

# CASE STUDY

## Driving children-first and a bottom-up approach

8 May 2019, West Sussex County Council (WSCC) hit the BBC news headlines: the council is failing vulnerable young people due to 'widespread and serious weaknesses' in its children's services, a watchdog report stated. The quality of care children received was a 'lottery and depends on where they live'. Signs of neglect were not always recognised, with 'profound consequences' for children. The Ofsted report stated there were 'long-standing, widespread and serious weaknesses' in services intended to protect children and 'risks were seldom recognised'. Ofsted inspectors identified 'critical weaknesses in how social workers, managers and partner agencies identify and respond to neglect'.

Within the services, there was a culture of victimisation and bullying, with antiquated working practices, and a legacy of long-serving staff, where there was a culture of resistance to change.

Since then, WSCC has embarked on a major development programme to support the cultural and practice improvements necessary to bring about sustainable and long-lasting improvement. The service now has a strong and experienced senior leadership team who are delivering a comprehensive set of improvements at pace which includes investment in managers, staff and teams.

x3 Associates co-designed and co-delivered (with WSCC) an inspirational and high-impact leadership development programme, at a rapid pace, to transform capability:

- established a winning leadership team
- driven cultural change underpinned by the principle of children-first
- created a bottom-up approach to continuous improvement.

The feedback from delegates continues to be excellent. We use real practical examples that delegates easily relate to.

In May 2023, Ofsted inspectors praised the relentless approach to improving practice. They highlighted the 'strong, determined and cohesive leadership team' who have made significant improvements since the last full inspection of Children's Services in 2019 which had judged all areas as inadequate. The voice of children and young people is strong and well-considered in decision-making. Leaders have been determined to shift the organisational culture and put children first.



'completely galvanised on this as a leadership team and being supported by a dedicated executive group'  
- Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting

Leadership Development Programme: Driving a winning team and a step-change in culture, 335 leaders and managers:

- Departmental Leadership Team
- Heads of Service
- Service Managers
- Team Managers

On the back of this success, the teams have developed their problem-solving capabilities with multiple agency partnerships and launched new family-safeguarding model teams.

WSCC has now received government notification that it will not be placed into a trust, following significant improvement.

'We had the best 3 days as a senior leadership team working on our plan to get to outstanding services for our children and families.'  
- Lucy Butler, Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning (DCS)