

Building cohesion, consistency, and culture at Distinguished Care Group

Distinguished Care Group is a relatively new addition to the provider landscape. The organisation brings together three established nursing and residential care services across Northumberland and has plans for further growth. The group launched in January 2025 under the leadership of Paul Smith, Director of Care, Quality, and Operations and Nominated Individual.

Paul quickly saw the opportunity to introduce the Care Workforce Pathway to help provide structure, direction, and cohesion across the newly formed Distinguished Care Group, while also driving service growth, improvement, and compliance. With ambitious plans for expansion and a strong commitment to delivering high-quality person-led care, the group aspires to be an innovative, responsive, and responsible employer. Central to this is working in close partnership with those who draw on Distinguished Care Group's care and support, alongside their families, friends, and other stakeholders, to move toward better care outcomes.

When the three services first came together, each brought different practices and cultures. For a new leadership team working to unify processes, the Care Workforce Pathway offered a clear framework to support consistency and quality across the group. From the outset, HR, recruitment, and onboarding processes were reviewed and standardised. All job descriptions and contracts were mapped to the Pathway, allowing the group to retire outdated roles, introduce new ones, and create clear, consistent expectations for staff.

Pauls explains: "The Pathway gives us the structure we need to bring three previously separate services together under a single, coherent identity. Mapping our roles to the Pathway helps us harmonise expectations, strengthen our workforce structure, and raise standards across every service."

Once roles and expectations were unified, they were able to introduce new approaches to supervision and appraisal processes and use the newly mapped job descriptions to support further uplifts in care quality. They introduced new learning and development opportunities in order to support all staff to meet the expectations required and started to have one-to-one career conversations to help take this forward. The new learning opportunities strengthened the new roles and as a result the organisation grew both clinically and managerially stronger.

The Pathway was adopted during a period of significant organisational change. Some colleagues initially worried the changes could be disruptive, as new leadership, new systems, and new ways of working were introduced. To support the

workforce, the group established a managers' forum, bringing together home leaders, directors, and owners. This strengthened communication, improved trust, and created a group identity.

Within six months of adopting the Pathway and applying its principles, one care home which had been in special measures for two years was, following external assessments, unanimously removed from organisational safeguarding processes by the local authority, CQC, and police force. Environmental improvements followed. Each of the home's three floors was assigned a specialist purpose. New management and practice leader roles were established at floor level to align standards and clinical practice with the expectations of the Pathway.

Paul says: "The Pathway helped us stabilise a home that had been struggling. Within just a few months, we saw transformation that our external partners also recognised."

Stakeholder satisfaction surveys evidenced the improved staff satisfaction in all settings. One setting performed particularly well, showing a 92% overall increase in satisfaction when all feedback from residents, relatives, friends and advocates, staff, and visiting professionals was combined.

Paul says "We see the Pathway as a framework and a way of helping to create culture. Our people know what they're doing, and they know what it's doing to change how they feel and the way they perform. The measured increases in satisfaction are directly linked to happier staff, more confident staff, more competent staff."

Distinguished Care Group are continuing to map roles against the Pathway role categories and embed the Pathway across their recruitment and marketing activity. Their focus is on helping employees understand that care work offers a long-term, professional career and supporting people to increase their confidence and outlook on their job. New roles, including an ambassador position, are already being developed.

As they grow, the Pathway will remain central to shaping culture, supporting colleagues, and delivering high-quality care across the group. And Paul's advice for providers looking to start their own Pathway journey is clear.

He says: "Seeing our tangible results in such a short period should encourage everybody to explore the Pathway. We're delighted to share our experience with providers who may want to get to where we are now. Because it is very possible. It's not easy, but it's more than possible."