

2020 VISION

THE BACKGROUND

An organisation can maintain and survive but can't expect to achieve greatness without strategic vision. Vital to corporate success, a new vision needs acceptance, buy-in and to be communicated through an organisation in order to succeed.

Here Oakridge Training and Consulting talks about its relationship with Denbighshire County Council and how this partnership is helping empower Denbighshire to deliver its vision and achieve strategic goals.

An organisation without a vision is like a traveller without a map. They may eventually arrive at their destination but will have embarked on a journey without direction or purpose.

It was an Audit Commission report and internal audit of Denbighshire County Council's leadership performance and management skills in 2006 that led to the start of the authority's journey with Oakridge.

At the time the organisation had an established long term vision which aimed to position the county as the 'ideal place to live, work, visit, conduct business and pursue a wide range of activities'. Yet those tasked with achieving the vision were lacking in the skills that would enable its delivery.

What was clear from the audit was that many of Denbighshire's people were promoted into positions because of their technical ability but were often not then given the tools to develop their management skills. The imminent implementation of a change management programme would only highlight more the need for improved management performance within the authority.



OUR APPROACH

The starting point for Oakridge was to provide tools for the senior management team to enhance their leadership skills. Involving the Chief Executive and the senior management team the work focused on a two day intensive leadership workshop followed by coaching sessions for each participant, participation in Action Learning Groups and a day looking at influencing skills and the impact of stress linked to change.

This was followed with activity that would align leaders' objectives to the authority's statement of intent – and how they could engage and encourage managers to develop the skills to lead and manage teams.

For the first time this was seen as a different approach. The senior team were felt to have improved understanding of issues and employed better listening skills with 'more valuable one-to-one sessions' widely reported.

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RESULTS

The appointment of a new chief executive at the council brought a new short term vision with the aim of positioning Denbighshire as an 'excellent' authority. The emphasis was on providing 'high quality, sustainable and efficient services to all its citizens and communities and effective leadership to the Local Service Board and other partners in the county'. The council was keen to be seen as one of the 'top performing authorities in Wales'.

Work on the management development programme commenced, which Oakridge designed in collaboration with the Denbighshire management team. The programme also took into account the current economic climate and the changes staff were facing.

The programme focussed on change, conflict, and stress management and enabled managers to make a clear link to everyday event, including:

- **Communication skills – what works, what doesn't and how to be more assertive**
- **Managing challenge and conflict – looking at what drives our behaviours and working with professional actors to help with conflicting handling**
- **Management development – including leadership styles, the role of the manager in the local authority and developing high performing teams**
- **Coaching versus mentoring and management and coaching skills**

Over 100 managers at the council took part in the programme.

To date post course evaluation has taken place for the completed courses and Denbighshire County Council is looking to introduce 'Contracts of Success' which encourage conversations between leaders and their management teams about necessary areas of development and how these can be delivered and measured.

Nia Grisdale, principal solicitor at Denbighshire County Council said:

"There were many elements of the programme which even now two years on have stuck with me and I use today. It really opened my eyes to the techniques and skills that can be employed for instance in conflict management and around issues of change management."

The refresher course 12 months after the initial delivery was really useful and enabled an exchange of thoughts and ideas between other delegates within the council and longer term could be used as the basis for a support group within the organisation. An external provider brought an objective approach to the delivery and I would welcome other opportunities to develop skills in these areas."

Linda Atkin, head of strategic HR at Denbighshire County Council said:

"In order to achieve our Vision and bring our work closer into the community we developed a set of values which we want all members and staff to embrace. It is by providing this development that we are able to empower our people so that they have the confidence to drive our business and achieve goals."

"We have received very positive feedback from the work that Oakridge has delivered and it is encouraging to hear that staff feel they have a clear personal focus. We also understand that this is only part of the process and that they will continue to need support, encouragement and reflective space in order to build on their learning and enhance their management skills."