SUBMISSION FROM HIGHLAND HOME CARERS

Submission on Employee Ownership

Stephen Pennington, Managing Director, Highland Home Carers

Highland Home Carers Ltd (HHC) was established in 1994 and sold to the employees by the former owner in 2004. Funding was obtained from the RBS, the company’s bankers, and from the Baxi Partnership Ltd in addition to some available cash deposits. An Employee Benefit Trust was established which initially held 85% of the share ownership; the full 100% was secured within 5 years. A governance structure includes 3 elected employee directors on the Board. Free shares are distributed to qualifying employees (at least 3 months employment by the beginning of the year in which the shares are distributed) by means of a Share Incentive Plan.

At the time of the buy-out, there were approximately 100 employees and the turnover was just under £1 million; there are now in the region of 450 employees and the turnover in 2014-15 was £6.2 million. Highland Home Carers is now the largest domiciliary care and support provider in the Inner Moray Firth area and is continuing to grow. Issues of recruitment and retention which are endemic throughout the industry have not proven to be a significant concern for HHC.

In April 2012, the Highland Council & NHS Highland embarked on a new integrated relationship under a lead agency model, with the latter assuming responsibility for the delivery of all Health & Social Care. Highland Home Carers has played a major role in the transformation of care at home services across (North) Highland by actively engaging in the partnership with all sectors – users, carers, providers and commissioners. The aims of the strategic approach are to increase the volume and quality of care provision and, by working in collaboration with all parties that is being achieved. A new tariff approach introduced in May 2015 has built in a set of requirements which will lead to better outcomes for all. These include ensuring that people are not delayed in hospital for want of a care at home package, payment of the living wage to all care at home staff, levels of staff training, quality standards, commitment to a collaborative approach and to developing services in remote and rural communities.

Highland Home Carers was invited by NHS Highland in summer 2014 to see if they could identify a way of meeting the needs of people who required care in the South Loch Ness locality. Traditionally people living there had moved to live with families or into a care home in such circumstances. A community charity, Boleskine Community Care (BCC), had been developing voluntary support services but there was a desperate requirement for a professional care at home service. HHC suggested that a joint approach could be developed and the 3 organisations produced a model which is now being rolled out across other localities. Integral to the whole approach was the introduction of the Social Care Self-Directed Support (Scotland) Act 2013 on 1st April 2014. This allowed individuals to be allocated a budget under Option 2 (Individual Service Funds) and for HHC to manage it on their behalf.

The essence of the scheme is that the local community identifies people who live locally and wish to support their friends & neighbours to continue to live in their own
homes. Highland Home Carers then recruits the individuals and trains them, which ensures that all the registration and public liability requirements are met. Each of these new workers become part of the HHC employee ownership scheme. In effect, they are then lent back to BCC who coordinate the care delivery in the area. NHS Highland social work staff conduct the assessments of people who are referred for care and HHC continues to manage the individual budgets and the payroll. The overhead costs are reduced which means that there is more of the budget available to the individual and to staff rates of pay. In the parish of Boleskine there are now 6 care workers rather than none and 9 people in receipt of care in their own homes.

Since this initial example, HHC has assisted the community of Strathdearn (Moy & Tomatin) to establish their own service (5 new employees), and is close to starting in Cromarty with the local care charity and in Bettyhill with a dozen employees of a small local domestic care company. HHC is also in discussion with community groups on the Black Isle, Glen Morrison, Helmsdale, Appin and Ullapool. We anticipate a growth in employee owners across the Highlands all working in their communities and aiding elderly and vulnerable people to live at home.

Stephen Pennington
Highland Home Carers
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