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DERBYSHIRE COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES NHS FOUNDATION TRUST EMPOWERING LINE MANAGERS TO MAXIMISE FLEXIBLE WORKING

The organisation

Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust (DCHS) serves a patient population of more than one million people across Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The trust employs approximately 4,400 staff across 133 sites including 11 community hospitals and 30 health centres.

Background

To support workforce development, reduced agency expenditure and improvements to the working lives of staff, the speech and language therapy (SLT) service wanted to better match employee requests for flexible working with business need.

The SLT service consists of staff caring for both children and adults across acute, community, education and home settings. It has a 98 per cent female workforce ranging in age, many of whom with child and adult dependents, plus other commitments.

The SLT team viewed improving flexible working as important, as members of the team believed that a positive workforce would deliver a better patient experience. As an organisation, the trust also knew that developing a flexible working policy, which empowers managers to apply, would bring a range of benefits to the organisation, including a happier workforce.

What they did

The trust worked in partnership with union representatives to identify existing good practice, enabling hospital and department leaders to shape a healthy

working culture which supports employee wellbeing while improving organisational performance. In response to the challenges associated with working pressures, several initiatives were set up to support healthy lifestyles, including workplace health and wellbeing champions at key sites, development of wellbeing clubs, and increased staff engagement sessions with executives.

DCHS also provided tools to help staff with time management, work-life balance, introduced regular 'go home from work on time days' and offered additional basic management training. Furthermore, the trust now provides advice to managers on how to help them manage their own work and that of their team members.

The SLT team had already introduced annualised sessions and mobile working as well as agreeing many flexible working arrangements with staff over the years. When DCHS re-launched its flexible working policy, it allowed them to formalise existing arrangements, and provide a clear and transparent process to support managers in dealing with requests.

Challenges

- Flexible working requests can sometimes be time consuming - it can take thought and compromise for both parties to reach a suitable agreement.
- It can be challenging to ensure there is enough cover across the working week to provide a balance of staffing and access to services for patients.
- Requests can sometimes be unworkable for the service and not in the best interest of staff, but it's worth discussing a compromise.
- Requests to reduce WTE would sometimes create vacancies that could not be filled or would make a post untenable. In these cases, it's worth advising the staff member to wait for an opportunity to arise through other staffing changes that enable their request to be met.

Outcomes

In the SLT team, a wide range of flexible working requests have been met, including reduced hours; flexible start and finish times; fortnightly working patterns; and use of annualised sessions across the service. Staff without children or dependents have also requested flexible working to help fit in with their individual needs and preferences to enable a positive work life-balance.

Key outcomes include:

- 63 per cent of SLT staff now have a flexible working arrangement in place
- a highly engaged workforce with positive views on DCHS as an employer





- satisfied and motivated staff who give 100 per cent effort
- staff understand the service needs as well as their own, and feel valued and supported by their managers
- the SLT staff survey and pulse check reports have indicated higher rates of satisfaction than the trust average
- attendance levels in the SLT team being consistently above the DCHS average and the team has very high retention rates
- feedback from staff on their flexible working arrangements has been very positive and team members will often offer additional flexibility to meet service needs and/or support their colleagues.

A staff view

[This video](#) was created by the SLT team and explains why this work was important to them, how they took it forward and for the individuals, what the benefits have been.

Steps to success

- Seek support from senior leaders within the organisation and empower front line managers to work directly with staff to match flexible working requirements to the organisation's service delivery needs.
- Front line service managers should allocate time to meet with staff to fully understand their personal circumstances, to achieve a productive work-life balance.
- Use conversations as an opportunity to help staff better understand the business and delivery requirements of the service and organisation.
- Be creative and consider non-standard working patterns.
- Where e-rostering is available, ensure that the criteria used to set rosters, factors in flexible working arrangements.

Top tips

- ✓ Understand what work/life balance staff are trying to achieve when making their request.
- ✓ Have an open mind about non-standard working patterns, trial for a brief period if unsure.
- ✓ If you have to decline an initial proposal, always provide clear rationale to staff, then offer alternatives for consideration.

Further information

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