



Taking more challenges on board

The success of the new health and wellbeing boards will depend on councils' flexibility, efficiency and ability to work with partners, says **Dominic Browne**

The devolution of public health responsibilities next year presents the localism agenda with one of its biggest challenges so far, but one which local government is well adapted to meet.

From April 2013, each top tier and unitary authority will have its own health and wellbeing board (HWB) responsible for understanding their local community's health needs, agreeing priorities, and encouraging commissioners to work in a more joined-up way.

At the same time, councils will also be given a ring-fenced budget – a share of around £5.2bn, based on 2012/13 funding – and will be able to choose how they spend it, according to the health needs of their population. Local authorities which make improvements against 66 health 'indicators', such as reducing obesity, will be rewarded with cash premiums.

Success may well depend on councils' flexibility, efficiency and ability to work with partners, and there are few areas of the public sector that can boast a greater aptitude for this than local authorities – far removed as they are from Whitehall's silos.

However, local government and health experts have argued the challenge is not just adapting to new methods of management but to new ways of making policy. Take transport, for instance. The aim of transport will always be 'getting from A to B', but innovative policy-makers are starting to ask if it can be more than that, or to put it another way, what else can we do with the journey.

According to the chair of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transportation's (ADEPT's) transport board, Tony Ciaburro, HWBs represent an opportunity to make an important cultural shift in the transport sector.

Mr Ciaburro believes they could result in 'moving the whole basis of our industry to be more outcome-focused'.

So, instead of dealing with policy in the abstract, the practical benefits of a given scheme are the foundation public spending is built on.

Mr Ciaburro who is also director of environment, development and transport at Northamptonshire CC, has already had

good experience of this type of outcomes-based approach to policy. Prior to health minister Andrew Lansley's reforms, Northamptonshire CC was granted funding by the local health service to help reduce the

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number of older people suffering falls.

The scheme achieved success through the authority changing its road maintenance approach and providing extra gritting for pavements in high-risk areas. Council officers also worked with the local probation service to use offenders on community service for the gritting programme.

HWBs could help introduce this type of successful scheme in more areas, Mr Ciaburro suggests, 'as long as they are not

micro-managed', and were not afraid to challenge the status quo and 'throw out the rule book.'

He says: 'If you are more focused on outcomes rather than inputs and outputs, you can take a wider perspective, create better links with other groups and create more innovative solutions.'

'This would also leave more flexibility for the public and private sectors to get together in terms of delivery, and not be tied down by predetermined methodology.'

The Department for Transport (DfT) certainly appears to have no plans to micro-manage transport's role in HWBs. A spokeswoman says: 'The department does not currently give any specific guidance at a local level on the potential health benefits of particular transport choices.'

Professor Stephen Horsley, director of public health for Northamptonshire, told *The MJ* the type of practical work highlighted by Mr Ciaburro is just what HWBs should focus on in the short term.

'The concern for the HWBs is that they try to do too much. One should not try to do things the individual organisations in-

olved can do themselves. They need to solve one or two key issues in the short term, or people will think it's a talking shop,' he said.

Prof Horsley also suggests this approach could present an opportunity to realise the potential of the 'community budgets' finance model, as HWBs bring together both co-operative working and outcomes-focused spending.

'What we have to do is get people working together on a small number of programmes so people can see HWBs as a vehicle through which they can pool resources creatively over the next two to three years, because we will need to pool resources to provide services to the local population,' he says.

This leaves transport directors, along with all other department managers, with less than 12 months to prove to council members and health directors that they can and should be involved in plans to improve local health and wellbeing.

But while transport itself can move beyond A to B, a question remains over whether its officers themselves are ready.

Why foster carers care

Understanding behaviour can improve outcomes and save money, says **Will Reynolds**

With Foster Care fortnight now over, fostering teams throughout the country have pulled out all the stops to recruit a new wave of carers.

External placements can cost up to four times more than in-house ones, so this period is essential for teams which know that recruiting more in-house carers is the key to reducing cost.

It is also the busiest period of the year for recruitment teams, but their work has only just begun to assess, train and register carers as quickly as possible to help meet the rising demand for foster homes for looked-after children.

With independent fostering agencies (IFAs) waiting in the wings, ready to profit from process delays and a finite number of new carers available in local populations, local authorities' need for slick systems which attract the right people, keeping them engaged during the application process and retaining them after they've been registered, is more acute than ever.

In order to achieve this, fostering teams must understand the core motivations of their customers. Teams need to understand why people are drawn

to fostering, what carers want to get out of their experience, what motivates some carers to stop fostering or 'defect' to IFAs, and how the service can attract people who will provide the best outcomes for children in their care.

Recent behavioural research carried out by iMPower, in partnership with

Shared values explain the motivations behind becoming a foster carer in the first place

some of our local government clients, sought to identify the core motivations and values of foster carers.

This new research was necessary since past studies had made good progress in describing who foster carers were and some of their superficial characteristics, but had failed to explain why they behaved the way they did, and what motivations sat behind these behaviours. The

research results were striking – a cluster of 10 common values shared by foster carers were identified – with 95% of the in-house carer cohort sharing most or all of these 10 characteristics compared with less than half of the wider UK population.

These shared values explain the motivations behind becoming a foster carer in the first place, and serve to equip carers with the mindset and cognitive skill-set required to deliver high-quality care, once they begin looking after children.

From this research, we have developed new ways of working. At its core is an improved communications strategy and reconfigured processes to serve this core carer 'market' better.

The findings have deep ramifications for the way councils recruit carers, keep them engaged during the application and training process, and indicate the best ways for councils to differentiate themselves against IFAs in a competitive marketplace.

iMPower has applied the same behavioural analysis methodology to a range of other services, including waste collection and management, special ed-

ucation needs transport (SENT) – winning an MCA award for change management in the public sector for its work on Coventry City Council's SENT system – and social care, and is exploring further opportunities with authorities.

These projects have helped councils to make meaningful behaviour change happen, resulting in better outcomes and proven cashable efficiencies. Our work is based on the premise that in the 'new world' of the public sector, councils need to be smarter about understanding their customers and, in some cases, to re-cast their relationships with service-users.

Attracting more in-house carers will improve outcomes for young people, carers and taxpayers, who no longer have to foot high IFA bills.

And being smarter about understanding motivations can help authorities achieve this goal.

iMPower recently published a 'white paper' on value modes. To find out more, visit www.impower.co.uk/public/upload/iMPowerChangingTheGame.pdf

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