



**Assessments Ahead! “You Said, We Did”
Event Report
3rd December 2013**

Introduction

Thurrock Coalition offers advice and support for disabled and older residents of Thurrock and their carers. We are a wide network of individuals and groups aiming to inform people about their rights and entitlements and to improve the quality and choice of services that might assist them.

The “*Assessments Ahead! – You Said, We Did*” Follow Up Event was held in order to engage Citizens of Thurrock, carers and families and Council Officers to discuss the steps taken and progress made by Thurrock Council’s Adult Social Care Directorate, in Co-production with Thurrock Coalition since the original event held in December 2012.

The *You Said, We Did* format provided an opportunity for participants to find out how their views and input have influenced Adult Social Care Practice, The Customer Journey, the Customer Charter and associated Service Standards over the last 12 months.

The report of the previous event can be found here:
<http://www.thurrockcoalition.co.uk/reports.html>

In summary, the original engagement event (also held on the UN International Day of Disabled People) had the following aims:

:

- Explore, discuss and develop a way of practicing that uses the views and experiences of people who use services to improve and develop social care assessment practice.
- The focus was upon establishing “What makes an effective assessment conversation?” and covered issues such as:
 - Inclusive communication
 - Types of questions
 - Improving understanding of individual situations
 - Better communication of the facts and issues
 - Why Social Workers need to establish certain facts and information, and how people feel that this can be done more sensitively and effectively in order to achieve the best outcome for people who use Adult Social Care services in Thurrock.

- To use Assessment-based role plays as a method of determining and illustrating positive and negative experiences of assessment conversations and adopting a solution-focussed approach to compare and contrast the different conversations with a view to improving service provision, process and delivery and influencing the draft Practice Manual for Social Workers in Thurrock.

The following Key Principles were extrapolated from the results of the day:

- **Respecting** individuals' autonomy and capacity as experts by experience and maximising individual choice and control,
- **Valuing** their contributions to their own assessment, to society and the wider community.
- **Understanding** the individual, their needs, situation and current support circumstances by adopting an holistic, solution-focused approach to the assessment conversation
- **Informing** and guiding the individual in plain, jargon-free language through the assessment conversation, exploring all available options as part of the assessment process, advising on anticipated timescales and to manage expectations effectively.

It is interesting to note that the standards and principles that appear in the SCIE Good Practice guidance for Social Workers are strikingly mirrored by the feedback provided at the "Assessments Ahead!" event. The Key Principles also link well to the Thurrock Workforce Planning Outcomes

Summary of Achievements to date

- Development and roll out of the Customer Journey Practice Manual, an electronic document aimed at Adult Social Care staff was launched in April 2013. It reflects and is underpinned by the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes, the Customer Charter and the Service Standards.
- 2 formal e-learning launches of the Manual and associated training/e-learning took place in April and November 2013 respectively.
- The Customer Journey Practice Manual is closely related to the Transformation Agenda and thus the *Building Positive Futures* Programme
- An Assessment Audit has taken place.
- Work is planned to develop and improve the complaints procedure and system.
- Thurrock Council recognise that the format of the Assessment form needs to be updated.
- Thurrock Council are moving to a Self-Assessment process for minor adaptations and small items of equipment, with the intention of introducing a similar process for other Adult Social Care services.

Findings, Recommendations and Next Steps

In terms of next steps, the Team with responsibility for the Customer Journey Practice Manual will:

- Continue to use service user feedback to inform service improvements – i.e. events, survey feedback, compliments/complaints
- Lower level process guidance to be included; to further inform practice
- Production of service level agreements/timeframes
- Development of quality checks/monitoring
- Use of external feedback. i.e. Peer Review, Investors in People
- The Manual will continue to be available and mandatory to all practitioners within Adult Social Care, including Commissioners.
- Thurrock Council will explore the possibility of rolling out the training to Thurrock Coalition and Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions, it could work in a similar way to the inclusion and involvement of people who use services and the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes used when interviewing new intakes of Social Workers on recruitment and interview days.
- The Customer Charter and the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes could be shared with people who use services at the Assessment stage of the “Journey” (It was suggested that this could be made available on double sided A4).
- In terms of monitoring and measurement of the effectiveness of the Customer Journey Practice Manual the focus will be upon measuring the impact in terms of both practice and culture. This in turn means that the importance of effective supervision of and support for staff must not be under estimated.
- The development of tasks for use in the recruitment process, to include case studies and comprehension tests will be explored in co-production with Thurrock Coalition.
- The Observation of training initiative¹ will be re-started in early 2014. It is anticipated that participants will be recruited from individuals who attended the Assessments Ahead events.
- A further engagement opportunity will be convened with the specific aim of capturing peoples experience of any assessments that have taken place since April 2013 (i.e. since the launch of the Customer Journey Practice Manual). Thurrock Coalition will send a proposal to Workforce Planning on how to effectively capture this feedback before the end of February 2014. Potential options include:
 - a. Organising another engagement workshop.
 - b. Co-produce, design and distribute a simple survey.

¹ Details of the initiative are available here:

<http://www.thurrockcoalition.co.uk/Reports/Thurrock%20Coalition%20-%20Observation%20of%20Training%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20%5BFINAL%5D%20%5BTO%20DISTRIBUTE%5D%202013.pdf>

Salient points arising from Discussions and the Q & A:

- The assessment forms used by the Independent Living Fund (ILF) are very user-friendly and have provided a positive experience for individuals. Thurrock Council will look into replicating this as good practice when looking at the current assessment form
- The proportion of space (within the paperwork) for the views, needs and aspirations of the individual should be significantly greater than the space provided for the views of the Social Work Practitioner.
- Information collection needs to be improved so that individuals do not have to provide personal details/facts and case histories every time they have an assessment or a review of needs.
- The procedure and assessment conversation could be revised so that when reviewing an individual, where there is no change of circumstances the individual is simply asked: *What's working for you? What's not working for you? Do you need anything else? Is what you've got the best option we can provide? Is there an alternative?* The focus should be upon quality not quantity.
- Through the Building Positive Futures Programme, it was suggested that there is a definite shift towards individual solutions, proportionality and a move to a strength-based (rather than deficit based) approach to Assessments.
- The guidelines around measuring need, Direct Payments and financial assessments can be shared upon request.
- A short feedback form will be developed in co-production with Thurrock Coalition for use by individuals immediately after an assessment. Feedback is also welcome over the telephone (particularly for individuals with visual impairments). The feedback could consist of 3-4 questions, and if an individual indicates that they are unhappy this would be followed up to explore specifics of the concerns raised.

Topics covered and Question and Answers with speakers

Below is a list of speakers who contributed to the event. There were Question and Answer sessions after each presentation.

Les Billingham – Head of Adult Social Care

Background to the Transformation Agenda in Thurrock

The ongoing work relating to the Customer Journey Practice Manual is closely linked with the Adult Social Care Transformation Agenda - Building Positive Futures is the transformation programme for adult health and well-being services in Thurrock. It aims to reduce demand by:

- Impacting upon poor health and well-being by improving housing.
- Thurrock Adult Social Care recognises the need to stimulate communities to build upon their strengths and shift emphasis away from dependence and towards resilience. This is a risky and challenging enterprise but the

economic and social cost of failure is providing the necessary stimuli to succeed.

In the wider context of personalisation, the programme aims to develop reciprocal relationships with people who use services at the centre of the process as Citizens and Participants in their own communities. The programme will focus upon peoples' strengths (rather than deficits or problems) and will genuinely work together and alongside communities, providing support in an early intervention and preventative manner in order to avoid crises. Work on the programme has already begun and consists of several elements, including:

- Training awareness across Adult Social Care Staff
- The Rapid Response Assessment Service (RRAS)
- The Adult Social Care Re-ablement Team
- Increasing awareness of the availability of Telecare Services
- Introduction of 4 Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs) in Thurrock
- Introduction of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) in Thurrock
- A greater emphasis upon Community based solutions for Thurrock Citizens
- Continued Co-Production with the Voluntary sector in Thurrock.

As the User-Led Organisation (ULO) for Thurrock, Thurrock Coalition has actively contributed to work streams, held events, consultations and workshops with key strategy input, influencing and shaping policy and practice. This contribution by participants is vital and welcome.

Questions and Answers

Question: Will the Customer Journey Practice Manual training be rolled out to all staff in Adult Social Care, not only Social Workers and Team Managers, but also Commissioners?

Answer: Yes, the Manual is available and is mandatory to all practitioners within Adult Social Care, including Commissioners.

Question: Some people who use Adult Social Care and wider council services like to be referred to as "Customers" rather than "Service Users". Is it possible to adopt a consistent approach to this issue?

Answer: The challenge here is getting it right for all groups and expectations. TLS was cited as an example that uses the term "Customer", however, this may not be a term readily recognised by all groups. Skills for care use the term People-who-use-services for example. However, ASC does seem to be moving to that term with the example of Customer Journey Practice Manual and we do have a Customer Charter.

Thurrock Council Adult Social Care will liaise with Thurrock Coalition to provide advice/recommendation about an acceptable term that council staff should use in formal communications, presentations, reports, assessments

It could also serve as a placeholder for staff to use in the event that the people they are working with give no other indication. Staff should start to adopt the term “Customer” for example and the teams can then work internally to change the vocabulary of colleagues.

Question: How will do people find out how to ask for an assessment (of needs) in the first place?

Answer: The Building Positive Futures Programme focuses upon community resilience, early intervention and prevention so that people are supported and enabled to live in the community for longer. In practice, this means that more timely (and lower cost) interventions would prevent or delay the need for more intensive (and higher cost) care and support services. When people do require support or services, there are several ways in which people can contact Thurrock Council: Through Local Area Co-ordinators, through the South Ockendon Centre (and other Community Hubs – once created) as well as through the Community Solutions Team (CST) and referrals from Third Sector Organisations..

Mandy Moore – Senior Performance and Information Officer in Adults Health and Commissioning

Overview, context of the Practice Manual (what it is, what has been done, future plans). The Customer Charter

- The Customer Journey Practice Manual is an electronic document (launched in April 2013) containing links to Legislation, ‘Good Practice’ Guidance, links to IAS (the Thurrock Council Case Management System) User Manuals, Team Information, links to templates/base docs and reference to the 6 Co-Produced User-Led Workforce Development Outcomes. It is a “living document” aimed at Social Work practitioners to see, use and understand – reinforced by an online training programme.
- It is a 150 page document and can be made large print, because it is purely electronic
- Development and Implementation of the Customer Charter (a series of promises to Adult Social Care customers).
- Training on the Manual occurs through E-learning (which is mandatory on an annual basis). The Manual also forms part of the Induction Programme for new staff. Team Managers also encourage use of the manual within day to day practice and supervision
- The content of the Manual is managed and maintained through feedback from people who use Adult Social Care. There is a central communication point within Adult Social Care for queries/suggestions around the Manual. There is a change control process – the holding and use of paper copies of the Manual is discouraged. The Customer Journey Operational Group is responsible for

signing-off any changes and Managers are responsible for ensuring staff and Team awareness and communication should a change to process occur.

- At the moment the Manual can be likened to being told about the constituent parts of a car (the steering wheel, gears, pedals etc). The next step is to support and train Practitioners on how to “drive” and thus affect real change on the ground.

Question: Will the Customer Journey Practice Manual and associated training programme be carried out with customers/people who use services? And how will the wider community get to find out about the Manual?

Answer: Thurrock Council will explore the possibility of rolling out the training to Thurrock Coalition and Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions, it could work in a similar way to the inclusion and involvement of people who use services and the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes used when interviewing new intakes of Social Workers on recruitment and interview days.

The Customer Charter and the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes could be shared with people who use services, practitioners and members of the Community Solutions Team for initial enquiries and at the Assessment stage of the “Journey”

(It was suggested that this could be made available on double sided A4).

Workforce Development Manager to liaise with Thurrock Coalition to come up with a communication plan to ensure the message is widely distributed. The use of existing networks and boards would be encouraged along with community resources too.

It may be worth considering a telephone survey. Perhaps targeted over a couple of months, that allows the assessment/check of the Outcomes and Customer Charter.

Question: How is the Adult Social Care Directorate communicating the change and awareness with regard to the new electronic Manual within Thurrock Council?

Answer: There is a distribution list for staff which contains a summary and link to the Manual as well as new legislation / guidance and new training alerts.

Tania Sitch – Fieldwork Service Manager, Adult Social Care

Update following the outcomes of the Assessments Audit

- An Assessments Audit was carried out across the Social Work teams, looking at adherence to minimum standards and clarity within each assessment. The Audit found no real concerns, which Service Managers found re-assuring although some assessments were not up to standard and these are being addressed.

- The Audit highlighted a number of issues around the Mental Capacity Act, in situations where decisions are made on behalf of someone else. There is another piece of upcoming work that will address this issue.
- The current assessment form is particularly deficit based, focussing upon conditions and eligibility which risks leading assessors to ask questions for which they have a “fix” or corresponding service. .
- The Rapid Re-ablement and Assessment Service provides a key element of the early intervention and prevention agenda in Thurrock.
- Work is also planned to develop and improve the complaints procedure and system. Thurrock Council recognise that the format of the Assessment form needs to be updated. Participants raised the issue of individual not recognising the form or that the information recorded by the Social Worker did not accurately or sufficiently reflect the conversation that took place during the assessment.
- Thurrock Council are moving to a Self Assessment process for minor adaptations and small items of equipment, with the intention of introducing a similar process for other Adult Social Care services.
- Thurrock Council are moving away from/resisting the introduction of a Resource Allocation System² – because several other Local Authorities have tried to use such systems, with limited success.

Questions and Answers

Question: The assessment forms used by the Independent Living Fund (ILF) are very user-friendly and have provided a positive experience for individuals. Could Thurrock Council replicate this as good practice when looking at the current assessment form?

Answer: Yes, absolutely, this will be looked into by the Senior Performance and Information Officer in Adults Health and Commissioning.

The Quality Development Worker for MCA and DOLS in Adult Social Care put forward the suggestion that, in an effective assessment, the proportion of space (within the paperwork) for the views, needs and aspirations of the individual should be significantly greater than the space provided for the views of the Social Work Practitioner and that there needs to be a shift away from focussing upon obtaining (sometimes irrelevant) evidence simply to receive resource.

² The idea of a Resource Allocation System (RAS) is essentially simple, although it has been subject to a great deal of variation in implementation. A RAS works by connecting a particular level of need with a particular level of money. The idea that rules can be used to make fair allocations of resources is not new. It is how the tax and benefit systems work, it is how the courts define entitlements according to principles of natural justice and many international systems use formal rules to distribute funding to people who need support. The development of a Resource Allocation System (RAS) in the UK was only innovative because this approach had never been used to set social care entitlements nor to make these entitlements explicit, that is, to underpin Individual Budgets. – Extract taken from: <http://www.centreforwelfareform.org/library/by-date/resource-allocation-system-ras.html> Last accessed on 12/12/13

Question: Asking an individual to re-iterate details that appear in previous assessments is often humiliating, particularly if it concerns for example toileting needs, this can be very distressing.

Could the procedure and assessment conversation be changed when reviewing an individual, so that where there is no change of circumstances the individual is simply asked: What's working for you? What's not working for you? Do you need anything else? Is what you've got the best option we can provide? Is there an alternative? The focus should be upon quality not quantity

Answer: Yes – Information collection needs to be improved so that individuals do not have to provide personal details/facts and case histories every time they have an assessment or review of needs.

Question: Currently the assessment process and forms still feel very “deficit-based” i.e. focussing upon what people are unable to do, and this is very disempowering for people. What are the plans to update this approach?

Answer: The Social Work teams want to shift focus increasingly towards individual solutions, proportionality and a move to a strength-based (rather than deficit based) approach to Assessments.

Question: Are there guidelines on measuring need, Direct Payments and financial assessments? If so, can these be shared?

Answer: Yes, absolutely

Bill Clayton – Senior Training and Development Officer, HR&OD: Workforce Development Service

- The Customer Journey Practice Manual is complimented by an online e-learning tool, covering key issues, including purpose, background, practical use, the Customer Charter, references and links to national guidance, and details of the co-production and partnership-working with Thurrock Coalition as the User Led Organisation for Thurrock. This is then followed by a series of 21 questions based upon the Manual, in order to test the understanding and knowledge of the learner. The pass benchmark is 85%.
- The E-learning is underpinned by the 6 Workforce Development Outcomes, co-produced with Thurrock Coalition:

- I feel I have a choice and am in control of the services I receive and they meet my needs.
- I feel I have been listened to and understood and am in control of the assessment process.
- I feel confident that social care staff know what they are doing. Social care policies are clear and understood by everyone.
- I feel all relevant information about me is shared appropriately and with my knowledge
- I understand what is available to me both in my community and for health and social care.
- I feel recognised as an individual, able to make decisions for myself and my own contribution to society.

- The following overarching work streams and strategies are relevant to the wider Workforce Development agenda:
 - The Transformation Programme
 - The Leadership Framework
 - The Customer Journey Practice Manual
 - The Practice Group
 - The Customer Charter
 - Supervision
 - Panel
 - System IAS
- The Workforce Development Activities are wide ranging:
 - ABCD Events
 - Local Area Co-ordinators
 - Interviews
 - Diversity Training
 - The EACH Project
 - Thurrock Learning Zone
 - Dementia
 - Continuing Professional Development
 - Community Events
 - PRP
 - Safeguarding
 - Ongoing work with Thurrock Coalition
- Details of the Council vision and priorities were also shared, along with the Leadership Framework. The Leadership Framework is a set of behaviours that is expected for all managers and leaders at Thurrock Council. The

Framework forms an approach to providing development opportunities and will form a platform for developing a flexible and innovative approach to support the Council's talent management strategy.

- It consists of 5 areas: Proud and Passionate, Create clear, shared direction, get things done, Value and develop people, Engage and collaborate.
- One of those behaviours is: -
- *Personally spend time with communities and our partners to understand and act on their needs.* – This is central to the work being undertaken relating to the Customer Journey Practice Manual.

Question: Would it be possible to develop a short feedback form for use by individuals immediately after an assessment? Alternatively, would feedback be welcome over the telephone (particularly for individuals with visual impairments)?

Answer: Yes, this will be taken back and creation of Social Worker feedback forms will be discussed. The feedback could consist of 3-4 questions, and if an individual indicates that they are unhappy this would be followed up to explore specifics of the concerns raised.

Feedback over the phone is certainly welcome.

Question: People may feel unable to put forward a complaint or be deterred from doing so, due to the fear of ramifications and possible review of their care package which could result in a reduction. People often feel more comfortable to raise issues through an independent third party (for example, Thurrock Coalition) rather than complain themselves).

Answer: People should not feel this way, there is a department that deals with complaints and there is also team support for staff. Feedback from the individuals and networks represented by Thurrock Coalition, as Critical Friends, is welcome

Question:

(a) How will/could the implementation of the Customer Journey Practice Manual be measured and monitored?

(b) Could the recruitment process involve more practice based tasks, such as application of the Manual and principles of Personalisation to "case study" examples, or perhaps a comprehension test (in order to test understanding)?

I Could the Quality Development Worker attend several assessments with Social Workers?

Answer:

(a) The focus will be upon measuring the impact in terms of both practice and culture. This in turn means that the importance of effective supervision of and

support for staff must not be under estimated.

(b) The development of tasks for use in the recruitment process, to include case studies and comprehension tests will be explored in co-production with Thurrock Coalition

I The Quality Development Worker is able to attend assessments with Social Workers, provided that consent is obtained from the individual concerned.

Conclusion, recommendations and next steps

In terms of next steps, the Team with responsibility for the Customer Journey Practice Manual will:

- Continue to use service user feedback to inform service improvements – i.e. events, survey feedback, compliments/complaints
- Lower level process guidance to be included; to further inform practice
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- A further engagement opportunity will be convened with the specific aim of capturing peoples experience of any assessments that have taken place since April 2013 (i.e. since the launch of the Customer Journey Practice Manual). Thurrock Coalition will send a proposal to Workforce Planning on how to effectively capture this feedback before the end of February 2014. Potential options include:
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Thurrock Coalition

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