



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE



THE STANDARD

ASSESSMENT REPORT

FOR

FURTHER OPTIONS (CENTRAL) LTD

Assessor: Derek Bawden

Date: 8th November 2007

West Midlands Quality Centre
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ASSESSMENT DETAILS

ASSESSMENT TYPE

POST RECOGNITION REVIEW

TITLE OF ORGANISATION	FURTHER OPTIONS (CENTRAL) LTD
MAIN ADDRESS	9 MARKET STREET LONGTON STOKE ON TRENT STAFFORDSHIRE
TELEPHONE	01782 316351
MOST SENIOR PERSON	DAVE MASON REGIONAL DIRECTOR
INVESTORS IN PEOPLE CONTACT	DEBBIE TATTON AREA MANAGER
NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN SCOPE	21
NUMBER OF SITES IN SCOPE	1
ON-SITE DATES	8 TH NOVEMBER 2007
DATE OF FEEDBACK MEETING	8 TH NOVEMBER 2007
WMQC PERFORMANCE & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER	JANE BLACKSTOCK
ASSESSMENT OUTCOME	STANDARD MET

INTRODUCTION

Further Options (Central) Ltd was originally recognised as an Investor in People in March 2004 when it was known as The Willows Supported Housing Project Ltd. Since then it has been taken over as part of the national Options Group, whose central office is based in Alcester, Warwickshire.

This streamlined review is the first against the current version of the Investors in People Standard (Jan 2005). The total number of people within the scope of this review is 21 (including regular sessional staff). This report is in the format recommended by West Midlands Quality Centre, which builds on the organisation's own storyboard.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSESSMENT

- To assess the organisation against all of the indicators defined within the current version of the Investors in People standard.
- Provide effective feedback on a) areas for development to strengthen the continuous improvement philosophy; b) the organisation's culture, and c) best practice within the organisation.

THE ASSESSMENT

- The assessor met firstly with the Area Manager and Administration Manager to brief them on the assessment process and to discuss the progress and changes made since the last assessment in 2004.
- In total, a sample of 12 staff was chosen as representative from the 21 people in scope within the organisation (57%). This is within the sampling range guidelines for an organisation of this size (40-80%).
- The individuals were chosen to provide a mix of all job roles throughout the organisation. The assessor talked to all staff on a 1-1 basis due to the need for flexibility and availability of staff. Three of the discussions were held by telephone for a) operational reasons, b) holiday, and c) on a training course.
- A range of documents were provided prior to the assessment to help the assessor assimilate current practices, e.g. organisation charts, Business plan, key objectives, induction checklist, supervision and PDP documentation, and a list of training undertaken by staff in the previous 12 months.
- The assessment was made against the current version of the national Investors in People Standard (Jan 2005). The report, as agreed with the client, was to be documented against areas for further development and areas of good practice.

YOUR ORGANISATION

Please provide the Assessor with some background to your organisation (Provide details of who owns the organisation, the managing board if one exists and any recent acquisitions, changes or mergers. State any tools other than Investors in People that you use to develop your organisation)

Organisational chart issued to assessor.

We have 2 authority Supporting People contracts and are assessed against the Quality Assessment Framework.

Products or Services (Please describe the main activities of your organisation. If there is more than one site how do products and activities differ between sites)

Accommodation providing support with daily living skills to promote independence. To enable young people to develop social skills and successfully integrate into the community and live a prosperous adult life.

THE INVESTORS IN PEOPLE STANDARD

Section One - PLAN

An Investor in People develops effective strategies to improve the performance of the organisation through its people

A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

Could you please describe your organisation's key purpose? (1.1)

To equip the young people with the necessary skills required to live as independently as is practicable

Your organisation's vision? (1.1)

To provide a national network of resource centres offering a locality supportive framework to assist young people leaving care and/or requiring support to become established within the community.

What are your key business objectives? (1.2)

To improve the existing service and expand into new areas/regions.

Are these objectives contained within a plan? (1.2)

Yes the Divisional Business Plan.

What will you need to do to improve organisational performance in order to achieve your purpose and vision? (1.1)

Improve resources and manage them effectively ensuring value for money.

Provide the necessary training for all staff to effectively perform their role.

If there are representative structures in place, how did you consult them when the plan was put together? (If there are no representative groups, please put N/A) (1.3)

The Regional Director and Area Manager consult re; the business plan. The Regional Director attends the Senior Executive Meetings to contribute to the Divisional Business Plan.

PLANNING AND PRIORITISING YOUR ORGANISATION'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

What are your most important priorities for learning and development in the organisation? (2.1)

ECDL

Child/vulnerable adult protection
NVQ3 in caring for children and young people
Professional boundaries
Health and Safety

What investment do you plan to make in achieving these priorities in terms of? (2.1)

Money: **£45,000 (includes staff time)**

Time: **2 days per staff member per month**

Other resources: **shadowing, visiting other establishments within the Options Group and other agencies, conferences. Training Centre, IT resources, Library, secondment**

How will you decide whether this investment has been effective or not? (2.1)

Service user questionnaires
Feedback/evaluations
Performance monitoring

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING PEOPLE

How do you ensure that the learning and development needs of different people are recognised and met? (3.2)

How did you make sure that people could contribute their ideas and suggestions when your plan was being put together? (3.1)

Suggestion box; Team meetings; Action Plan meetings; Working Groups; Supervision
Senior Executive meetings

DEFINING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES

What leadership and management characteristics do you expect of: (4.1)

Yourself?

Professional, supportive, organised, consultative, open and honest, reliable, approachable, good listening skills

Other managers?

I would expect all managers within our Division to have the above characteristics.

How have you ensured that the management team has these characteristics? (4.1)

Leadership and Management Training (ILM); NVQ's
In House training; External training
Job description and person specification
Workforce Development Plan

PLAN: - To be completed by the Assessor only

Comment on the degree to which the statements above were confirmed at the site visit and any additional information identified:

The assessor found that the above information from the organisation fully describes what happens in practice. See below for additional information.

Comment on the strength and consistency of evidence available:

From the discussions with managers and staff there was a clear culture of constant learning, growing and reflecting through open team working, listening to others and seeking/providing encouragement and feedback. 1.1

The organisation displays clear values and demonstrates a family type ethos which is driven through clear frameworks and policies. 1.1

Staff commented on how it was “a great place to work”; “I love it here”; “Promises are kept”; and after joining - “it works exactly as described at interview”. This is supported by the fact that there has been zero level of staff turnover in the past 12 months. 1.1 9.2

There were several key measures which gave staff a clear view of the bigger picture, e.g. new referrals, meeting project deadlines, income levels, new business/waiting lists, LA reviews, Outcomes Star etc. These all form part of the strategic business plan produced in line with the Options Group format. 1.2 1.4

There are no formal representative groups within Further Options (Central), although consultation does happen through specific working groups or Action Plan meetings to progress new initiative etc. 1.3 1.5

The key supporting framework of regular communications is seen through whole staff meetings, team meetings, and regular supervision. All staff interviewed agreed that the infrastructure of the organisation had changed immensely from the private ownership to the current status of being well organised, having clear objectives, supportive and strong management. 1.4 1.6

All staff had a clear view of the wider objective of their individual roles and the appropriate development, e.g. to ensure young people were not left homeless, and that they could be helped towards independent living through a variety of support activities and through developing “life skills”. 1.6 2.4

Both managers and staff described how development needs were identified at supervision sessions and followed through into personal development plans (PDPs). Individual needs covered specific skills for new managers (ILM course), counselling, NVQ in working with children, ECDL for all staff, common assessment framework (for Supporting People), first aid and food hygiene, along with many awareness training on disability discrimination, age discrimination, health and safety, etc. 2.1 2.2 2.3

An example of recent positive change is seen in staff being allocated to individual properties in the Stoke and Leek areas and being key workers for 3.1 3.5

those young people based there (rather than to individuals who may have variable needs).

Management and staff described how they had particular specialisms and interests within the fields of young people and leaving care. They also were multi skilled in being flexible to cover for colleagues and to work on the immediacy of problems for the benefit of the team and the organisation. Examples of intensive support workers covering for others and vice versa were common and worked well in this relatively small, team based organisation. The mix of skills, attributes and learning available to all allows such a flexible approach.

Senior management were able to describe the requirements of a good manager within Further Options (Central). E.g. to be supportive, open, encouraging, approachable and able to listen to others, and above all to demonstrate a professional approach to helping young people.

Managers were described as hands on, supportive and providing encouragement, praise and daily feedback. Managers also had the respect of staff as they themselves had been support workers and so knew the roles, pressures etc that staff faced on a daily basis.

Have the evidence requirements been met? (enter a ✓ or a x)

ONE						TWO				THREE					FOUR		
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
✓	✓	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section two -DO

An Investor in People takes effective action to improve the performance of the organisation through its people

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

How would you demonstrate that top managers and managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people? (5.1)

Feedback from staff supervisions
Performance measurement
Staff retention
Staff development
Staff progression

How do managers provide constructive feedback to people on their performance? (5.2)

Please provide two examples:

- 1) **During supervision sessions**
- 2) **On the spot praise**

RECOGNISING AND VALUING PEOPLE'S CONTRIBUTION

How do managers recognise and value people's individual contributions to your organisation? (6.1)

E-mails/memos/cards received from the Chief Executive, Human Resources Director.
Individual feedback during supervision and team feedback during team meetings.
More responsibilities and autonomy of own caseload.

Please provide two examples:

- 1) **Bonuses**
- 2) **Pay rises**

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO TAKE OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING DECISIONS

How have you encouraged a sense of ownership and responsibility within your organisation? (7.1)

Working groups; Promotions; Task setting; Job description
autonomy of own caseloads; Working towards trust status

How have you encouraged people to get involved in decision making at an individual level and (if appropriate) through representative groups? (7.1)

Supervision; Working Groups
Team meetings; Action Plan meetings

MAKING SURE THAT PEOPLE LEARN AND DEVELOP EFFECTIVELY

How do you make sure that people's agreed learning and development needs are met? (8.1)

Training matrix; Personal Development Plans
Workforce Development Plan
Supervision/appraisal; NVQ monthly progress report

How do you ensure that people who are new to the organisation, or those who have changed roles, receive an effective induction: (8.3)

1) New starters:

12 week induction programme/probationary period

Shadowing other staff

Supervision

Buddying/mentor system

Job description and person specification

2) People who have changed role:

Shadowing staff already in same or similar role

Training to suit new role and to meet person specification

Buddying/mentor

New job description and person spec

Amended personal development plan

Communication to advise of change

DO: - To be completed by the Assessor only

Comment on the degree to which the statements above were confirmed at the site visit and any additional information identified:

The assessor found that the above information from the organisation fully describes what happens in practice. See below for additional information.

Comment on the strength and consistency of evidence available:

A clear example of management skill was noted in the ability to not provide immediate solutions, but to get individuals to think for themselves and to develop their solutions, through encouragement and empowerment. 5.1

Staff working towards the NVQ Level 3 described good and regular monthly access to the assessor to help them progress stage by stage. Equally the commitment to the completion of the ECDL for all staff is facilitated by staff attending a local centre for two hours per week, or accessing on line facilities for those support workers who are not always office based. Many described "buddy" working to help learn together, share tips and best practice, make it an easier process to follow, and to ensure regular progress. 5.1 5.3 8.2

Thanks and praise was a very natural part of the ethos of Further Options (Central) and staff felt appreciated and supported. They could quite clearly see how they made a difference to individual young people and also to the success of the organisation, through expanded service provision and new centres planned for Newcastle, Leek etc. 5.2 5.4 6.2

Supervision sessions are very open, informal (but with structured agenda) and staff can raise any issues (work or personal) and feel they will be listened to, supported and issues resolved. This applies equally to staff having access to the Director or Area Manager, as necessary, to raise important and sometimes 5.3 5.4

immediate issues.

Since becoming part of the Options Group there has been a clear commitment to growth and hence “growing staff” to become the managers of tomorrow. This was evident in the individual discussions with staff who had achieved promotion at appropriate times (and usually prior to the setting up of new projects or new outreach centres). 6.1
6.3

An example of consultation and staff involvement in decisions is seen in the planned move to new premises. An Action Plan group has been set up to identify potential properties and staff are involved in discussions about how to organise and set up the office and support facilities. Staff are happy to take these responsibilities on board. 7.1
7.2

Staff confirmed the opportunity to be involved in new projects as required, and to take on additional responsibilities as necessary. Their views were always listened to and positive feedback from managers is always focused on reasoning e.g. why something will/won't work rather than just yes/no. This is a key management value of providing constructive feedback to further encourage staff involvement and ultimately achieve true staff engagement. 7.1
5.4
4.2

The flexibility of staff to cover and support each other is seen in times of regular holidays, where staff agree the best way to provide cover, who can be off and when, what preparation is needed before staff go on leave and to ensure that staff do not come back to “work piled up”. Another example of true team work and mutual team spirit. 7.2
7.3

There is good interaction between the small internal teams, e.g. admin and maintenance to ensure that properties are updated/prepared/refurbished as necessary for new clients. 7.3

Staff and managers also described the many informal development opportunities available, e.g. conferences, local authority seminars, visits to other centres (internal and external). All are described as valuable in gaining insight to how others operate, to identify other practices which may be adapted to work within Further Options (Central) etc. 8.1
8.2

Those new to the organisation described a very full and comprehensive induction process, covering several weeks or months of ongoing learning, including touring other Options Group sites, shadowing others, formal induction pack, the history of the Options Group, on-the-job training etc. 8.3

Have the evidence requirements been met? (enter a ✓ or a x)

FIVE				SIX			SEVEN			EIGHT		
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section three - REVIEW

An Investor in People can demonstrate the impact of its investment in people on the performance of the organisation

THE IMPACT ON YOUR ORGANISATION'S PERFORMANCE

In "Section One – Plan" you described the investment you plan to make in achieving your organisation's learning and development priorities. In this section, please comment on the investment you have already made in terms of: (9.1)

Money: **£22,500**

Time: **250 days**

Other resources: **New IT system, purchase of new offices, In house and external training**

How has the performance of your organisation improved as a result of making this investment in learning and development? (9.2)

Growth in confidence of staff leading to them taking on extra responsibilities.

Better outcomes

Improved reputation

Improved service

Reduction in number of complaints received

Good staff retention

Could you please provide two examples of quantifiable benefits:

- 1) **Staff have devised a resettlement programme**
- 2) **New responsibilities e.g. assessing foster carers**

As a result of your evaluation, what did you learn about the effectiveness of your approach to improving your organisation's performance? (9.3)

There needed to be a more structured and systematic approach.

Have you made any changes or improvements to your approach as a result? (9.3)

Working towards a workforce development plan for the Options Group as a whole and for the individual parts of the organisation to develop individual training matrix.

Introduced personal development plans, job descriptions and person specifications.

IMPROVING THE WAY PEOPLE ARE MANAGED AND DEVELOPED

As a result of your evaluation, what did you learn about the way your organisation manages and develops people? (10.1)

When we developed this process 12 months ago the management and development of people was very vague. Improvements and new structures developed have had a major impact.

Have you made any changes or improvements as a result? (10.1)

Introduced managers/operational meetings

Systematic approach to training, development and meeting people's needs.

Crisis response to needs has changed and is now more planned. A preventative approach has been adopted and has led to less crises.

REVIEW: - To be completed by the Assessor only

Comment on the degree to which the statements above were confirmed at the site visit and any additional information identified:

The assessor found that the above information from the organisation fully describes what happens in practice. See below for additional information.

Comment on the strength and consistency of evidence available:

Without doubt the Group structure provides investment for property to provide for homeless young people, investment in future plans for expansion (already well under way) and investment in people and development of new managers/senior support workers etc. The investment also covers a group learning resource centre in Shifnal, as well as time for individuals to develop through access to training for up to two days per month per individual, and to “train the trainer” courses to develop individuals as internal trainers. 9.1 10.1

The major benefit of the focus on staff and staff development has been the increase in individual confidence. This is translated into staff taking on more challenging roles, being promoted, having clearer roles and objectives, becoming involved in new projects from day one etc. This has also had a knock on effect in comments from commissioners and Local Authorities as recognition that “Further Options (Central) is the best supplier they work with”. 9.2

Another example of continuous improvement described by management is seen in the work of another Action Plan group to develop the standard “Outcomes Star” into a specific and more focused way of measuring individual progress of young people, in line with the Supporting People framework and the way Further Options (Central) work. The development of this practical and workable tool would not have happened without staff involvement, and is confirmed by those staff on this group. 9.3 10.3

Many examples of staff sharing their learning (either formal or informal) is seen in the Key Workers office, in local team meetings and in whole staff meetings, where problems are shared and solutions discussed. Networking with others and inter agency working are also clear examples of learning from others, and identifying new ways of working (or what not to do!). As a result the team has introduced improvements which speed up communications to/from agencies and ensure a partnership approach to providing the complex needs of young people. 9.4 9.5

Staff and managers described how change and new ideas are welcomed. There was an inclusive feel which was evident in action plan meetings, key worker meetings/discussions, a suggestion scheme, and open and approachable management. 10.1 10.2 10.3

Regular praise and recognition is common within the existing communications processes. Management are keen to promote best ways of working and further develop the continuous improvement culture, though providing mentors and buddies of those undertaking NVQs etc. 10.2 10.3

Have the evidence requirements been met? (enter a ✓ or a x)

Nine					Ten		
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

THE ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A SUMMARY OF THE ORGANISATION'S STRENGTHS:

- Very strong team spirit, ethos and “family feel” culture
- Open management which is supportive, involving, open, listens and consults
- Commitment to staff and staff development as a means to success
- Structured, organised and planned evolution through staff engagement
- Clear roles, responsibilities and flexibility of team working
- Focus on succession planning and development of future managers
- Effective communications through meeting structures and action plan groups
- Adaptability of learning to meet Supporting People and organisation specific needs
- Solid management and operating foundations are now in place for further expansion
- Effective people development to ensure “round pegs in round holes”
- An organisation where “promises are kept” - (“you get what it says on the tin”)

A SUMMARY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT:

- Consider further defining the management criteria linked to the implicit core Values of the company, (e.g. respect, openness, and supportive) to provide additional objectivity in manager behaviours and hence link to recruitment/promotion, personal development plans and also in performance review measures.
- Consider the best way in which to conserve the very strong ethos and team spirit as the organisation grows through expansion and new centres are opened over the next few years. Many current staff may well be future managers but new staff need to fit the culture and vocation.
- Consider the use of an additional assessment at recruitment stages e.g. through role plays to ensure a good fit with the existing team ethos and to demonstrate the above core values.
- Consider the need for a more structured approach to marketing as the organisation grows and expands. The linkage to the key decision makers in Local Authorities and Councils will be paramount and may well become a full time role. This can be reinforced with the current model where everyone is involved in spreading the word.
- Consider the need for an expanded set of key performance indicators to widen the range of performance to which individuals contribute. There may be a need to translate operational targets into true “indicators” e.g. measuring the fundamental processes which lead to the desired outcome.
- Consider the (already recognised) need for upgrading the current IT network as part of the planned move to new premises to further facilitate more automated processes and reduced reliance on paperwork for support workers.
- Consider the benefits of promoting the role of Investors in People in developing a successful operating model, across the rest of the Options Group. Specifically the

<p>development of one or two Internal Reviewers may facilitate this process and also provide development options and a useful resource for Further Options (Central) before the next review.</p>	
<p>FEEDBACK</p>	
<p>Feedback Date:</p>	<p>8th November 2007</p>
<p>CONCLUSION</p>	
<p>Has the Standard been achieved? Yes / No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In concluding that the Standard is met, the assessor confirms that Further Options (Central) Ltd continues to be recognised as an Investor in People. 	
<p>RECOGNITION</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition is granted for a period not exceeding three years from the date of feedback meeting or date that the previous 3 year period expired, whichever is the sooner. The current guidance states that the organisation can seek assessment at any stage provided the period between each assessment does not exceed three years. The organisation should discuss the exact timing of the next assessment by contacting West Midlands Quality Centre. An appropriate assessor will be appointed nearer the time. 	
<p>IF RECOGNITION IS GRANTED, THE MAXIMUM DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT REVIEW WILL BE: NB: <i>You may seek a review more frequently than at 3-yearly intervals</i></p>	<p>31st March 2010</p>