

## Case Study 2: Commissioning Strategy for people with learning disabilities - Willingham Supported Living Project

Cambridgeshire's Commissioning Strategy for people with a learning disability aims to offer services that give the greatest degree of choice and autonomy locally in Cambridgeshire rather than automatically making placements in residential care settings with traditional-style day services. Supported Living projects enable young people to hold secure tenancies instead of being in a care setting. Full access to their benefit entitlements gives them choice on how the entitlement is spent and puts them in a position where they themselves are able to influence the way they are supported, what they do throughout the day, and who they do it with.

*Working with Cambridgeshire's procurement strategy allows for integrity and consistency for providers due to the explicit nature of the service specifications with a clear intention from tender to service delivery. The lead in time for the Wilford Furlong project assisted in the transition process especially for those young people leaving the family home.*  
John Ellis, Operations Manager,  
Pentahact

The expectations and aspirations of young people and their parents have been raised through early involvement in the development of services. This works most effectively for young people with profound disability who are moving through the assessment and care management process between Children's Services and Adult Services. Services are planned in advance with partners from housing, health and the parents to identify the style of service which best meets the needs of the young people.



The supported living project at Wilford Furlong in Willingham, a village near Cambridge, was opened in October 2004 for six young people of 16-19 all attending special schools. This group of young people all have significant physical health needs and learning disabilities that require time from the people who work with them to get to know them, to build trust, and to understand their communication needs. As carers work on different communication methods, these methods are then employed by the young people to comment on the service they receive.



The process of letting the contract for a provider for the supported living service had a strong customer focus throughout, with support provided from the Council's contracts team to enable parents and service users to have confidence in and an understanding of the procurement procedures. A Parent Group was set up, to help develop the service specification, and this group was consulted during the process to ensure that the outcomes of the contract would provide a high-quality service that allowed their children to



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experience independence in a safe and secure environment.

Members of the Parent group and an advocate (an independent person appointed to speak up on behalf of the service users) were also part of the evaluation and selection process and two parents and the advocate attended the formal selection interviews of shortlisted organisations. All the parties involved understood the importance of selecting a service provider who would be committed to working with the Council over the life of the contract, so that the support provided to the service users would meet their needs throughout the whole if their time in the supported living project. The process was carefully planned so that contract letting process was completed one year in advance of the project opening, to ensure a smooth transition for the group of young people from home/school to a more independent lifestyle.



The successful provider of care and support became an integral part of the Project Team, a multi-agency partnership with representatives from the Housing Association, the appointed advocate, occupational therapists (to ensure the physical needs of service users could be met within the build design), care managers (addressing the social care needs of the service users) and specialist community nurses (ensuring that the health needs of service users were met). There were also development managers from the Learning Disability Partnership and from the Care and Support provider to see the project through to completion.

As well as visiting service users at school in various locations across the country and liaising with education colleagues to gather relevant information on how they are supported, additional steps were taken to focus on young people's needs, such as involving service users in choosing colour schemes for the building and furniture requirements, and exploring daytime opportunities in the area. Links were developed with the local health services, GP, and District Nurses to ensure health needs could be met at a local level and initial care and support plans were drawn up for each service user.

The Care and Support provider was appointed a full year before the of opening the project to ensure there was sufficient time to allow them and their staff to work directly with the service users and their parents before they moved into their new home. This time enabled both service users and their parents to build relationships with the Care and Support provider team, so that when the time came to make the transition, all parties were happy and comfortable with the change. The advantage of this long lead-in time is that all involved have developed a good working relationship and there is a shared understanding of the way the service will operate. All involved take ownership of their own roles within the project to ensure its success.



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