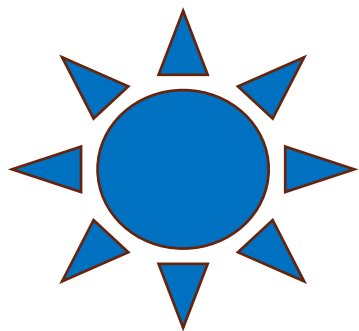




ELCAP

The Reinvention of ELCAP: A Journey to Self-Managing Teams and Leaner Working

“I was lost, and I met a man who I thought was local. I told him where I was trying to get to and he seemed puzzled. I told him the big town, it was near, and he still seemed puzzled. After a while he told me he did indeed know where I wanted to go but, if it were him, he wouldn’t start from here!”



in  **Control**[®]
Scotland

Louise Close, November 2017

Introduction

If you were setting up a care and support organisation today from scratch, it is likely you would begin with the people who needed support as your primary focus, consider what they want and need and then create a team with the skills, expertise and knowledge required to deliver an excellent person-centred service, building with them a structure to support those workers to be the best they can be and to have a good work/life balance to ensure you retain them. Obviously, this would, therefore, be a flexible and creative service, where individuals who receive support are an integral part of their team, working with staff to agree what they want out of their life and how the organisation's input will enable and facilitate this. You would strive to recruit, train, develop and retain staff who are highly motivated, provide incentive and opportunity for them to grow the confidence and competence to do the work required of them and be available to offer advice and guidance where necessary, whilst trusting those actually delivering the work to do it to the highest possible standard. You would want your organisation to be efficient and so would put in place only the lightest of processes and procedures to ensure safety and compliance with the law, whilst ensuring these do not inhibit your front-line worker's ability to sense and respond to the changing needs of their clients, or indeed, the ability of teams to flex to support one another to give care and attention to their home as well as work lives where appropriate.

You wouldn't start from here: an existing organisation piled high with layers of management and weighed down by reams of paperwork. Creating hierarchy and bureaucracy would not be your goals, and indeed are often the things that, whilst ostensibly in place to enable organisations to function well, are often cited by those who work within them as the reasons they fail to do so. But if you don't have the luxury of starting from scratch, how do you begin to unravel and dismantle these labyrinthine systems and complex structures, in order to free your staff to provide the creative and flexible care and support which your customers quite rightly, and indeed increasingly, with the backing of the personalisation agenda, demand? ELCAP have done just this, over the past five years. Their journey continues of course, and their story is both an inspiration and a challenge.

A note about the paper

This paper was written by Louise Close in her role as Associate of In Control Scotland. Lou's involvement with ELCAP developed as a by product of a piece of work with several organisations exploring and working on different aspects of personalised human resource practice. This work was funded through the Scottish Government Self-directed support team Innovation and workforce development fund.

You can find out more about this work at: www.in-controlscotland.org



The beginning

ELCAP exists to “provide services for people who need support and to bring other bodies together to help provide those services”, and they provide care and support to people with disabilities across East Lothian, ranging from a few hours a week to 24 hours a day. Its’ vision is that *“we all live in a society where there are no barriers that prevent people from living the lives they want to live and reaching their full potential”*. Put simply, ELCAP say *“we want to give people the support they need, the way they want it, to live the lives they want to live.”*

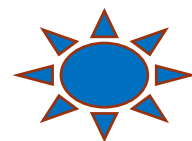
These ideals will sit comfortably with any organisation which exists to provide care and support services to people with disabilities or difficulties in their lives and people who run or work within most provider organisations working in health and social care will be nodding sagely as they read the words of ELCAP’s vision, as they will no doubt chime consistently with their own mission, aims and objectives. What is being described is good, person-centred care and support. But pause, scratch the surface, and interrogate the reality, and often what you discover is an organisation where individual staff who are motivated to do just this, are in fact frustrated in their attempts to be person-centred by a plethora of often conflicting policies they have to wade through to find an answer to a simple question, layers of management they have to navigate for permission to do something slightly “off care plan”, and a culture of risk aversion which subtly pushes everyone to “cover their backs” whilst nominally stating that they are to be “positive about risk”.

As in many similar organisations, the Board of Director at ELCAP held a strategic planning day to consider the challenges which lay ahead for them and consider where as an organisation they wanted to be in the coming years. They examined and reaffirmed their core values and principles and used these as a compass to steer a course from a traditionally structured provider company to one which, today, is quite radically different to most, on the way finding that their perceptions of best practice in care and support as well as corporate services have been fundamentally challenged.

ELCAP began their reinvention of themselves by simply asking staff two questions:

1. How specifically does the structure of ELCAP enable you to do this (deliver the vision / mission) well?
2. If you had the power to change one thing about ELCAP to enable you to do even better, what would it be?

And then they listened, carefully and with curiosity, to what their staff told them, and after listening, they acted on it. As they began to examine the suggestions staff had made, their early thinking developed into a question about how much of the funding received for an hour of support actually went into delivering that support, and how much went into things which did not directly enable or facilitate this support. This focus on getting as much direct support out of each “billable hour” has become something of a mantra in ELCAP, and has driven real change in both the way the organisation is structured and the culture and practice of the day to day work.

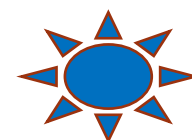


Lean working – not just about finances.

The mantra enabled people within ELCAP at all levels and across departments to interrogate things that they had previously taken for granted and to be bold about challenging the status quo, without the need to blame someone else for a poor system or to become defensive about their own practice: the driving force was to seek ways in which *everyone* could do better at the job they had to do in order to deliver better outcomes for the people supported, a starting point that everyone could get behind. So, whilst it was difficult for some people to see the potential for change beyond the way the organisation was currently operating, using tools and exercises to explain the ideas and develop people's thinking which prioritised changes that directly affect the service user worked well.

Simple steps like changing the way budgets are described internally to be more closely aligned to the individual service fund model, which ELCAP are currently working with their commissioner to bring into all their services, has shifted the thinking from the organisation's pot of money to the person's pot, and it quickly became apparent that when people conceive of the money belonging to the customer and ultimately to the tax payer, they think quite differently about how it should be spent. A truly positive approach to risk was required too, with a courage to keep things simple in terms of policy underpinning the development of more robust practice. The organisation asked itself why create rules for 300 staff when only one or two have failed in some way or done something strange? Why not instead create high expectations based on known good practice, develop competent staff who can be trusted to deliver to this standard and provide a safety net to catch any who fall below it.

So ELCAP today is a very *Lean* organisation both in terms of expenditure and functionality. Staff teams come together regularly to consider everything they do and are required to do by the organisation and to openly question themselves about whether this specific activity, following that particular process, or adhering to this individual policy fits with the organisation's mission and values. If not, they ask themselves where it says they *must* do it, for example, if it is a legal requirement. They also think about who is paying for it and whether they believe it is a reasonable thing for the service user to fund, i.e., does us doing this or that add value to, or directly facilitate the individual achieving, their outcomes? They consider what would happen if they stopped, and if they decide that there are things they would prefer not to do, but need to comply with or really do need to continue for safety reasons, then they would seek to understand if these things can be done more simply or efficiently. And they now do all of this within predominantly *self-managing teams*.



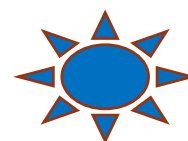
Self-managing teams – at the heart of the matter

Before beginning this journey ELCAP were a traditionally structured organisation which could be described as running with a traditional management model – command and control from above filtering down through layers of hierarchy to the front-line worker who could of course challenge the system or question decisions, but had to do so via the same layers of management and in reality, had very little say in or influence over anything other than their own day to day work, with much of that being directed by care plans, contracts, policies and procedures they were expected to comply with, but not necessarily agree with. There were 47 people working in management, senior or back office roles directing the work of approximately 300 front-line staff. Today, there are the same number or slightly more front-line staff, delivering care and support, which is consistently rated excellent by the Care Inspectorate and for which demand from commissioners never flags, supported by a management and back office team of 16; eleven managers and five office based staff all of whom are considered in the ELCAP parlance to be “non-support staff”.

So how do the front-line staff manage to deliver excellent quality care and support, to be flexible and creative in their daily practice in order to respond to the changing requirements of their clients, as well as maintaining healthy work-life balances which mean they consistently report high levels of job satisfaction? Sickness and turnover are low and ELCAP rarely has difficulty recruiting, even at times when the sector more widely is struggling because it has a reputation for being an excellent employer, and because it pays significantly more than other local providers despite receiving the same hourly rate for the work it does from the commissioning authority. Self-managing teams are one of the magic ingredients that makes all this possible.

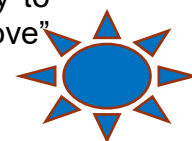
Teams are structured around an individual or a small group of individuals who use ELCAP’s services, and each small team is responsible for organising themselves to deliver the work that is required to support the person or people to live their lives their way. There is no senior support worker, no team leader, no service manager, no area manager. The team take responsibility for how they organise their rotas, and how they utilise each of their unique skills, knowledge and experience to best deliver what is needed. If there are difficulties within the team, or issues around the person or people they support, the team discuss these and work out solutions for themselves. They liaise with other professionals and people’s families directly to plan, monitor and review people’s care and support, and most teams make decisions about spending individual budgets with the person and manage risk positively in a person centred and pragmatic way.

At the heart of a self-managing team within ELCAP are a set of shared core values, which each team member clearly articulate when asked about why they do their job or why they enjoy working for ELCAP, and which are also evident when observing them at work with the people they support. In both observing and speaking to front-line workers, the following key themes for how the self-management structure holds the team together and how individual workers “tick” within it emerged, and these are additionally backed up by what staff and people who use ELCAP services say in response to surveys and in discussion with both the Care Inspectorate and Investors in People, both of whom have found the organisation to be highly effective and highly efficient in recent years.



Key ingredients which underpin self-managed teams:

- **Commitment to a set of shared common values** which underpin the goal or aim of the organisation or team. At ELCAP front-line staff talk about having a sense of “ownership” of the work that needs to be done to meet the needs of individual service users, and demonstrate a clear commitment to far more than this in terms of a constant striving to help people they support to achieve their full potential and live full and meaningful lives. There are many examples of individual staff “going the extra mile” and whilst these are often present in more traditionally structured teams it is sewn into the fabric of self-managing teams in a way which means it feels quite natural and not exceptional.
- **A culture of continual learning and improvement:** organisations in which self-managing teams can flourish have a learning culture as opposed to a blame culture. When things go wrong people look for the learning rather than for the culprit, and this generates an organisational and team culture where creativity is celebrated, experimentation is encouraged and permission to fail is a given so long as the aim was in line with the team’s thinking. In such a culture, things change and develop far more rapidly and success is inevitably far more likely than in one where everyone is watching their back and fearful of stepping even slightly outside of the usual boundaries. In 2015, ELCAP’s Investors in People report stated: “Your ability to adapt to the economic and local climate whilst maintaining a high-quality service from a fully committed team can only occur through a culture of positive change... Having a strong ethos of peer and team support you have a perfect set-up for continually learning on the job as well as in the classroom.”
- **Openness and transparency:** in a self-managing team each member knows what tasks and activities they and their colleagues are responsible for and how these are to be done, everyone understands when there are difficulties and pulls together to solve problems, each voice is respected, and everyone is heard. At ELCAP staff talk proudly about the fact that “no one speaks behind anyone else’s back” and there is no need to “go to a manager” for solutions.
- **Trust in each other and in the organisation to provide support when needed:** trust must be earned through competence and competence must be learned, hence self-management cannot simply be given to people overnight, it is a gradual process of growing into the opportunity and being supported to do so. When an organisation demonstrates that it trusts its staff by diminishing checks and loosening micro-management practices, staff can step into this trust and become ever more trust-worthy. It is a delicate balance at the beginning where more traditional organisational structures must give way to enable self-management to flourish, but as one of the staff at ELCAP said, “*trust just snowballs once it gets going.*”
- **Shared responsibility:** where responsibility is concentrated at the top of a team or organisational structure it is virtually impossible for those lower down to exercise any of their own, and so people respond either by losing the ability to make their own decisions or choosing to relinquish their power to those “above”



them. This often leads as organisations grow to those in managerial positions having an ever increasing workload and to those on the front line feeling ever more frustrated at how little autonomy they have in their daily working lives. Conversely, when responsibility is devolved to the front-line worker and they are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to assume it, they tend to embrace this and the knock on effect of them being the ones making decisions about the delivery of care and support is inevitably that these decisions are more robust and defensible; they are after all the people with the best understanding of the issues at hand, as they are closest to them. As one staff member at ELCAP said; *“having more responsibility makes you take more responsibility”*.

- **Accountability:** the other side of the coin. If I am responsible for my own decisions and choices in my day to day work, then it is reasonable to hold me accountable for them. In a blame culture I decide nothing and the consequences of failure fall on the shoulders of my manager who dictated what I should do. In a self-managing team however, responsibility for decision making is shared amongst those who will be carrying out the decision made, and therefore the team obviously shares accountability for the consequences of that decision, meaning all decisions are treated with respect and taken with due care and attention so that each member of the team can feel confident that they have done the best they can. If the consequences are negative, then each member of the team will share the accountability for this and seek the learning which will enable them to make a better decision next time. Interestingly, at ELCAP some staff talked about how this shared accountability made it much less likely that self-managing teams will tolerate members who consistently fail to keep to the required standard or who simply refuse to pull their weight, whereas in a more traditional organisational structure, if we are honest, we all know of instances where individuals coast through their working day allowing others to strive on their behalf, not only creating bad feeling in the team as a whole but ultimately jeopardising the quality of the work the team does.
- **Appreciation:** a key characteristic of self-managing teams and indeed, of organisations where self-management can flourish, is that there is a culture of appreciation. People celebrate small successes and quite simply thank each other regularly for small acts of kindness which in turn encourage more of the same. Managers appreciate staff and staff appreciate each other. In ELCAPs case as with many provider organisations in the sector, clients and customers are positively encouraged to use their strengths and meet their full potential, but the added ingredient is that this is equally true of staff, who are encouraged and indeed expected to “show up whole”, seek to utilise each experience to learn and grow their skills and expertise, and are rewarded for doing so. Any constructive criticism which is offered in a culture of overall appreciation is far more likely to be positively received and acted upon than that which is offered in a landscape of appreciative scarcity, and so this regular validation of each individual generates an atmosphere in which every member of the team is more able to develop.
- **Teamwork:** at ELCAP there is a real commitment to create and keep core stable teams to work around an individual or small group of individuals, and staff actively work to avoid having to bring others in to assist with cover by managing any



shortages together, as they know this consistency is not only better for the people they support, but ultimately better for them. Together they face whatever the work throws at them and together they find a way through to success, relying on each other rather than seniors or managers and so creating a genuine sense of team identity and strength.

Of course, these things do not develop overnight, nor can they be imported into a dysfunctional team or an organisation which simply decides it wants to restructure to create self-managing teams. They have grown and developed over the years as ELCAP has slowly worked on this journey; engaging with staff to think through the questions posed about how aligned daily practice is with the organisation's stated mission and vision, creating opportunities for teams to slowly take on more responsibility as and when ready whilst investing in staff to gain the confidence and competence to do so safely, continually checking in on how things are progressing and not driving the change too quickly, but at the same time holding true to a vision of where they want to be which ensured they did not wander off course or run out of steam.

So, are there really no managers?

There is still a small team of managers at ELCAP who are available to all teams should they need some additional support, which might take the form of advice and guidance, facilitation of a meeting to help them grapple with a particularly thorny issue on which they are struggling to gain a majority agreement, or simply an additional brain to help think through a new situation. Within those teams who are fully self-managing, the role of the manager if called upon by a team is not to tell them what to do, but to facilitate their thinking to find the solution to whatever they are struggling with which has so far eluded them. As part of this real change in practice, ELCAP are investing in training for their remaining "managers" to help them shift to a more "coaching" and facilitating role, and are also developing a new on call system which will again give more autonomy to the teams.

In terms of being leaner, ELCAP has during this time gone from having 20 registered managers to just one, and from six separate offices to just one. It is interesting to note that the managers themselves are quick to point out that one of their biggest concerns at the start of this process was how on earth less people in senior positions would cope with the high volume of demand for their time and input, including on-call contacts outside of office hours. Yet today, a management team which is a quarter of the size it was several years ago receive a fraction of the calls, as the self-managing teams simply get on and solve problems themselves.

So how did they achieve this? ELCAP's journey into self-managing teams began with the traditional management role of both directing, and *permission* giving, wherein front-line staff would have to clear things with their senior support worker, who would in turn need to check with the team leader, who may then have to double check with the area manager, who in specific circumstances may additionally have to go to the operational director for affirmation. Potentially four people, each one further removed from the person being supported and the actual issue in hand, each one potentially sighted on different priorities and each one increasingly concerned with ensuring the compliance of people they had significantly less contact with than the layer below them. This is a structure most organisations will recognise and it is one which, whilst many people who



work at all levels within it will often complain about it and spend much of their time frustrated by and caught up in it, still seems to prevail, because the shift away from this well-known way of working is extremely challenging for people at all levels.

The early shoots of self-management begin when individual staff are encouraged to take more responsibility for the day to day decisions they have to make, as they go about their regular duties, and this can simply be achieved with the “nudge” of a very subtle change of response to requests for assistance, from providing the answer to enquiring of the individual what they think they should do. This needs to be backed up with a commitment to provide development and / or training opportunities where this approach highlights a lack of knowledge or skill, although more often at this stage, seniors report that people do know what the right answer or response is and are simply programmed to check first. So individual staff begin to lean into the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own work, looking to their senior or manager to simply “*rubber stamp*” or approve these decisions after the fact.



Building on this as individuals within the team develop their decision-making competence and gain confidence in their own skills and expertise, the team can be similarly encouraged to make decisions and take responsibility for larger matters and to begin to organise themselves without looking to their senior or manager to do so for them. In care and support services the obvious place to start is often with the rota, and in ELCAP this was a step which was instrumental in the progression towards self-management, when teams began to create their own plan for who would be working when, negotiating with each other instead of a “middle-man” to directly resolve any issues and taking shared responsibility for the end result, simply keeping managers informed. This of course is an approach which quickly develops across all aspects of day to day work, with staff continually encourage each other to promote independence and be less risk averse, in line with ELCAP’s “keeping people safe” policy.

The natural progression from this stage is to develop the team’s autonomy as a group of equal peers to include decisions regarding individuals who are supported by them. This might include changes to the way people work based on developing understanding of an individual they support or a new piece of information regarding a health issue they have for example, with the team discussing and agreeing the best way forward, testing and learning together and only reporting in to a manager if there are issues they are unable to resolve. Often at this stage people talk about ‘*exception reporting*’, so if all is well and your day to day decision making is throwing up no difficulties for you, carry on, only



seeking input from management in exceptional circumstances. It is at this point that the purpose and usefulness of supervision or “one to ones” comes into question as staff within a self-managed team naturally provide informal peer support for their own development and learning needs, and teams can be supported to learn the skills to hold more formalised group supervision or action learning type sessions if they feel this would be useful.

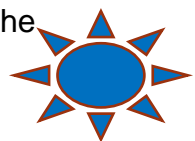
Eventually when a team’s confidence in itself, and the organisation’s corresponding trust in them develops to the extent where it becomes apparent they are perfectly capable of planning and organising their work, making decisions not just about minor changes to existing care arrangements but about whether to take on new clients, inputting to client reviews and liaising with families and other professionals, the need for management becomes something quite different. No longer do the team need someone higher up in the organisational command chain to give permission, rubber stamp or even tacitly approve activity by having oversight; now they are fully *self-managing*.

What they may need from time to time is input from someone outside of their team perhaps when they are presented with a client situation which is entirely novel to them and requires an understanding of behaviour, health or legislative issues which they have never previously dealt with. They are not in this instance seeking direction from someone senior to take responsibility away from them, although if a situation is urgent then they may look for a swift intervention by way of advice or information; rather they are in need of support and perhaps facilitation of their own learning and development to enable them to feel equipped to deal with this new development in their team’s required skill set in future. The team themselves may investigate some form of focussed training which they feel they need, or explore development opportunities which they believe will equip them better moving forward, perhaps shadowing another team with more expertise for example. In many self-managing organisations teams will have access to their own portion of the overall training budget to be able to simply organise this for themselves, trusted by their organisation to use this resource wisely, and for the ultimate aim of delivering on the vision and values which underpin all activity, in the case of ELCAP this being to enable people they support to *“get the support they need, the way they want it, to live the lives they want to live.”*

What about the human element – when people don’t agree?

One of the main concerns raised as a reason why self-managing teams won’t work is that human beings have an inherent ability to fall out with each other, and the assumption implicit in this suggestion is that we all need someone senior to us to resolve our conflicts. In a traditional managerial structure of course, it is often the case that when two workers fall out or one is felt by others in the team to be falling short of the required standard or simply failing to “pull their weight”, someone will speak to the manager and make the problem theirs to solve. The team may well gossip amongst themselves about what they think ought to be done and there will be much second-guessing about what is in fact being done, but the resolution will often be made behind closed doors in the name of respecting confidentiality.

When disputes and weaknesses in the team are addressed in such an opaque way, it is often the case that no one knows exactly what has been said or done and so the

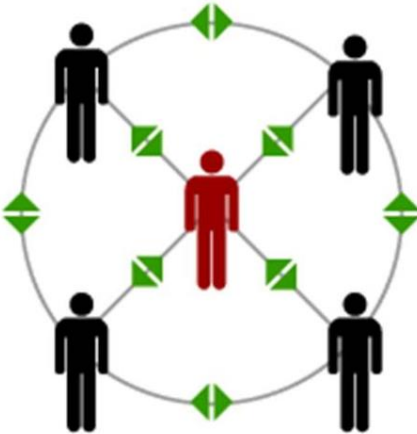
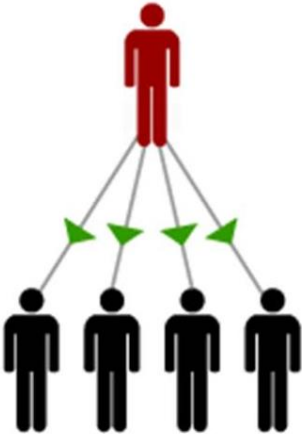


rumours continue to bubble under the surface, people continue to talk behind other people’s backs and mistrust can become rife. Why in such an atmosphere would I agree to help a colleague in need of someone to step in to cover their shift at short notice when it’s not my job, but the manager’s to ensure the service is adequately staffed? And why would I wish to share responsibility for managing risk in relation to someone I support in anything other than a very protectionist way if I can’t be sure my colleagues are all on the same page? I may have read the positive risk taking policy but I “know” what goes on behind closed doors when someone makes a mistake and I’m not putting my head on the block.

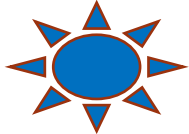
An atmosphere of mistrust is the unintended consequence of having one person hold the responsibility for a team’s cohesion and effective co-working. When the whole team share that responsibility, there are few places for people who choose not to contribute fully to hide, fewer chances for disputes to grow in the darkness of confidentiality, and far more likelihood of healthy working relationships flourishing in the light of everyone’s shared attention.

So, individuals who are to become part of more autonomous teams must be supported to develop skills in communication and the ability to manage conflict, whether, through managers and leaders modelling this behaviour, mentoring and coaching or formal training, or a combination of all these methods. Team meetings become far richer and deeper experiences, focussed less on sharing information or the latest news (or edicts) from higher levels of the organisation and more on the quality and detail of the interactions between the members of the team, how they work together as an integrated unit greater than the sum of its parts, and how ultimately, they can all do the very best job of work in delivering the care and support their clients are purchasing from them. Human nature is such that we all tend to avoid conflict, but conflict is usually a sign that something isn’t right and needs to be addressed even if it is being expressed in an unhelpful way, so a whole team working together to shine a positive and objective light on the matter in dispute is far more likely to lead to a resolution than pushing it away to be “sorted out” by the manager.

Traditional Team (Micro-managed)



Self-Managing Team



In conclusion.

ELCAPs journey began because of a number of different drivers, to be more efficient in the face of financial difficulties, to be more person-centred in response to the personalisation / self-directed support agenda and to generate better staff retention, At its heart, however, was a desire to truly do what they say they do; *“to give people the support they need, the way they want it, to live the lives they want to live.”* By listening to their staff, ELCAP learned that much of what they previously thought of as givens in terms of organisational structures, systems and policies were getting in the way of their ability to deliver on this simple aim and indeed in some cases, were actively frustrating or confusing individual workers attempts to do their jobs well. And so, began a journey of simplifying the complexity, interrogating the detail and creating new ways of working which free staff to step into the trust they have gained and to truly deliver what care and support people want in ways that make sense to them. They achieved all they have to date whilst remaining within the law and at times having intelligent conversations with their commissioners and inspectors about things which are not law, but interpretations of it through guidance and are therefore reasonably open for discussion if they appear to be counterproductive.

While remaining convinced of the overall success of this work, ELCAP staff, Board and managers would freely accept that some of the challenges along the way have been particularly difficult. Exploring potential change at such a large scale with committed and experienced staff without them feeling judged as individually underperforming or worrying about the security of their jobs is hard. It is testimony to each person who works at ELCAP of their commitment to the shared goal of enabling people they support to live their lives their way that they were able to pull together and create what today is an organisation with enviable staff and customer satisfaction, where people are proud to say they work and from whom commissioners continually seek the best quality care and support.

