

Creating a central focus for recruitment and retention in the Black Country

Within the Black Country ICS, a positive programme of relationship-building has taken place over the past few years. This has been supported by social care providers being represented on the ICS People Board via Skills for Care's locality manager.

The establishment of a specific Social Care Recruitment and Retention network across the local area has led to great successes and an increased sense of focus and engagement from providers and social care partners across the Black Country. It has also enabled the ICS, alongside other organisations and partners, to engage with the social care sector more effectively and accessibly.

Thanks to this network, a number of initiatives have been funded across the system to support providers to overcome recruitment and retention challenges and ensure they are contributing to integrated workforce planning across the area.

Establish focused and clear plans of support for social care providers

Across the Black Country, a wide range of organisations and individuals are ready and willing to support health and social care providers tackle the ongoing sector-wide recruitment and retention challenges – including recruitment agencies and training providers.

It is hugely positive that there is such a vast range of workforce-focused organisations offering to support providers in their approach to recruitment and retention. However, providers were becoming overwhelmed with the different options for training, recruitment and workforce-related support, and often did not have the time to unpick how each could support them in their recruitment goals.

This issue was identified by Skills for Care and the Workforce Transformation Lead in the Black Country in their conversations with social care providers. It was then raised with the ICS, who supported the establishment of a dedicated social care Recruitment and Retention Network. This proved to be successful, and there are now over 50 organisations represented on that group, including providers and local authority commissioning contacts.

All new adult social care workers in the local community will receive a free bus pass for their first month in their new role. This recruitment initiative is a direct result of the Recruitment and Retention Network's collaborative approach to identifying barriers and fielding solutions that can overcome them. The idea was brought to life by bringing together shared connections, contacts, learning, and resources across the network.

Engage suppliers to the sector to support collaboration

Many suppliers to the sector (for example, organisations who support with recruitment and training) have built good connections with the central Black Country Workforce Recruitment and Retention network, which has become a valuable hub of shared learning and insights.

By setting up a shared database of organisations, contacts, and roles and responsibilities, both suppliers and providers have been able to focus their attention and resources to meet their goals. As an example, suppliers have been working together to adapt their offers, and bringing those offers together to develop a much clearer pathway of recruitment and training for the workforce.

Working collaboratively with suppliers to the sector has resulted in clearer offers for providers, and increased provider engagement with recruitment initiatives. Indeed.com was one of the suppliers in this group who has since been approached to do some bespoke work with providers, with support from funding by the ICS. This opportunity was secured thanks to the ICS receiving direct feedback from providers after a recruitment and retention workshop with suppliers that identified a need for further tailored support with the early stages of recruitment.

Prioritise retention as well as recruitment of staff

Working groups across the ICS which focus on workforce must not lose sight of the importance of retention while much of the wider narrative about the sector often focuses on recruitment. The Black Country ICS has developed a number of approaches to support social care providers with this theme. In particular, ensuring that providers feel equipped to offer their teams great wellbeing support and chances to develop their skills.

Their Grow for the Future working group looks at recruitment and retention across the whole system. This is supported by Looking After Our People which links in with the Mental Health Wellbeing Hub led by the ICS. Social care voices have been increasingly represented in broader conversations about wellbeing and involvement with the Hub, including to establish specific social care support sessions. The Black Country is now looking forward to an ICS Wellbeing Festival in May.

Social care learning and development opportunities continue to be a central theme in the workforce planning across the system, which is seen as key to improving retention rates. Work has begun on the development of a Leadership and Management Learning Directory for care managers. This will make it easier to identify how to bring together the multitude of offers in this space. It will also ensure everyone has equal opportunity of access to offers from, for example, local health trusts, training providers, representative bodies and training academies.

A recent workshop, which is part of the ongoing work to involve suppliers, was a great testament to the work that the Black Country have done to boost social care provider representation in system planning. The event brought together over 60 delegates, including from social care providers, to think collectively about recruitment, retention and training. Support to embed values-based recruitment was a common theme which providers brought up as a 'wish', in order to ensure that people with the right values and approach take up roles in care. As a result, Skills for Care have since been commissioned by the ICS to provide training to care providers on best practice in values-based recruitment and interview techniques.

Keep an open mind about methods of social care engagement

An over-reliance on meetings (whether in-person or virtual) can deter people from engaging with ICS planning work. Even with the best intentions, care providers in particular are typically very time-restricted in how much they are able to contribute on top of their day-to-day work.

Likewise, an overuse of technical terminology or formal structures of communication (such as lengthy paperwork packs to digest before meetings) can introduce additional barriers to engagement.

In the Black Country, a recently established provider WhatsApp group has really helped to overcome these issues. It is making it easier for providers to input their ideas, insights, and feedback into the ongoing work. The Indeed.com bespoke training originated on this WhatsApp group, thanks to feedback shared informally on that channel and relayed back up to the ICS (by Skills for Care in this instance). Now, Skills for Care are working with the local Care Partnership to explore developing a webpage to centralise information for providers across the region.

“We are all part of the same system, and both health and adult social care there is a huge amount of expertise and professionalism that can be used to achieve great results for the people we all support.”