



HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE



Wigan Council

Wigan Ethical Homecare Provider Framework – Setting the conditions for collaboration over competition

Despite having similar homecare budget to most councils, Wigan Council oversees a system which generates some of the best homecare outcomes in the country, and a wide range of additional positive social and economic impacts including stable, well-paid local jobs, strong social connections,

This is not an accident, or the result of demanding higher percentages of social value in contracts. It's come from careful and deliberate system stewardship towards a shared vision of a how a thriving care system should work.

Identifying Problems, Aims and Opportunities

The process started with Wigan Council Commissioners recognising the problems with the local care market and existing block commissioning approaches, including zero-hour contracts, poor care outcomes, adversarial provider-commissioner relationships, and rising unit costs. There were concerns that many of the block contract providers were primarily motivated by the opportunity to extract a profit, and had little interest in improving outcomes for users of the service.

Commissioners began to explore what a better system would look like. The approach was underpinned by Council commitment to authentic partnership and collaboration valuing respective knowledge, expertise and insight to codesign a strong shared vision and model of homecare where everyone plays their part.

The council saw beyond the narrative of social care as a financial burden to recognise its importance as a contributor to a thriving economy. Care is a key local employment sector and the council recognised the importance of a healthy functioning care system to provide good jobs in the borough.

Bringing together interested parties

Through a period of pre-market engagement, the council engaged extensively with anyone who might care about the problems with the current state of affairs. This was conducted in a spirit of open enquiry and sought to understand among other things:

- Fair and sustainable unit costs for care - exploring what would constitute a reasonable level of profit to ensure providers could remain financially stable
- The needs of service users - identifying what mattered most to the recipients of care
- Strengths and needs in local communities
- The logistical challenges of delivering care appointments across the borough

This exploratory process uncovered a number of non-negotiable 'imperatives' for the council that would form the basis of the partner selection process, the contract with the local authority, and the ongoing quality assurance process.

Potential providers would need to prove that they were:

- willing to work on an open book basis
- Committed to paying real living wage
- Capable of delivering quality care outcomes
- Committed authentically to knowing, caring and contributing to the borough and local people beyond the contract.

Establishing Relationships

The procurement process involved establishing an Ethical Provider Framework which specified the values and behaviours, care standards, and resources available. The council area was divided up into fourteen geographically defined lots and providers were invited to apply.

The unit cost was fixed, removing price from the assessment and the assessment was values (as opposed to output) driven. Instead, the council committed to continually review costs with providers, through open book accounting. This ensures that costs remain affordable for the council and sustainable for providers.

Providers were selected through test of the imperatives which had been identified in the pre-market engagement stage. In person interviews explored their commitment to place, their capabilities, and the assets and strengths they felt they could bring to the system. A multi-agency panel, which included the recipients of homecare, came to a rigorous judgement on the right suppliers. An emphasis was put on

trusting gut feeling and testing whether suppliers had the community's interests at heart or were solely motivated by the profit opportunity. Potential suppliers were encouraged to consider any assets and expertise they were able to bring to the partnership and had to agree to an open book accounting process with a commitment from commissioners to engage annually on a sustainable and affordable fee position.

Eight providers were selected for the 14 neighbourhood areas.

Delivering and tracking value in partnership

10 years in, the partnership has exceeded expectations, delivering a wide range of positive social and economic outcomes, both predicted and unpredicted, including:

- No waiting lists for home care
- The highest proportion of CQC-rated Good and Outstanding care services in the North West
- Reduced travel times and carbon footprint for care workers
- Greatly improved recruitment and retention of staff
- Diversified workforce – 50% under 30 years old
- 86% of the workforce live in the place where they are delivering care.

Instead of specifying these outcomes and trying to lock them into contracts, the procurement process focussed on setting the right conditions and conditionalities for future collaboration. As well as massively increasing social value outputs, the process has significantly improved working relationships across the system - by limiting the geographical overlap, providers no longer compete for referrals and have become partners rather than adversaries.

The system is now cooperating towards common goals under the stewardship of the local authority.

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