

Capitalising on existing networks and infrastructure to create opportunities for open-minded and broader integration in Greater Manchester

The Social Care Provider Network in Greater Manchester is a group of representatives from the hundreds of care providers across the area. They come together to discuss matters concerning care providers and represent them in feeding into ICS plans across the area. Skills for Care were commissioned to increase the number of providers in the network from December 2019 to March 2022. The project saw significant success. The number of providers involved increasing from 140 to over 400, and with increasingly diverse representation (including from a greater number of domiciliary care and learning disabilities care providers) across all ten local authority areas.

The success of growing the network has in part been thanks to the existing infrastructure across Greater Manchester, including the devolution agreement of 2014, which has encouraged a high degree of engagement across health and care.

Now, Greater Manchester ICS seeks to embed and broaden the scope of social care engagement to reach the next level of cooperative working.

Harness short-term successes to sustain longer-term progress

Having increased provider representative numbers across all ten local authority areas, the ambition to increase provider engagement could have stopped there.

Instead, the success in building and growing engagement has been monitored, captured, and shared across the system by those involved. This has prompted conversations about long-term sustainability, to ensure the positive work is embedded for future integrated working across Greater Manchester.

As a result, the ICS has decided to commission a part-time dedicated role to continue to ensure that providers across the system remain able to engage with the work of the ICS. This is a really positive step which demonstrates the receptiveness of the ICS to include as many social care voices as possible to inform their work.

Seek to integrate both health and care voices at all levels

Across Greater Manchester ICS, conversations now include how social care engagement can be expanded so that they have a voice beyond the care-specific subgroups and planning networks they have typically been involved in. In particular, there is a growing understanding that integration can be achieved in areas which may not have previously appeared to be relevant to social care – such as workforce planning groups with a Primary Care or Urgent Care focus.

This will lead to specific workstreams, and the meetings that take place within them, not always being solely *either* health *or* care focused. Instead, the wide array of networks and groups feeding directly into the system will be informed by an increasingly cross-sector view. As a result, it is hoped that social care involvement will be broader and partnership working will be supported to thrive at all levels.

Greater Manchester ICS have seen the benefits of thinking openly about where social care providers can have a positive influence. This includes in the height of the pandemic, when 'Gold and Silver crisis control groups' were set up to manage hospital discharges and included representatives from adult social care. Initially made up of a Director of Adult Social Services and the Programme Director of the Adult Social Care team at the ICS, this was

soon expanded to include the Chief Executive of a small care home group in Greater Manchester. They were able to add further expertise and insights into the realities of the situation.

Ongoing conversations about how to embed similar approaches to integration are in their early stages, but are an encouraging sign that adult social care is recognised as a critical part of the wider portfolio of support across Greater Manchester.

Demonstrate and communicate meaningful action

Greater Manchester ICS have identified that demonstrating the 'real life' difference that people can make by contributing their time, ideas and expertise is crucial for broadening and sustaining engagement.

For example, Greater Manchester ICS recently launched the pilot of a complex needs support programme for care homes. This initiative was established in response to feedback from adult social care providers that more support was needed in this area. Providers were directly engaged to attend this workshop, which fostered positive discussions about training needs. Thanks to having been supported to take part in the initial workshop, the group was made up of a wider group of provider voices than ordinarily represent the sector. Many of them took the subsequent opportunities to form a steering group and dedicated project group – an outcome of which was the development of a specification for people with advanced dementia.

With each development of the complex needs pilot project, Greater Manchester ICS have been feeding back updates and progress to the providers involved. This meant that they could see that their plans and insights were being channelled into tangible actions. It is also of vital importance to the success of integrated working. When individuals and organisations can see action being taken, and understand what their involvement can lead to, stronger accountability and 'ownership' of the vision for integration builds right across the system. In time, this should allow for great connection and communication between different types of services.

Greater Manchester ICS is now focusing on trying to establish a formal structure for communicating these plans and actions both ways across the system. They want to ensure that insights and feedback from providers can be fed 'up' to ICS system level leaders, and plans and actions can cascade 'down' to the people carrying out the day-to-day business of care. This has been achieved to some degree at place level, through initiatives such as Local Authority Provider Forums and now hopes to expand to system-level thinking.

“Adult Social Care providers have so much to offer for ICS planning and delivery. They are creative, innovative, motivated, and have a lot of experience. They can really bring a lot to the table.”