

Using the workforce capacity model - case study

Wigan Council

Background

Wigan Council is one of Greater Manchester's ten local authorities and provides adult social services to over 3,700 residents.

Wigan Council used the workforce capacity planning model to help plan the changes needed within the workforce ahead of the introduction of the new Care Act.

What they wanted to achieve

Wigan Council wanted to understand all the existing and new functions required by the Act and identify the key areas where demand would increase. In particular, the council recognised that the introduction of the new Care Act will result in an increased demand for assessments; these will include carers' assessments, financial assessments, and the assessments of self-funders. They therefore wanted to use the workforce capacity model to see how these demands could be met whilst still achieving their corporate savings targets.

Wigan Council wanted to make sure that they were utilising the existing workforce efficiently by ensuring that qualified social workers will be able to spend their time on the issues that most require their expertise. The council had noted that the Care Act suggests that not all new functions will need to be carried out by qualified social workers and therefore planned to use the model to test this theory and ascertain which functions could be carried out by staff other than qualified social workers.

What they did

Wigan Council held a workshop session with managers from the social work and mental health teams. During the workshop, they mapped out all of the functions required by the Care Act and identified areas where there was likely to be a growth in demand. By marking the functions that required the expertise of a qualified social worker they were then able to assess whether the remaining functions could be carried out by a different kind of worker – such as a social care officer.

What was achieved?

By using the workforce capacity planning model Wigan Council identified that although the workload will increase following the introduction of the new Act, much of the new work could be carried out by non-qualified social workers. By creating the new role of social care officer, qualified social workers would be able to spend their time working on the most complex cases and safeguarding-related work.

As a result of using the model, the council now has a validated job description for the new role of social work officer.

In addition, following the front-line observation work, Wigan Council were also able to determine where efficiencies could be made in the way that staff work in localities handling and inputting data.

Commenting on the achievements Sharon Barber, assistant director, said: “Due to our requirements to cap the growth in terms of demand on our services, we had already started to think about a new type of workforce who could deal with the straightforward bulk of contacts coming in to the system. This piece of work confirmed my thinking in that to enable us to cope with increased demand for assessments and fulfilling needs, we need to make sure that social workers are only dealing with the things we need their expertise to deal with.”

What was learnt?

Wigan Council found that rather than simply focussing on the way they work now, it was important to take a step back and look at the basic functions required and identify who could carry them out. They recognised that because the Care and Support Act requires local authorities to examine many of the fundamental ways they approach social care; it is worth taking all the requirements into account to redesign the workforce.

Commenting on the knowledge gained Nicola Lowe, programmes and partnership manager, said: “Understanding the workforce for the future is a key part of the transformational work with adult social care and health in Wigan. This work has supported our understanding of developing wider pathways, that not only focus on those dealing with complex and non-complex cases but what is required from a preventative focus from the community and voluntary sector.”

To access the workforce capacity planning model visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/careact > capacity planning model.

Skills for Care has a range of other resources that can support the Care Act implementation. For more information and to access the resources visit

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/careact