

Cheshire West and Chester Council

The Role of Senior Managers in supporting the ASYE within Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Background

Cheshire West and Chester Council adopted their own Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) process in line with national recommendations in September 2012.

Due to the high number of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in children's services the process became firmly established more quickly than in adult services where the number of NQSWs was much lower.

A core process was agreed across both services but separate national drivers and policy directions have led to differences in the way in which the process has developed and is supported and managed.

However, what has remained constant is the importance of the role of senior managers in the decision making process for ASYE and confirming the final assessment judgement.

What we wanted to achieve

In ensuring that senior managers (all of whom are registered social workers) are involved in the internal assessment process for all NQSWs the aims have been:

- To champion the ASYE process at the highest level and embed it within the organisation as a whole

- To demonstrate commitment to the Employer standards particularly around the development of a comprehensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) process starting with the ASYE and continuing beyond this
- To focus the mind of all social workers and managers on the importance of CPD with regard to Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration renewal
- To maintain a focus on consistently high standards of practice
- To help ensure social workers feel valued in their role
- To strengthen the communication and understanding between NQWS and senior managers

What we did

Arrangements were put in place so that in children's services a senior manager chairs the final Assessment Panel and in adult services the Final Review Meeting. The function of both of these forums is to confirm the final assessment judgement.

Senior managers take time to read through each portfolio and to engage with individual NQSWs during the final stages of the process and through this they can get to know and understand their staff, to see the progress they have made and to

have confidence that they are ready to take on the challenge of the more complex work they will face in their future practice.

This process is working well, supported by workforce staff who are also registered social workers and who have a good understanding of the operational context within which the ASYE exists.

A great deal has been achieved including:

- Improved communication, understanding and trust between senior managers and social workers
- social work staff feel more valued in their role with the investment in their professional development
- greater commitment to ongoing professional development
- a more cohesive approach to professional development with the ASYE process aligned with a commitment to CPD for all social workers and underpinned by a firm undertaking to embed the Employer Standards across the organisation

Senior managers have also ensured that social work teams in both children and adult services are fully engaged and that candidates, assessors and supervisors are fully prepared for their role. This has been achieved by senior managers supporting a programme of briefings, learning and development workshops and regular forum meetings for assessors and supervisors with a separate forum for candidates as they progress through their ASYE year.

With senior management support we were also able to build on existing relationships with our partners at the University of Chester to develop academic assessment as part of the ASYE and to offer NQSWs access to research materials and support in developing their skills in critical reflective practice.

Within the council senior managers supported NQSWs in adult services in both social care assessor roles and domestic violence advocate roles to undertake the ASYE. Working through the partnership we were also able to support an NQSW in the voluntary sector in a personal health budget coordinator role to register on the ASYE process.

What we achieved

As a result of the involvement of senior management the ASYE process is now embedded within the organisation with the first cohorts of candidates having received their certificates from The College of Social Work (TCSW).

The time limit on the process has helped to focus the minds of all those involved, the regular reviews and the support from a mentor helps to ensure that candidates are kept on track.

The process has provided a source of CPD for assessors and supervisors with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills particularly around enabling and supporting the learning of others.

It has helped to establish the basis of a more structured CPD process for more experienced social workers with the establishment of additional processes leading to progression and beyond.

Cheshire West and Chester Council have also been working to embed the employer standards into the organisation and developing the ASYE process has helped to reinforce the standards.

What we learnt

The fact that all the senior managers across both services are registered social workers has been regarded as a key element in championing the process at the highest level and embedding it throughout the organisation as a whole. It also demonstrates a direct commitment to the learning and development of NQSWs in the organisation, and feedback from NQSWs shows that this is meaningful.

By taking the lead role in the final process of ASYE senior managers are able to demonstrate their commitment to supporting NQSWs not only with their individual learning and development but also in making sure that the right mechanisms and resources are available to support them. Discussion around these issues with the NQSW provides the opportunity for senior managers to identify the strengths and failings in the supported element of the process and to recommend any necessary changes. Senior managers will then discuss the outcomes with workforce staff who take responsibility for the detail of the process.

Finally, there is the commitment to ongoing CPD with the discussion with the NQSW about their continuous learning and the expectations for year two of their employment.

In conclusion the involvement of senior managers has been crucial to the process of embedding ASYE into the organisation and as part of an overall approach to developing a more coherent CPD process for SWs at all stages of their career. As one senior manager put it "... this gives me confidence that Cheshire West and Chester is contributing to developing the workforce of the future." Allison Ainsworth, Senior Manager, Older People and Physical Disabilities

Tips

- keep senior managers informed and updated on key developments in ASYE, social work qualifying education and CPD is essential
- seek feedback from senior managers on the internal ASYE process and outcomes
- involve senior managers in standardisation & moderation processes
- planning ahead is crucial getting dates in diaries for meetings and panels

“Knowing that my senior manager took such time and interest in my professional development made me feel valued in my role as a newly qualified social worker. I feel confident in starting the second year of my social work career in the knowledge that I have her support.”

Kate Moorhouse, (NQSW),
Leighton Hospital Team, Adult
Social Care & Health

“This programme is an essential investment in the professional development of our qualified social workers, giving them confidence to develop their practice further at a time of enormous challenge and tumultuous change in the field of social care.”

Keith Evans, Senior manager, Learning Disability & Mental Health

For more information please contact

www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/

Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care has helped to develop the ASYE process and provides some practical resources and funding potential for employers involved in providing adult social care.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment

Our special website section provides an overview of the process, lists how employers can register their NQSWs and includes related case study examples and guidance to demonstrate how other employers are delivering this process.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Socialwork

Continuing to develop Social Workers

Skills for Care has produced core principles, resources and guidance to support employers to develop the social work workforce.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/swcpd

Skills for Care
West Gate
6 Grace Street
Leeds
LS1 2RP
telephone 0113 245 1716
email info@skillsforcare.org.uk
web www.skillsforcare.org.uk

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