



It has to come from them' : developing private residential nursing homes as 'teaching homes'

Introduction - setting the scene

This story is about Janet, a nurse adviser in a Social Services Department, who wanted to develop an innovative scheme for private nursing homes to become 'teaching homes'. She wanted this to be part of the support structure locally for achieving new national requirements and quality standards in the sector. This initiative started very much as her idea, drawing on a similar scheme she had read about in Oxford.

The conventional advice was given her :develop a funding bid for it. Janet was starting from



a borough-based partnership with local private homes, already meeting 2-monthly in a forum. But when all funding bids were put on hold due to the imminent development of primary care trusts, Janet was forced to ask herself: how else can I develop this initiative?

This work was also inter-twined with the ongoing processes for accrediting and inspecting the homes.

[Janet's viewpoint](#): the Nurse Adviser

[Mrs Smith's viewpoint](#): Head of Nursing, independent sector homes

[Jenny's viewpoint](#): Contracts Manager, Social Services

[Key Issues](#) in this story

Janet - Nursing Advisor

For Janet the key to the eventual success of her partnership with the local nursing homes turned out to be the apparent obstacle of all funding bids being put on hold due to the imminent development of primary care trusts. This event forced Janet to ask herself: how else can I develop this initiative?

Her reflection reminded her of her experience outside the NHS in development projects in Africa, where to succeed local people have to own the idea from the start.

She says of the local nursing homes: 'they were very enthusiastic, asking me how I was doing ... but they weren't getting involved, the support was only verbal, there was ... pressure "so are you doing this? Are you getting us this scheme?" and I thought No - they have to own this because I am not eternal in this post.'

So she explained the bid could not proceed and said she would still coordinate the group on the basis of those interested coming forward: 'I want names - so I have one name!'



She is now working with those interested and linking them to other partners such as the university, the relevant national nursing bodies.

Janet also shocked herself in her realisation that she was operating under the assumption that 'we were all working under the same government policies .. and directives ... I thought everyone was working in the same way, with the same understanding.' Her partners in this project were extremely diverse ethnically and also from the private sector which is very different from her situation.

She says 'I thought "Wake up!" I woke and the waking up was painful... It's difficult for me to put myself into a business mind .. making money is not an issue, it's not my problem, I am not interested and I have to understand that these people ... their main issue is ... business... I will have to put myself into that sort of thinking.'

Equally she was faced with challenges in ways of working where some people seemed to be going 'over her head', to her bosses or to councillors.

She made clear her position that she was working with all homes to meet accreditation and care standards in order to be awarded accreditation. She reports positive feedback from home owners on her approach: they 'felt we were working in a more collaborative and supportive way ... took a time of adjustment to realise I wasn't working against them but with them.'

As a nurse she could also take her professional credibility into the homes and talk on equal terms with nurses there in ways which non-nurses could not have done.



She also used the opportunity of working in this partnership and trying to understand the motivations of money, to re-pose the issues of purpose: the homes are for the care of older borough residents. 'They [the home owners] need to make money to be able

to live and bring up their children ...[but] for some it's just money, money, money. I said [to them] : don't tell me about money. You are looking after people and I want to know how they

are.'

Her input to the procedures homes are developing has been to make this clear - asking them where they say in their material that they are looking after older people. She pointed out the negative image they otherwise give and ' so they changed their way - I think there is a change.... in the way we work together and the way they present themselves as well, more of a caring company caring for elderly people, rather than a business company.'

Mrs Smith - Head of Nursing

The firm Mrs Smith works for operates in several localities but has a cluster of 7 homes in Janet's locality. Each home has a home manager. Mrs Smith is responsible for clinical issues across these homes. She joined the firm in 1999 to 'turn around' a large dual registered home where there had been problems and re-establish its effectiveness. She led a one-year action plan to sort out the complexities of the mixed clients and their needs. The home was successfully inspected and registration clear after a year. Swiftly then the accreditation process began and was achieved in 4 months.

Her background is of long experience in the NHS and in South Africa as nurse and midwife and nurse/midwife tutor. 'All my career in care and nursing.'

She explains that the District Nurses are another key group for partnership, as



well as the Council and the Health Authority.

Her approach to partnership...

'You cannot meet people's needs without working across.' If the relationships is positive There are no good results if there is 'aggro', if no-one backs down, if there is no listening...' 'There are many way to do things - not just one way.' 'Collaboration starts

with yourself, how you are, how you are in your family, at school. Then you have to try to make partnership with your staff and with the clients and their relatives - that's the most difficult of the lot because it's so emotional for them.'

The Partnership with this Council is a positive relationshipShe is keen to work with professionals like herself and benefit from their expertise.

At the same time as she appreciates the 'watchdog' role of the council, she also feels she can question the rationale for requirements. She talks of the importance of not overreacting to official reports, not to be defensive even if you are on occasions angry with them. 'Then the important thing is the communication skills: clarification, checking,

negotiation .. We need the working relationship on the ground, but still need to be assertive.'

On HA/LA registration and inspection processes ...

'Because of the new Care Standards they are trying to put their house in order and so it's pressure on us.'

'There is no point in being defensive, we have to see the objective standards of the inspectors - but they are only human ...'

She described the situation in Bexley where they already have a joint unit and how much better it is to have it all on one day and less duplication of effort. In her local area she feels 'there are differing opinions. With dual registered homes we get conflict sometimes.. so we need to all work together and to understand each others areas of work.'

In discussing the coming **shift to joint inspection units** for all areas she commented:

'Watch this space! We need the watchdogs, ones who are clear and tell us what's what and have the tools and then we can work with them. I expect those who come will have adequate knowledge. How will they support us? We'll wait and see.'



She and her colleague in non-clinical management agreed that it would only become clear in the interpretation after the first round of inspection and feared a loss of 'room to manoeuvre' with national standards as they have at present. The existing relationship with the inspectors was seen as very valuable.

Her colleague comments : 'We can phone and say we're planning to do this, what would your reaction be, how would you see that? If there is a complaint we can check out with the unit their view and get advice on how we should handle it. The unit always asks people if they have informed the home, so we work in partnership on it.'

On the training initiatives...

She is positive about Janet's efforts to get cost-effective and even free training. She herself has secured NVQ places for staff with King's College. But she recognises that when people in her managing director's position see anything about training 'they don't interpret it correctly'. They can see it as a cost issue. 'it's a business to them, they employ others to look after the clinical side and training.'

On the council's forum:

'Yes we [private homes] are rivals, so you let the directors be aware, whether they agree we should take part. We took part in the consulting on the NSF. Some things directors go to and some home managers go to as well. It's good for them to get some exposure to these

meetings.'

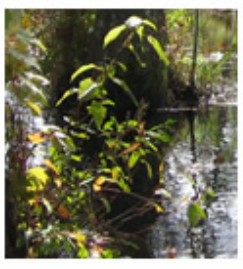
'They [the council] have to work harder now. They did have 100% control, now it's going to the private sector and if they don't take a strong hold, then they have to watch for a period of chaos. The Care Standards will keep some power in the relationship [for the Council].'

Jenny - Contracts Manager (SSD)

Jenny is the contracts manager in social services, and Janet's boss. She describes their role as 'work with the private and voluntary sectors, which has grown as the Council's own homes have declined. We haven't any now - not that I agree with that but I work for a Council that does. We are involved with monitoring and accreditation and with complaints. We try and be supportive, using the carrot as well as the stick ... We said to them [at the start] we knew they weren't getting enough funds, so they see us as instrumental in getting them more money, even though we had to [do that] in order to house our residents, so that was positive.'

'We came in 18 months ago and they [the private sector homes] have found a different ethos, of partnership and they've experienced some benefits of that. .. They said people weren't supportive [before], just telling them what was wrong and not how to improve. It was more 'stick' than anything.'

However she acknowledges that it is hard to know how far that was the case and perhaps council staff at the time saw it differently. She herself wonders about the level of support her unit now offers: 'Do we give too much support? Are some people taking us for a ride? We have to draw a line somewhere.' Regarding the accreditation she describes their strategy of giving a lot of support at the start plus guidelines for what homes have to do within the year. Then that is reviewed and accreditation may not be given.



She explained that the purpose of the partnership was absolutely clear for the Council: 'to enable us to close our homes and to develop the sector so we could place our residents.' The aim is to release funds to take a proactive role in monitoring and developing quality. Equality and diversity issues are already embedded into the contracts and inspection criteria; she feels the private homes are well focused on this issue, certainly compared to other private sector organisations. Her concern as the partnership progresses is the shift of power from the council to the private homes: 'I worry about a future price hike as we are now 'locked-in' [to these

providers] and there are few vacancies. Power is swinging from the council to the providers - not all of them perceive this yet, the larger firms do.'

On the forum that is held regularly with the private home owners, she comments : 'there are up to three of us from the Council and then it's the same old faces [from private homes], the ones who are willing to give support. The ones who don't come miss out on a lot of information and then they often need more support from us. We are going to offer them to get involved in our training programmes, but we know who will take this up and who won't. In the end they've got to take it up. [As with the training homes project] Janet will have to withdraw eventually, they've got to do it. Most of them trade with other boroughs and by working with us they could be ahead of the game, they don't all see that yet'. She commented that other boroughs do things very differently and there aren't that many links between officers to spread developments.

On difficulties, she feels : 'personalities can get in the way - someone who pretends it's all OK [at the home they manage/own], or where they get heavy "I'll get my lawyers on you" if they think we're not happy to accredit. We won't go alone; we go in pairs. We also communicate with the Registration and Inspection Unit and put all our information together. Individual homes are easier to work with as they are autonomous - groups can be difficult - they tend to have things that are the same everywhere like menus, so if a resident complains it's hard to change it for one home.'

On how she measures success: 'the number of complaints and what type they are, although being more open the number itself may rise. Then the way the homes talk about us.'

On the progress of the partnership: 'They're being a bit more open with us as we're being more open with them, for example telling us when they think there may be a complaint coming up, not so defensive.' She has managed such homes herself in the past and feels that, as she can and has done the things she asks of them, that it helps in terms of credibility.

Issues raised by this story

This story highlights the **complexities of partnership with private sector organisations**. The business culture and attitudes described had to be thought through and acknowledged by the public sector actors, and not simply ignored, in order to gain progress. It is interesting too that in this partnership a degree of challenge to how the firms portray themselves seems to have produced positive change at least cosmetically, and sends changed

signals to users and other stakeholders. It is also important to note that here the viewpoint of service users on the changes and on the working of this partnership is not available.

The story also shows how the **credibility of professionals** in their own area and holding to this professional expertise may help significantly in partnership situations. Equally Janet needed to draw on skills and understandings she had from very different settings to make sense of the problems she was facing.



Power and how it is shifting is also a theme in this story. The growing power of contractors vis a vis the local authority is seen by all, yet the new standards regime may cause a swing back the other way. The story expresses very clearly the dynamics of building partnership in situations where it is overlaid with contractual links.

Finally it can be seen how the mechanism of a forum where the participants are essentially in competition may be limited, and that the result of this may be for scarce social services time to be devoted to those who contribute least.