



Briefing 16-26 July 2016

Building Cleaning Services to the Elderly and Vulnerable

Many local authorities have long since vacated the market for 'home-help' type services to the elderly and vulnerable. The market is now notorious for companies offering zero-hours based contracts and minimum (now living) wages. A market however still exists for cleaning and basic support services, one that not only provides real support, but also generates revenue for the Council.

Key issues:

- Local authorities can compete successfully in the market for home services
- Home cleaning and basic support services not only ensure the wellbeing of residents but allows the elderly to remain within their home – a win-win
- Careful service design and clarity can successfully overcome H&S and trading debt concerns

Introduction

In 2008, Oldham Cleaning Service decided to create a service helping elderly and vulnerable people within the Borough remain independent in their homes for longer by providing support with everyday household tasks. The service enhances 'quality of life', promotes opportunities to reduce isolation and social exclusion and encourages social wellbeing.

The service is open to all, free standing and has grown from a slow start (only 1 customer in first 6 weeks) to stand now at around 250 hours per week, delivered by 25 staff working between 10 and 20 hours per week and making a surplus of around £40,000 per year.

Service structure

Delivering a traded service to the elderly and vulnerable carries a range of concerns about satisfying, health and safety, COSHE assessments of chemicals used and ensuring payment. Careful design of the service and its operation has ensured that legal responsibility remains with the client. The service is managed by one part time supervisor.

A range of services are offered:

- General cleaning, dusting, sweeping, vacuuming, fridge/freezer cleaning or defrosting, toilet and bathroom cleaning and internal window cleaning
- Accompanied shopping
- Basic food preparation
- Bed making / changing
- Washing and ironing
- Visiting service

- Dog walking

The team are trained in:

- Customer care
- Health & safety
- First aid
- Basic food hygiene
- Manual Handling
- Emergency procedures
- Using client personal equipment
- Safe Handling of Chemicals (COSHE)

Current service

- 200 clients
- Minimum 2 hour slot, offered weekly or fortnightly
- Monthly contract, invoiced in arrears
- 25 staff - between 10 / 20 hours week each – total 250 hours
- Mileage payment or bus pass provided to staff
- Cluster of clients where possible
- Same cleaner assigned to each client (although not guaranteed)
- Flexibility to offer work around school cleaning contracts
- T/O approx. £120k, £40k surplus

Clients are required to sign a contract with the Council

This contract includes the wording: *'If we provide you with cleaning services, you are responsible for providing the material and equipment necessary for the particular cleaning task. This will have been discussed and agreed with you when we carried out our initial assessment'*. Thus the service avoids providing any equipment or consumables and whilst trained in safe handling, is not responsible for the safe storage of what are in any case domestically available cleaning products.

Similarly the assisted shopping service states that the client is responsible for the costs of taxi transport and cost of shopping. Receipts are provided to account for any money spent.

Clients are required to provide seven days notice should they wish to cancel an appointment. Failure to do so incurs the normal charge although discretion prevails in exceptional circumstances.

Generating new Clients

The service is now established and works hard to ensure that those delivering adult social services are aware of the cleaning service and this generates referrals. In addition low cost leaflets, entirely produced by the service are distributed to Age Concern, Link centres, Libraries, surgeries, warden controlled buildings and the Council website

Quality Control

Clients are given a regular customer satisfaction survey asking questions on :

- Standard of cleaning carried out
- Punctuality of cleaning staff
- Flexibility of cleaning staff
- Professionalism
- Value for money

The cleaning staff are highly regarded by the clients. Comments including the following are not uncommon; 'I'm very pleased with every aspect of the service. "The lady who visits me is a treasure". "Very good is an understatement. Excellent would be more appropriate".

However the service goes beyond simple cleaning and support:

Mrs H said: "I needed a bit of help doing the things which were getting difficult to do like stripping the bed and hoovering up. "It gives me peace of mind knowing everything will be done I was very house proud and like my home to stay nice and tidy. I also look forward to having a chat and the company. I would definitely recommend it to others."

Mrs H's daughter, added: "It's been a real help knowing someone else is checking on mum and doing some of the jobs as it frees me up to spend more quality time her, I've had no problems and the staff have been helpful and friendly."

APSE Comment

The Oldham example demonstrates that local authorities can deliver a hugely valued service to the elderly and vulnerable, whilst generating income. Traditionally council home services concentrated on those in receipt of benefits or assessed as in need of personal care and the continued funding squeeze has reduced this to all but the most vulnerable. The advent of personal budgets also freed clients to decide how to spend any money they receive. This approach ignores the very large number of people who want the service and are willing to pay.

Cleaning may often be seen as an area dominated by minimum wages and small margins. However combined with the security of buying from the local council and low level marketing to maintain a presence, the Council has offered the service at a competitive price and pays its employees above the market rate. Others should consider offering such a service to their own residents

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