

# national transition support team

working together to improve transition  
for disabled young people

## Case Study: Transition in Central Bedfordshire

### Introduction

**This case study focuses on Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and how it decided to move to the creation and funding of a Senior Transitions Officer (STO) post from June 2010.**

### Overview

The case study describes how, through the appointment of a Senior Transition Officer, Central Bedfordshire Council sought to address some of the complexities and competing demands of a multi-agency approach to transition.

### Main transferable learning points

- Competent and confident leadership at operational level is vital.
- The differences in professional/lay backgrounds, competing expectations, perceived work boundaries, separate budgetary arrangements, differing ideologies and values are in part, impediments to multi-agency collaborative work.
- Separate eligibility criteria are frequently operated by Children's Services and Adult Services to identify, assess and provide for disabled young people and this can serve to disrupt a harmonious and smooth transition.
- An agreed protocol with its flexible pathways provides latitude in each case, which is important as each disabled young person has a distinctive route to travel as s/he moves into adulthood.
- Implementing a Single Assessment framework that attempts to capture all young people's needs could present a challenge.

- There is a benefit in locating the Senior Transition Officer role in Adult Services as there is greater incentive to promote independence and enable young people to reach their potential as they move into adulthood.

### Introduction

The Transition Support Programme (TSP) began in the autumn of 2008 and in April 2009, under local government reorganisation of Bedfordshire County Council, two new unitary authorities were formed – Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council.

The TSP work has been led by the Head of Service for Children with Disabilities who also chairs the Strategic Transitions Group. In January 2011 this role was extended to include Health and in so doing formalised the link with Health Services particularly through access to the Director of Public Health.

### Background

Early in the programme CBC established a multi-agency Transition Strategy Group (TSG) to address longstanding as well as emergent issues concerning the transition of disabled young people to adulthood. At this stage the main participants in the group were managers from Children's Services, Adult Services and Health with representatives from other agencies. While individuals reported back to or shared the minutes with their respective colleagues in sections/teams

between meetings, progress in the further development of inter-agency collaborative working remained patchy and slow.

At a strategic level there was considerable activity concerning the production of policies, plans, protocols and pathways but it was recognised by senior managers across statutory services, parents' groups and third sector agencies that there was a more immediate need to stimulate and further develop multi-agency transition arrangements on a day-to-day basis.

Perhaps the greatest driver for change came from young people and their families who were becoming increasingly aware that they could have greater choice and control and were the 'central players' with an entitlement to effective and reasonable guidance, support and provision. The multi-agency nature of transition spurred CBC into seeking an operational model for translating the disparate and sometimes competing elements of the process into a more coherent and accessible experience for young people and their families.

Whilst not wishing to create a separate or an additional team to focus on transition or disrupt existing local service arrangements, the Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Children's Health and his opposite number in Adult Social Care Learning Disability Services decided to invest in a dedicated post that would serve to facilitate and develop, on a day-to-day basis at an operational level, more effective and efficient transition arrangements.

Across services the role of the 'key worker' or 'lead professional' remains of central importance and of significance to each case and is in no way undermined but enhanced by the overarching system management role of the STO.

The STO's role was framed within the framework of CBC's Transition Improvement Action Plan (which is reviewed and updated regularly by the Strategic Transitions Group). A

comprehensive 'work plan' was developed and agreed by the respective Heads of Service in both Children's and Adult Services in response to priorities in each of the service areas.

## **Aims and Objectives**

CBC's agenda for change and development centres upon shortfalls in transition arrangements that have been widely reported by disabled young people and their families. The disquiet primarily revolves around:

- The procedural complexities associated with the collation, presentation and discussion of case information.
- The differing approaches used by agencies to identify and assess the needs of the young disabled person.
- The inadequate nature of published information on what disabled young people and their families can reasonably expect in terms of a pathway and time scale.
- The competing views of professionals as to possible financial and material support that may be available.

The overall aim is to promote positive inter-agency collaborative working that will effectively and efficiently address the aspirations and needs of disabled young people and their families.

CBC is seeking to encourage and support multi-agency collaborative working so that disabled young people (and their families) enjoy the benefits of a person-centred approach to their transition.

At a time when financial prudence is of particular importance the post was perceived by CBC as 'an investment rather than a cost'. Undue duplication from within local council and health services and the third sector can no longer be afforded. With individual budgets increasingly becoming available the young person will be in a position to purchase

customised services rather than 'fitting in' with a more limited menu of centralised provision.

Running in tandem with local inter-agency initiatives has been the TSP-sponsored Innovation & Outcomes Project where CBC and one of its neighbours, Luton Borough Council, have been working together on the design and development a single assessment format.

## Approach

It was generally acknowledged that the transition processes were not providing the outcomes required for young people, their families or the local authority. 'Buy in' to the transitions agenda was disparate and although statutory requirements were met, there was a lack of joined up and cohesive planning across services. Previous transition roles within Children Services, had mainly served an administrative function of data collection and dissemination.

The appointment of a Senior Transition Officer (STO), who has been seconded from the local Adult Learning Disability Team (ALDT) but continues to be managed within Adult Services, was made in response to addressing the synergy required between the services, and to continue to address and offer some resolution and development to identified barriers and challenges.

The project was designed for a nine month period due to finish on 31 March 2011. The desirability and feasibility of continuing with the post was the subject of careful monitoring and evaluation by senior management.

In conjunction with Children and Adult Services a work plan was developed encompassing the agreed priorities and key objectives of the STO. The work plan was systematically reviewed and updated with any pressures, challenges, outcomes and developments.

Both the person specification and the job description were jointly developed, clear 'line

management' responsibilities are retained by the Team Manager in ALDT and 'project management' resides with the Heads of Service. This ongoing dialogue has allowed the STO to report back, make recommendations and suggest developments directly to the people best placed to drive forward and effect change.

A range of local council services are cited within the job description as a vast array of contributors, and providers are identified as playing a significant part in the lives of young disabled young people. There is a clear expectation that the STO will actively engage with and enhance the connectivity between individuals and groups. Other areas of work include:

- The development of a Quality Assurance Process that ensures transition planning and information is appropriate and completed in a timely manner.
- The improvement of Consultation and Engagement with Carers.
- The collation and interpretation of relevant data in relation to customer needs to support future planning of appropriate resources and potential budgetary implications.
- Working in partnership to develop a blueprint for a transitions pathway based on the Personalisation Agenda.
- The development of a multi-agency assessment tool.
- Promoting the role of the STO with partner agencies and relevant stakeholders.
- The organisation and development of Practice Learning Sets within the local area.

## Challenges

- The complexity and diversity of establishing, developing and maintaining close working relationships across agencies has presented

considerable challenges for all participants. The differences in professional/lay backgrounds, competing expectations, perceived work boundaries, separate budgetary arrangements, differing ideologies and values are in part, impediments to collaborative multi-agency collaborative work.

- Trying to encourage creative and innovative solutions in case work while working across a number of different systems and work cultures.
- Even within local services, separate eligibility criteria are frequently operated by Children's Services and Adult Services to identify, assess and provide for disabled young people and this can serve to disrupt a harmonious and smooth transition.
- Each disabled young person has a distinctive route to travel as s/he moves into adulthood. Thus, the importance of an agreed protocol with its flexible pathways provides latitude in each case, this could present a challenge when trying to implement a Single Assessment framework that attempts to capture all young peoples needs.
- Working with disabled young people and parents/carers who have had a less than reasonable experience of transition can, through a range of informal channels of communication, undermine the confidence of those who move towards post-14 arrangements.
- To support families to create an environment in which the disabled young person is encouraged to seek greater personal independence as s/he moves towards adulthood.
- Policies, plans, protocols and pathways need to be accessible to all those for whom they are designed. While some managers of services may be familiar with them within

their own service there is little evidence that the information is necessarily known beyond these bounds.

- The changing role of Connexions and the subsequent reduction in the number of Personal Advisers remains of concern particularly as their capacity to sustain their stated function (SEN Code of Practice, 1993) comes under pressure.
- Market place development that responds to updated legislation and changes in the ways services are delivered i.e. Personal and Individual Budgets.
- The Green Paper '*Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability*' (March 2011) presents challenges and opportunities to a range of interested parties at a time of considerable economic and material change. Multi-agency working is no longer merely a desirable but an essential feature of present day service.

Although the challenges of the role and the transitions process as a whole remain considerable, there are clearly identified successes and development opportunities which will allow CBC to work cohesively and effectively to improve the transitions process and outcomes for young people and their families.

### **Successes**

- Early indications are that the STO is proving to be an invaluable source of relevant information and a secure point of reference for inter-agency initiatives particularly concerning training and development opportunities. The 'street credibility' of the STO is proving to have a positive effect on the engagement of agencies in improved working arrangements.
- Greater attention has been encouraged by the STO to focus upon the transition from

Children's Services into adulthood rather than a direct transfer from Children's Services to Adult Services (though this may be an appropriate and considered outcome for some young people).

- The development and delivery of practice multi-agency workshops. A major by-product has been to improve the connectivity between individuals and groups, and has allowed scope for multi-agency buy in as well as development opportunities for future practice.
- The bringing together of stakeholders from the Multi-Disciplinary Team and other relevant agencies.
- Improved lines of communication between Children and Adult Teams to ensure that there is more effective joint working. For example, the transfer of cases between these services is improving and the timing of joint processes is more focused on the needs of the young person. This co-operation and joint working has not been confined to disability teams but has a broader reach to Looked After/Leaving Care and Mental Health Teams.
- The tracking and forecasting processes devised in Children's Services are more responsive to the input of information from a broader base of stakeholders. Monthly meetings continue to provide an effective multi-agency forum where follow-up work is identified and also reported on.
- Greater engagement with parent carer representatives, who are actively seeking support and guidance and the STO's representation at meetings and forums.
- Transitions literature and information has been gathered and re-drafted to enable young people and their parents to appraise themselves of the transition process and what they can reasonably expect from the services involved.

- The development of the Single Assessment tool with another local authority, proving that a coordinated and consistent involvement can produce supportive material across boundaries.
- The development of a transition pathway that mirrors CBC's customer pathway and starts to look at early information gathering (14+) enablement and signposting (16+) and support planning (17+) to ensure an appropriate transition pathway is identified at the earliest opportunity.

The biggest factors underpinning these successes have been:

- The evident support of senior managers across statutory services. In itself, an excellent example of improved cross-service collaboration.
- The STO's extensive experience of working in Disability Teams in Adult Services and growing knowledge of working with a range of public, private and third sector agencies has proved invaluable in encouraging major stakeholders to explore a wider range of options. Continuing Professional Development has been enhanced through working directly with an increased range of stakeholders.
- The STO's ability to support other services and agencies has improved through direct work with each of them. This improved portfolio of personal information and knowledge also provides invaluable sources for individuals and teams within the private, public and third sectors. The STO does not share any individual case information with other individuals or teams.
- There is a benefit in locating the STO role in Adult Services as there is greater incentive to promote independence and enable young people to reach their potential as they move into adulthood.

- The extended membership of CBC'S existing Joint Assessment Panel. The range of participating agencies has grown and thus a broader perspective of young people's aspirations and needs is made available to the forum.

### **Be Further Developments/Planned Improvements**

Implementation of the Single Assessment as developed through the Innovations and Outcomes Project.

The continuation of the Practice Learning Sets which supports all agencies to gain better understanding and working knowledge of the transitions process and their responsibilities within it.

Development of the workforce to support and enable young people to reach their potential (in terms of independence, work skills and leisure) to equip them to be as independent as possible and have as much choice as possible into adulthood.

Due to the improvements and developments made locally the STO role has been extended for a further 6 months to evaluate the work completed, consolidate the learning and agree next steps for transition support in Central Bedfordshire.

### **Benefits of the project**

The TSP has linked with other local and regional projects to build a bigger picture of the range of provision being made for young people, 14-19. An analysis of local opportunities for post-16 education, training and employment is in the process of design and will provide helpful additional information.

- There is a focal point for all agencies to refer for guidance and sign-posting.
- Discussions to course presentations, the STO is increasingly engaged in workforce

development opportunities.

- There is more engagement with an increasing number of relevant services e.g. Housing, Work Centre Plus and Transport.
- The focal point of the work is away from the creation of an increasing number of transition teams to equipping as many workers as possible, irrespective of their particular specialism, to feel more confident with transition working practices. A working knowledge of transition has a broad range of applications irrespective of the age group of the particular clients.
- A reciprocal benefit for the post holder is that 'on-the-job' learning and development are enhanced by immediate, relevant and sustainable working links and supplement the other avenues for Continuing Professional Development

### **Conclusion**

The introduction of the STO has made inroads into some of the long standing issues surrounding transitions and the perceived as well as real difficulties in providing a coordinated and timely transition. Improved and more comprehensive tracking arrangements have enabled Adult Services to more accurately predict and forecast future need and can begin to more effectively target resources and commission services that can respond to the diverse, and at times, complex needs of the young people residing within Central Bedfordshire.

Working relationships between key players have significantly improved, at times mediated and supported by the STO who has an overall understanding of the priorities, pressures and competing demands of each service provider.

Perhaps most importantly the STO's role has begun to embed within operational teams the need for a whole systems approach to transition, and to enable young people to

achieve to their full each service has to take equal and ongoing responsibility.

## How to...?

### Key issues and principles

Joined up vision between Children and Adult Services.

Senior Management sign up and oversight.

Systematic Work plan with key milestones, person responsible and evaluation at regular intervals so that amendments can be if necessary.

Open engagement and where possible, co-production with young people and their family carers.

Experienced Officer who has working knowledge and oversight of the transitions process across all the relevant disciplines.

Flexibility, STO is able to continue to engage in practical elements of transition including care management if required.

Timely and relevant information and support that encourages young people and family carers to consider the choices and aspirations that adult services can signpost to or provide dependent on level of need.

Help young people, family carers and other professionals to dispel myths and assumptions about adult social care and what it provide as early as possible.

### Barriers

The willingness of other services and agencies to engage with the post holder.

Services that do not invest in the transitions process.

Limitations of having a single post facilitating the complexities of transitions.

Separate budgets within and across services can still inhibit or undermine attempts to engage in a more integrated way.

### Practical ideas/Good practice

Engage senior managers ... their agreement and overt support is key.

Engage a person with 'street cred' who has a strong desire to develop him/herself, to identify 'growth points' for further action in realizing the stated aims and objectives and is willing to approach 'new agencies'.

Be clear as a manager what is and isn't being delegated.

It's not about the perfection of systems but the willingness of the STO to engage with a range of people in the best interest of the disabled young person and his/her family.

### Top tips

Start small – while it may need leaders/senior managers at strategic level to ensure that policy can realistically be translated from theory into practice, competent and confident leadership at operational level is vital. For the most part you are only as good as your operations!

### Key policy and legislation

- Valuing People Now
- Aiming High for Disabled Children
- SEN Codes of Practice
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995
- Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
- NHS and Community Care Act 1990

## Websites

[www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

[www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk](http://www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk)

### Acknowledgements

The National Transition Support Team would like to thank the staff at Central Bedfordshire Council for their assistance with this case study.

### National Transition Support Team (NTST)

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB. [www.ncb.org.uk/cdc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc)

National Transition Support Team  
Information line: 020 7843 6348  
Email: [tsp@ncb.org.uk](mailto:tsp@ncb.org.uk)  
[www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk](http://www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk)

