

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

MARCH 2012

PEER CHALLENGER - MICK CONNELL

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) was formed in April 2009. A legacy of poor performance was inherited from the former Bedfordshire County Council, which had been designated as 'Priority for Improvement' by the Department of Health.
- 1.2 The current Director joined CBC in January 2009 to lead the improvement journey. Following the 2008/09 Annual Performance Assessment, CQC recognised that CBC knew the challenge ahead and that early signs of recovery were apparent.
- 1.3 The Peer Challenger has undertaken the role on five levels:
- Review of reports and strategy documents provided by CBC.
 - Visit to CBC on 19 December 2011 to take part in a wide range of interviews with elected members and senior officers
 - Telephone conversations with improvement partners and regulators.
 - Attendance at a regional workshop on sector led improvement on 9 January 2012.
 - Visit to CBC on 13 March 2012 to meet with groups of external stakeholders (service users, carers, statutory and independent sector partners / providers).

2. LEADERSHIP

- 2.1 Leadership is a key ingredient in service improvement. The Chief Executive, Director and Lead Member, all demonstrate a very positive commitment to the improvement journey based on a realistic assessment of the position and identification of adult social care as a major priority.
- 2.2 The Director has worked very hard to change the culture and demonstrates an open, honest and visible style of leadership which has made a clear impact within the department and with external partners.
- 2.3 A strong senior team is now in place working to a common purpose. Personal development, training and communication right across the department are key elements in the improvement approach.
- 2.4 There is insight and self awareness about current performance and the challenges ahead. This, together with the measured approach to change to ensure that improvements are embedded, gives confidence that progress towards excellence will be sustained.

3. RECOVERY AND IMPROVEMENT

- 3.1 The Recovery Programme was established in October 2009 to take adult social care to safe, sustainable service delivery in the key areas of concern. Focused, prioritised resources were deployed to ensure rapid improvement.
- 3.2 Lessons learned from the first phase of the Recovery Programme were documented and used to shape phase two. Five key areas of risk to sustaining improvement were identified and acted on.

- 3.3 Enhanced performance has been achieved and is assured through a robust approach to performance management with a well developed balanced scorecard highlighting actions required. Project management skills and the necessary resources are deployed to achieve effective delivery.
- 3.4 It is clear that progress has been made in creating a stable environment in which further challenges, e.g. key commissioning strategies and market development, can be taken forward with confidence.

4. SAFEGUARDING

- 4.1 Improvements in safeguarding are evidenced in the peer review which took place in June 2011. I have spoken to the lead Director and he is very positive about what has been achieved in CBC.
- 4.2 Partners have also confirmed to me the positive impact made my CBC at the strategic level in the safeguarding adults board.
- 4.3 There has been a clear focus on improving practice and the attention to detail is impressive. A recent testament to this is that a council officer has been asked to provide support to another local authority.
- 4.4 There is a commitment to continued improvement and future objectives are laid out in a development plan following on from the safeguarding peer review. Progress is reported regularly on developments. Involving people in the development of safeguarding services, improving people's experience of safeguarding and outcomes are given high priority.

5. PARTNERSHIPS

- 5.1 CBC has a mature approach to partnership working emanating from the leadership style referred to above. Comments and constructive criticism are welcomed. External partners refer to being able to have a 'grown up' conversation with CBC. Service users and carers feel that the council listens to them.
- 5.2 The Director has been keen to seek support from a range of external sources and for CBC to play a greater role in the region and improve its visibility. My conversations with improvement partners have confirmed the strength of this approach. I also attended a regional sector led improvement workshop on 9 January 2012 to support the Director in sharing CBC's experience on the improvement journey.
- 5.3 There have been marked improvements in key partnerships, e.g. with NHS organisations, with positive signs that more integrated approaches can be developed successfully in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

I have been impressed by the work undertaken in CBC to improve adult social care services. I am confident from my information gathering, discussions and observations that the council is now performing “well” overall. In my view, the council continues to make good progress and will be able to sustain this in the future.

**Mick Connell
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