professional experience. Cornerstone already has 48 self-organising teams across Scotland, each made up of 4-16 people.

How Cornerstone aims to achieve its objectives:

- Colleagues being more involved in the direction of the organisation
- A local rather than regional focus
- A focus on team working
- Business support working together with local teams to deliver exceptional service
- Implementing a culture of empowerment and trust
- Adopting a coaching and mentoring approach rather than traditional methods of management and supervision
- Introducing fast, accessible and user friendly technology
- Establishing the Cornerstone Foundation to fundraise the resources they need to enable their new model
- Cornerstone strategic plan

The Human Learning Systems features of Cornerstone's approach

Human

The Local Cornerstone model aims to put the person they support at the centre of everything. As Hazel Brown, Leader of Exceptional Service at Cornerstone, explains: "lots of social care organisations say this is what they do, but in reality corporate policies and processes divert staff from focusing on the best outcomes for people."

To deliver care and support that meets individual needs, Cornerstone devolves decision making to staff working directly with people accessing support. Staff are trusted to decide, working with the person they are supporting, what the best approach is to helping that person achieve the outcomes that are important to them. To enable this, Cornerstone has removed or stripped back their policies to give staff more autonomy. Teams are locally based and self-organising—they decide how to translate the model in their area, how to support each other as a team, and are responsible for recruitment into their team. There is no hierarchy in the team, and team members work to each other's strengths.

This has required significant cultural change – after being told for years to adhere to policies rather than using their judgement, staff are now being told to do the opposite and some believe that it's not their job to make decisions. While it is a big shift, Hazel explains that with the right tools and support it can work. Staff have lots of training and coaching and are supported by responsive technology. Staff also work within clear boundaries. Hazel explains that, "Our teams work

within safe parameters and regulatory guidelines – it's not anarchy!" Leaders no longer see themselves as managers and only intervene if teams are moving away from the core Cornerstone values or strategic principles.

Cornerstone is in the process of gathering baseline data to enable them to understand how their new approach is impacting on the people they support. Based on research into approaches elsewhere, Cornerstone's ambition is that outcomes for the people they support will improve as they benefit from small staff teams that know them well, more face-to-face time (as a result of less paperwork) and flexible approaches that are tailored to their interests and needs.

Learning

Cornerstone's ultimate focus is on achieving the principles it has set out for its work. It is constantly reviewing how best to achieve these, adapting its approach as it goes based on learning and feedback from teams across Scotland as they test out very new ways of working. Cornerstone is seeking to develop a culture of creativity to encourage staff to feel confident working in a more flexible way, including through using action learning sets to support staff in finding solutions for themselves.

To support ongoing improvement, Cornerstone has shifted the focus of measurement. While it continues to gather data on KPIs such as customer satisfaction, complaints and care inspectorate grades to ensure a safe service and meet regulatory requirements, Cornerstone has stripped this back to what it actually needs to know rather than what it has always collected. Much of the audit data is gathered and processed using

technology, freeing up staff time to focus on the quality of the support it provides through exploring people's individual experiences of Cornerstone.

As part of this, Cornerstone captures stories to explore the difference Cornerstone is making to people's lives and whether it is achieving its ultimate ambitions through its new approach, as well as inspiring both internal and external staff working in health and social care.

Systems

Cornerstone works to take a systemic approach on two levels. Firstly, it seeks to provide holistic support to individuals, including through advice and practical help to help them and their families navigate the social care system.

Secondly, Cornerstone is working with actors from across the system to enable their new approach. From the start they worked with partners to get their buy in and support, including the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Scottish Social Services Council, plus the commissioners of its services.

Hazel emphasises that their work is not only about developing Cornerstone's own work: "we're trying to change the whole system, not just the organisation. We believe social care is broken and undervalued and we want to address this in the much wider sense." Cornerstone is now working to influence wider system partners to transform how social care is delivered, supported by a grant from the Big Lottery Fund which includes a focus on sharing learning across the UK. Other social care providers were initially sceptical but are now approaching Cornerstone in large numbers to learn about their new way of working.

Working with commissioners is the other key priority. While Cornerstone has made savings by flattening its management structure and reducing corporate services to enable higher wages for social care staff, their model also relies on commissioners moving away from commissioning an 'hour of care' and commissioning flexibly to enable to focus on better outcomes for people instead. Cornerstone have encountered lots of support from commissioners—some of whom are really keen and want to explore how they can change their practice to enable more self-managing teams to provide more person-centred care, and some of whom want to see how the initial phase of innovation goes before they proactively change their own practices. Cornerstone has noticed a real shift in the power dynamics in their relationship with commissioners over the past few years given the recognition that the status quo is unsustainable – they recently held a workshop attended by commissioners from some of its partnership areas which they explain never would have happened a few years ago.

Story of change

The starting point

The Local Cornerstone model was developed in response to the challenges in social care. Specifically, Cornerstone's board had a conversation a few years ago about whether they could afford to continue paying the Scottish living wage. To explore a model that allowed more investment in staff and improved outcomes for the people they supported, Cornerstone visited a number of different care and other organisations, including Buurtzorg in the Netherlands whose self-organising teams supported by good technology

were a strong influence. Three members of the senior management team then spent a few months developing the model, informed by lots of stakeholder interviews, feedback from customer surveys, looking at current KPIs and wider research.

Progress and challenges

Cornerstone has made significant progress in embedding their new model so far with 48 self-organising teams already established, but they are still early on in what is a big and radical shift. Hazel reflects that, “We need to be bold – not small changes tinkering around the edges – that is why it is scary.”

Communication has found one particular challenge they have faced in developing and delivering their new approach. Hazel explains that “when people know you are planning something but you can’t articulate it yet, that can be challenging. Where there’s a gap, people start filling it in.” They’ve taken lessons from another Dutch organisation to help them do this as well as they can, including making uptake of the new approach voluntary initially. They’ve found talking to other organisations that have gone through transformational change helpful throughout. Opposition from unions to the new model has been a big and ongoing challenge and Cornerstone’s advice to other organisations is to involve unions as early as possible.

Where next

The key priority in year two of Local Cornerstone is to continue rolling out and refining the model now that it has reached a tipping point. This is likely to involve making the new approach mandatory rather than voluntary, with all Cornerstone staff across Scotland expected to adopt the model based on the learning so far. For staff who are sceptical about the new approach, Cornerstone sees teams already working in this way as key advocates who will be able to influence and support teams new to this way of working. For some staff, the new way of working just won’t be for them, and managing this turnover and recruitment of new staff will be a further key priority for Cornerstone over the next year. Progressing their work with commissioners is the other key enabler to supporting uptake of the Local Cornerstone model.

References

- Cornerstone Strategic Plan 2017-2020
- Local Cornerstone Year One report 2018
- Hazel Brown presentation, 26 September 2018
- Interview with Hazel Brown, 9 January 2019

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM: GATESHEAD

Overview

Gateshead's Public Service Reform (PSR) work has experimented with the creation of a bespoke public service response to the strengths and needs of individual citizens, in order to help people, thrive.

It is based on the idea that most people's lives proceed well most of the time, but that anyone can experience a particular problem, or constellation of problems, which means that their lives start to 'wobble'. The experiment is to see if a Local Authority can hear the signals of people's lives starting to wobble, or them asking for help in some way, and respond with bespoke support in order to help them to get their own lives back on track.

To learn about what might work for different people in different contexts, the Council is creating a series of prototypes, which attempt to hear different signals of people asking for help:

- People who have got into council tax arrears
- People who are seeking employment support in libraries
- People who are experiencing homelessness
- People asking for help in their neighbourhoods

The first of these prototypes – council tax arrears – is complete. It worked with 40 cases, creating tangible improvements in the lives of 30. 4 people didn't wish to engage and 6 were 'trapped' behind a dominant issue requiring of specialist input that the team could not readily access, such as mental health support.

Despite not being able to help these 6 people, the prototype uncovered new information about their context and the right help now stands a better chance of happening.

Many of the cases are ongoing so Gateshead can't cost the prevented demand quite yet, but that which we are already aware include:

- The reduction of the likelihood of a child requiring statutory care services by addressing a spiralling situation that began with huge debts (some of which was incorrectly billed due to a Council error and a resulting in a re-credit). A near crisis has become stable and improving without any intervention from acute services.
- Four people were self-harming and two had considered suicide. Two of these are still struggling but four are improving.
- Seven people had found work or better-paid and/or more sustainable work thus moving off or needing fewer benefits.
- Three had started to claim benefits when they had no income but were eligible for help, thus reducing the strain on crisis services.
- Five people related to those in the prototype but not within it themselves have also found work or maximised their income to match their entitlement such that they can better position themselves to find work.
- One person is likely to be being financially abused and living in poverty that was materially damaging their health. This trajectory has been dramatically turned around to remove the potential need for sustained acute services.

- Fourteen people are engaging in mental health and/or addiction and recovery support that were previously not engaging with any form of mental health support. Ten of them are responding positively and taking more control of their lives

This very likely compensates for the £70k cost of the prototype.

The team of people involved in this prototype drew staff from:

- The Local Authority – housing and council tax teams
- JobCentre Plus
- Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Voluntary sector mental health support

It also pulled on further specialist support from:

- Housing officers
- Social Workers
- Mental Health doctors and nurses

Gateshead's approach

Human

The work in Gateshead involved creating a team who had a simple brief: develop an understanding of the people who have asked for help, and use your judgement to respond in whatever way is helpful to them. On one occasion this involved buying food for families who had nothing in the cupboards, and a winter coat for another. It paid for residential rehab for one client. The team helped clients to get the right benefit payments (all of the clients had incorrect benefits initially). Mostly, what the team did was to create a relationship with people which enabled them to feel that someone was genuinely listening and on their side.

The team was entirely trusted to back their own judgement on what support people needed. The only constraints were 'stay safe, and stay legal'. By trusting the intrinsic motivation of staff, they were able to provide a flexible response to the strengths and needs of the people they worked with.

Learning

The whole of the PSR work in Gateshead is built on the premise that learning drives improvement. The team had no preconceived programme of support to provide, they tried different approaches, and collected information about what happened as a way to learn and improve.

The learning cycle was envisaged in the following way:

- Learn what is effective – what support helps people to get their lives back on track?
- Learn what is efficient – what does an efficient system look like which can provide this support?
- Learn what makes it sustainable – what are the implications of working in this way in terms of future costs and demand?

Systems

The levels of the system that this work is focusing on are:

Change in the relationship between providers of service

It sought to create change in the relationship between different providers of service by seeking to move beyond service silos and the limits of practice imposed by professional standards, and instead create a 'whole person' response which different people contributed to.

Some providers of service were able to embrace this change, and work collaboratively to support people. Others could only see things through the lens of their silos, or resisted change.

Change in the relationship between providers of service and citizens.

For those able to embrace a 'whole person' response, the work created a new relationship between providers of service and citizens. Providers of service who embraced the 'whole person' approach developed a bespoke response. They created a new version of 'public service' rather than viewing public service as a series of separate services. Those who did not embrace this change remained wedded to the idea of providing a standardised service to all 'clients'.

Story of change:

Starting point

The starting point for the change was the appointment of a new Director of Public Service Reform, with a background in systems change.

Impetus for change

There was both a moral and a financial case for change. Standardised, siloed services provide support that doesn't meet people's needs, and are wasteful of resources. Initial investigation found that such services were expending significant amounts of money not helping people.

Progress and challenges

The first prototype is complete, and the second is just starting. Progress has been made in understanding the forms of bespoke support which meet people's needs. The key pieces of learning are:

- Relationships solve problems, not services – in the drive to make short-term financial savings, public service has moved away from relational support. But this is actually what's needed most, and its absence drives up costs.
- Liberate staff to keep learning continually – staff need support to learn and reflect on their work. Trying to performance manage by use of KPIs gets in the way of learning and adaptation.
- There are significant challenges for the remaining prototypes to address, concerning bringing more services and organisations into the approach. This requires a focus on learning and experimentation at 'higher' levels in the system.

Where next

The second prototype, focussing on people seeking employment support via libraries, is due to start in April 2019, as is a third prototype around homelessness. The fourth prototype will focus upon an entire community. This design process will seek to involve a wider range of stakeholders from the outset, as a way to address questions about the broader health of Gateshead as a system which serves its citizens better.

The long term ambition is to understand what a system looks like that enables this more relational, bespoke approach, including new approaches to commissioning.

References

<https://tangledandtrapped.wordpress.com/>

FUNDER: BLAGRAVE TRUST

Overview

The Blagrave Trust ('Blagrave' or 'the trust') is an independent grant-making foundation that distributes funding totalling around £2 million per year to youth charities in Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Wiltshire. In partnership with the organisations it funds, the Trust's mission is to 'bring lasting change to the lives of the most disadvantaged young people aged 14-25 to enable a positive transition to adulthood.'

Blagrave aims to 'promote and empower young people as powerful forces for change, and ensure their voices are heard in matters that affect them.' To achieve this, the Trust seeks partnerships with organisations that listen to and put young people at the heart of their work. Blagrave recognises the role it needs to play as a funder in enabling this, and is committed to shifting the power imbalance that traditionally exists in funding relationships.

Since stepping up the ambition of its grant-making and hiring director Jo Wells in 2014, The Trust has been testing and evolving its approach to be as flexible, transparent and enabling as possible. As it continues to adapt its own work, Blagrave is committed to sharing its learning, including with other funders.

Blagrave's approach

Human

The Trust is committed to enabling youth organisations to be responsive to the young people they support. As director Jo Wells explains, "we want to enable positive transitions for

young people, whatever that means for them, focusing not on societal notions of 'success' but on their own ambitions, quality of life, security and stability." To facilitate this, Blagrave trusts its partners to do what they are expert in and to act on feedback from young people rather than seeking control through traditional project funding. Instead, it provides multi-year core funding without any prescriptive funding criteria or onerous reporting requirements.

Regional Partnerships Manager Tessa Hibbert explains that, "we've increasingly come to realise that the hoops that funders make organisations jump through to get funding do not create impact, in fact they are slowing down the organisations we want to help."

The Trust aims to foster a spirit of partnership and mutual respect through a commitment to listening and relationship building. Tessa states the Trust recognises "that local knowledge, context and creativity can't be conveyed on paper and that organisations need to be agile. We start by developing relationships with partners so they in turn can build relationships with the young people they're supporting. Relationships based on trust are essential."

The Trust views that it has a responsibility as a funder to understand the work of their partners (and potential partners), so that organisations can focus their time and resource on supporting young people rather than on paperwork. The Trust

does not ask for information that it will not use and where possible uses information that partner organisations have already produced. Its application process involves meeting with potential partners and reviewing existing documentation, rather than applicants having to complete an application form. The Trust also visits every organisation it wishes to fund to learn more about their work and, where possible and appropriate, meets the young people they support.

Blagrove has had positive feedback from partners about how its approach enables them to support young people. One partner fed back that: “The flexibility and understanding of the Trust in terms of how we support young people has been crucial, particularly in relation to wanting to do the work in another geographical area. Knowing that we are supported without unnecessary restrictions is vital to enable us to provide the kind of personalised service that our young people so desperately need.”

Learning

Blagrove’s Charter sets out the commitment to ‘Critically assess what we do, adapting and innovating in response to what we learn.’ The Trust has been learning and adapting at a rapid rate since 2014 to continuously improve its approach. For example, after narrowing the focus of its funding to young people in 2014, the fund then adopted specific priority funding areas within this, but soon realised this created rigid boundaries which did not reflect the reality either of young people’s lives or the organisations that supported them. In 2018 it stepped up its ambition to put young people

in the lead by recruiting two trustees aged under 25. The Trust’s open dialogue with partners helps it to maintain accountability to them and builds trust through transparency. It posts commitments on its website and regularly asks its partners for feedback on whether and how they are living up to them.

The Trust also views learning as a priority in ensuring its partners are accountable to young people. It funds organisations who actively listen to and involve young people, and adapt and improve their work in response. In all interactions, the Trust encourages its partners to reflect and share their learning and reinforces that they have the freedom to change how they use their funding to reflect the complex and ever-changing environment they work in.

As well as promoting learning in its interactions with individual partners, the Trust enables peer learning, including through convening annual events to enable partners to connect, share, reflect and learn from each other. In 2018 the event explored the question “who holds us accountable to our missions”? Creating a collaborative rather than competitive dynamic between its partners reflects the Trust’s ambition to put young people rather than organisational interests first.

Systems

Blagrave seeks to help tackle systemic issues facing young people, rather than only addressing the symptoms, and in 2018 recruited a policy manager to develop its strategy in this area. It aims to help contribute to change beyond its immediate partners for young people aged 14-25 through:

Addressing structural issues impacting young people

The Trust funds initiatives that give young people a stake in society and support their own social change efforts to ensure their voices are heard in matters that affect them. To maximise its potential in contributing to lasting change for disadvantaged young people, the Trust is exploring how it can influence the systems that make the biggest impact for young people – both locally and nationally. For example, in Southampton it is working with a research partner to understand more about the complex reality for young people who face multiple challenges. They are working to analyse the system, identify where the problems are, and develop an advocacy solution to take forward long term change on a local and regional level. Nationally, the trust is developing its strategy to have achieve policy change on the 'root causes' of issues faced by young people.

Rebalancing the power dynamic in funding relationships

The Trust strongly believes that to achieve its mission it needs to address the traditional inequality in the funding relationship that prioritises funded organisations' accountability to the funder rather than the people they seek to serve. Blagrave aims

to form equal partnerships with the organisations it funds, reflected in its decision to call these organisations 'partners' rather than 'grantees,' and its focus on building trust with and listening to these organisations to constantly improve its own approach. Blagrave also works to influence and encourage its partners to model these behaviours in its own work with young people.

As part of the ambition in its Charter to 'achieve social impact beyond our immediate partners in pursuit of a fair and just society,' the Trust has ambitions to bring about wider change in how the funding sector operates. Despite being a small Trust (3 staff, up from 1 in 2014), it is playing an influential role in shaping new approaches that put young people first. Based on a model used in the US, the Trust was the founding partner of a 'Listening Fund' – a collaboration of funders (Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief, and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation) who are investing £900,000 to support youth organisations to enable young people to have their say in shaping their own support services. Already the learning from this fund is providing valuable insights that will shape what the Trust does next—feedback from the Fund's assessment tool has shown that while youth organisations are committed to listening to young people, they are not necessarily being held to account for acting on what they hear.

Story of change

The starting point

From 1978, the Blagrave Trust was a traditional grant-maker which provided short term, small annual grants for a range of projects operating in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire. When its trustees decided to sell the estate from which the Trust generated its income in 2009, this allowed Blagrave to increase the amount of funding it distributed. At the same time, the trustees increased their level of ambition and decided to hire a Director for the first time. Since 2014 the Trust's ambition has been to help improve the lives of young people and is seeking to help address the power imbalances in the funding sector as part of this.

As part of its focus on advancing good funding practice, in 2016 the Trust partnered with the Esmée Fairbairn foundation to conduct a listening exercise with grantees to generate insights and stimulate debate about how funders can better support the work of the social sector. The findings of the Listening for Change survey of 640 people included:

- Organisations felt that their funders are far more accountable to their own trustees than to orgs they support or people they seek to help.
- One third of respondents reported that over 30% of total organisational resource was spent managing funding contracts, with process and bureaucracy diverting attention and energy away from more meaningful discussions and focus.
- More flexible support biggest thing funders could do to improve the relationship
- The need to redesign how the funding system operates. As one survey respondent commented:

“There must be a better way of doing it. Us humans are a brilliant, clever, inventive lot and it must be possible to do it better. If we were designing this from scratch, I doubt we would end up with the same system.”

Along with feedback from their own grantees, the findings from this survey provided a strong reinforcement of the Trust's sense that funding practice needed to change, and prompted it to make immediate changes to its own approach.

Progress and challenges

The Trust has moved quickly as a small and dynamic organisation, which in some cases has been challenging for partners who are not used to working with funders in this way. While it is taking time to embed the new ways of working both as a funder and for the partners it supports, overall the results have been positive. Tessa explains that removing detailed monitoring requirements has created more capacity for the team to focus on practice and learning, and developing a more meaningful relationship with and understanding of partners. The improved relationship and trust between funder and partner, and between partners themselves, has created a 'community' and presented opportunities for the Trust to use its convening power more to share learning. And, while they admit they haven't 'cracked' the act of monitoring partnerships to learn rather than measure, the focus on learning and building of trust means that partners are more likely to tell them when things go wrong, and enable them to course correct together.

Where next

The Trust is continuously evolving its funding approach based on feedback from its partners, and is exploring ways to influence more widely, including through the system change work in Southampton and the Listening Fund, becoming youth led in everything it does and contributing to the sector's understanding of the relationship between lived experience and grassroots led change, alongside other forms of expertise in the social change arena.

References

Blagrove Trust website

Blagrove Trust Charter

Leap of Reason Ambassadors

Brain, heart, ears: A Profile of the Blagrove Trust

Listening Fund report

IVAR (2018) The Story of the Blagrove Trust [not yet published]

Blagrove Trust Annual Accounts 2017 'Reflections on accountability' <https://www.blagravetrust.org/reflections-on-accountability/>

Tessa Hibbert presentation, 26 September 2018

COMMISSIONER: PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Overview

Plymouth City Council have worked in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group to create a 'cradle to grave' integrated fund of £638 million to commission systemic responses across the following service areas:

- Public Health
- Leisure Services
- Housing Services
- Children's Services (including Schools Grant (DSG))
- Adult Social Care
- Primary Care
- Community Health Services
- Acute Provision

Four strategies unite the authority in a shared vision which considers: wellbeing, children and young people, community, and enhanced and specialised care. This enables an alignment of purpose through a shared vision.

A whole system, co-productive approach is taken across all work streams at Plymouth. Co-production is defined as a more collaborative, broader, deeper, and longer process than consultation. Vision is co-produced with a range of stakeholders in the system, and which uses a variety of methods and bespoke processes tailored to context. In addition, a horizontal and mutual accountability has been developed between commissioners and service providers.

This case study focuses on the commissioning of a 'whole system' of support to adults with complex needs. The key features of this commissioning process were:

- The Council and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) created an £80m, 10 year, shared budget to commission a health and care system for vulnerable adults in Plymouth
- The tender did not specify outputs or outcomes to be delivered. Instead, it focussed on collaboration and learning together.
- This was tendered through an **Alliance contract** model whereby organisations in the city came together to create a shared response – where organisations are jointly liable for the performance of the contract
- Following the tender process the Council became a signatory to the Alliance, formally recognising that they are part of the system
- The tendering process was conducted as a series of design conversations between the commissioners and providers in the Alliance, from which a set of core service principles and activities emerged.
- The signed Alliance contract does not specify outputs or outcomes to be achieved. Instead, it uses a set of agreed principles as the basis for how the Alliance will function. The details of the service provision are subject to continued adaptation based on shared learning.
- This commissioning process was made possible by four years of **system change work**, which built relationships of trust between the actors involved.

Key documents underpinning this Case Study, including the tender documents, and can be found in the 'Complexities' Knowledge Hub resource library [here](#).

Features of Plymouth's approach **Human**

It is assumed that the drive 'do the right thing by people' is a collective motivation held in Plymouth and is assumed as an underlying principle to the commissioning and delivery process.

A high level of trust has been developed across Plymouth. This trust has been built at each layer of the system: between people who need support and the workers who support them, those workers and their managers, managers and commissioners, commissioners and directors.

The Council deliberately undertook exercises (such as **Appreciative Inquiry**) to build trust between themselves and providers, between the providers themselves, and between providers and the people they serve. The building of this trust between people and organisations has enabled the Council to create flexible contracts without detailed service specifications. Trust has created the conditions for flexibility and adaptation.

Learning

Learning was placed at the heart of the commissioning process. The commissioning process included a series of design conversations with providers in the Alliance, in which shared challenges and responses began to emerge.

The tender specification made clear that measures were to be used for learning, for all actors in the system:

“We want to work with provider(s) to measure and reflect on the outcomes that the system is producing, in order to help the system continuously adapt and improve, and to help organisations understand their particular contributions to these outcomes?”

Tender specification document

Systems

The Council has taken on the role of Systems Steward by:

- Making the system visible to all the actors within it – through system mapping and appreciative inquiry
- Building relationships and trust between actors in the system – by convening regular facilitated systems thinking sessions
- Creating new, light-touch, system infrastructure to enable on-going governance of the system: a **System Optimisation Group**, and a **Creative Solutions Forum**.
- Framing its relationship with providers as a shared systemic endeavour to create good outcomes, rather than as a purchaser/provider split
- Allocating resources through an Alliance Contract mechanism – a way which recognises the collective responsibilities of a systemic perspective, rather than promoting competition between members of the system

Examples of Plymouth’s commissioning and delivery principles and processes

The following are principles from the tender document which underlie Plymouth’s approach to commissioning:

- The person using the service is in control. This is not just about choice but the power to shape and direct their support
- Everything we do acknowledges that everyone is a citizen and we will work to enable them to make a positive contribution to their community
- We will look for opportunities in risks
- We connect ourselves, around and focused on the needs of the person
- We always recognise people’s perspectives on the value held in their relationships and networks
- We invest in the priorities, energy, passions and enthusiasm of people
- We aim to increase the understanding and connectedness within a wider community to ensure we reduce isolation
- We involve people with a lived experience and people delivering the service in the ongoing development of services
- We are intelligence-led
- We intervene early where possible
- We believe people have the ability and competence to achieve great things
- We will focus on skills and assets rather than deficits and barriers.

Story of change

Starting point

A Lottery Bid in 2012 which was rejected ultimately had beneficial consequences for Plymouth; it had acted as an impetus for commissioners to meet every week for a year to discuss the bid and for views to be sought from a range of stakeholders which involved over 70 services, 400 people using services and their carers, elected representatives, and key decision makers.

The learning gathered from the mass consultation, and the relationships and trust developed through meetings acted as a lever for change as it shifted perspective from thinking about services to individual users, to the health of the system.

Impetus

The overriding motivation for changing practice stemmed from the desire to 'do the right thing by people' and the realisation that the current system was not set up to achieve this aim. The prevailing commissioning approach, and over specification of contracts, created siloes and competition between service providers, and disempowered both workers and users of services. Achieving meaningful outcomes for users was lost behind bureaucracy and proxy measures.

In addition, austerity forced Plymouth to consider a different approach. Evaluation of structures and processes highlighted areas of duplication and gaps in the system. Users were remaining in the system without having their needs attended to, and not only was this detrimental to users, it was detrimental to the system, and unsustainable in times

of austerity. Commissioners concluded that, paradoxically, when you stop thinking about money and outcomes and just on doing the right thing and delivering bespoke service you save money and outcomes are better.

Progress and challenges

There has been acknowledgment that trust, and relationships took time to develop and that the course taken would be messy, involved. What seemed to hold the group together through tough times was the realisation that challenge is a healthy and necessary part of the process.

There was acceptance that not everyone will be immediately 'on-board' with a complexity-informed approach. Therefore, it was about identifying 'fellow travellers', and forming a 'coalition of the willing' to get the ball rolling. Once others could see that the approach was working then trust was further dispersed across the system.

Permission has been granted at the director level to do things differently and it is thought that without being given this freedom, it would have been extremely difficult to of had the autonomy and ability to overcome siloed structures to work collaboratively towards meaningful outcomes.

Where next:

Plymouth City Council and partners are working to translate the Alliance principles into governance and management practices.

References

Further information on the Plymouth case study can be found in the [Complexities Knowledge Hub library](#).



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