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**Cheshire West and Chester  
Council Change Advocates  
Programme - Case Study**

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# Cheshire West and Chester Council Change Advocates Programme Case Study

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## **The Change Advocate concept**

The Change Advocate concept in the Cheshire West and Chester Council fills the gap between the process of doing change and the people on the front line of service delivery who need to change.

Like most local authorities, Cheshire West and Chester needs to make major changes in the way it delivers its services due to falling budgets and rising expectations. A number of major change initiatives are under way, launched by the Chief Executive Steve Robinson. A unit within the Council, called the Change Team, has been set up to help different departments to design new processes and systems and deliver the projects needed for the change.

Council staffs often feel that change is being done to them; this low level of engagement can result in resistance and sometimes leads to change that is not as successful as it should be. The Change Advocate is focussed on the people side of change so they mediate between the process of doing change and the people affected. Change Advocates are volunteers from all over the Council. They are also affected by change and therefore understand the emotions and concerns of staff. The Change Team interface with Change advocates in the different parts of the business they are working with, some of the Change Team are also Change Advocates. Senior managers engage Change Advocates to promote change and provide feedback from front line staff.

The Change Advocate concept is similar to the 'second operating system' proposed by John Kotter in his recent book, *Accelerate*<sup>1</sup>. The first operating system is focussed on the operational work of the organisation, such as the delivery of Council services. The second operating system is focussed on changing the first one, whilst allowing the first system to continue to deliver. The first system is a traditional hierarchy, the second system is organised as a fluid network structure which can adapt quickly. In Kotter's paradigm the Change Advocates are the core of the Guiding Coalition of the willing that come together to make the change work.

## **Organisation Development requirements**

To make the Change Advocate concept work the HR Department realised they needed to achieve:

- A volunteer community through which Change Advocates can support each other.
- An awareness of soft skills and the change process amongst the Advocates.
- A high degree of confidence in their ability so that they will get involved in change.
- An ability to experiment and be flexible about the role to suit different changes in different parts of the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Kotter, John, *Accelerate*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2014 (see also Kotter, John, "Accelerate!", Harvard Business Review, 2012, no 11.)

An outline of activities to meet these requirements was envisaged as:

- A webinar to launch the idea and begin recruitment of volunteers
- Networking events to build a community
- Soft skills training
- Action Learning sets

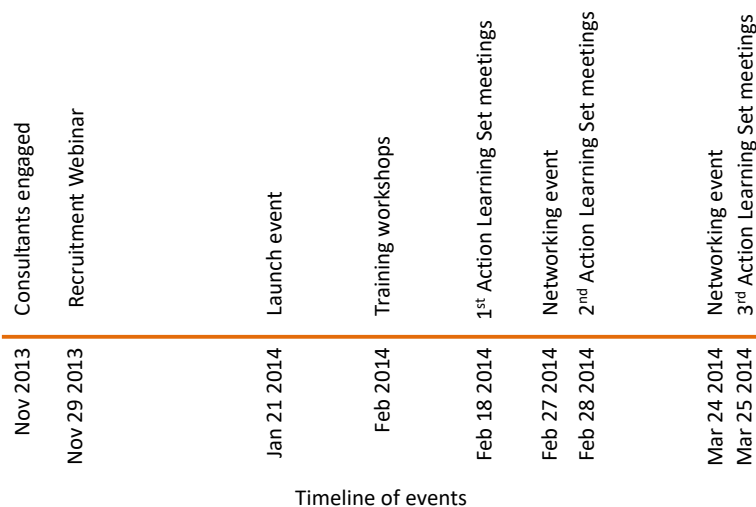
To meet these requirements the Council put out a tender for training and consulting businesses to propose ideas on how to meet these requirements and provide the activities.

### Introducing Consultants

The contract was won by Aspire Europe Ltd, a consulting and training company with extensive experience in change, programmes and projects. Two of its consultants, Robert Cole and David King<sup>2</sup>, worked with Vicki Craven from the Council HR team to develop a 3 month programme to get the Change Advocates going.

### Change Advocate Programme

The programme of activities followed the outline design identified by the HR team with Aspire providing the detailed designed for each facilitated event.



### Webinar to begin recruitment

Aspire provided a short contribution to the webinar on the importance of change and participation of Change Advocates in the process. It included opinion polls on topics through the presentation to engage the audience with comments being fed back. The webinar signposted the events and emphasised the development of confidence. It finished with a call to action: sign up to be a Change Advocate. An initial generic role description was developed by the Aspire team, based on their previous experience of setting up change teams in central and local government.

<sup>2</sup> See 'The Players' at the end of the case study.

Following the webinar the HR team recruited 40 volunteers from across the operating areas of the Council and across all grades.

### Launch event

A launch for the 40 volunteers was held in Chester Town Hall with a call to arms from the Steve Robinson, the Chief Executive of the Council, who promised his support for the Advocates and emphasised the urgent need for successful change. Workshop activities in the event tackled two topics:

1. What is the role of the Change Advocate?
2. What governance does the role need for success in the Council?

The workshops generated good results and a new role description was agreed as a result. The governance topic was much harder. The issue was the relationship of the Change Advocates with senior managers in delivering change. The senior managers have a dual role: they need to sponsor and support the change to ensure it gets delivered; they also need to control the impact of change on the delivery of services. It was felt that a Change Advocate was squeezed between the two.

### Training Workshops

Training on a number of soft skills was presented through workshops for up to 12 delegates at a time during a training day. The emphasis was on learning about yourself and understanding the differences between people and their approach to change. A number of exercises built around a case study and involving the development of communications made the concepts real. The case study was the real introduction of contribution related pay and the requirement for performance management. The feedback from the delegates on this topic led to some changes in the way it was developed by the HR project team.

Following the training, each delegate had the option to register for a Level 4 Award in Change Management Skills from the Centre for Change Management (C4CM)<sup>3</sup>. Nearly all of the delegates chose to register and carry out an assessment where they applied the concepts from the training to real changes in their area. This qualification assessment made a significant contribution to the learning taken from the workshop being held by the delegates. It gave the delegates a sense of achievement and helped their confidence. Finally it was a clear measure of the impact of the organisation development programme.

Vicky Chowdhury (Internal Comms) adds *“The reason I became a Change Advocate is to help colleagues through change. I was really interested in the people side of things. How change affects how people think, the emotions they go through and how they digest the information given to them. As a communications professional I’ve found the training I’ve had to become a Change Advocate fascinating.”*

### Networking events

Following the Launch event, a follow up networking event was held each month. The purpose is to bring the Change Advocates together as a community, meet each other and discuss common issues. The format split the half day event into two main activities.

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<sup>3</sup> See the web site [www.c4cm.co.uk](http://www.c4cm.co.uk)

The first activity was a discussion around tables of 6-8 about what was happening to individuals and the changes in their area. The tables then reported a summary back to the plenum. It quickly became obvious that the main concern was getting started in local changes. Advocates found their senior managers were not aware of the role and getting engagement was proving difficult as the role description was not sufficiently detailed for the Advocates to describe what they could do.

The second activity was a short Knowledge Forum in which a simple topic was put up for an exercise to extend the training. The first two topics were on: Golman's leadership styles<sup>4</sup> and Stakeholder analysis. These proved to be very popular.

In the words of one of our Change Advocates (Susannah Hill, Library Services) *"It has been extremely valuable networking with colleagues from other services too. It has really made me feel that we are not alone in the challenges we face and has helped me feel part of a much larger team rather than only thinking in terms of our own service."*

### Action Learning Sets

Following the Launch event the Advocate cohort was split into 8 Action Learning Sets. Each set included a mixture from across the Council and grades. The purpose of the sets is to encourage shared problem solving about change and provide a smaller, more intimate, support group for advocates. The Aspire consultants established the sets and their working method based on their experience and on the book by Mike Pedlar and Christine Abbott<sup>5</sup>. The intention was that after 3 meetings the sets would become self-facilitating, so having an available text was important.

The sets proved to be very well received and provoked some significant problem solving amongst the members. They are all continuing, having generated very strong bonds between participants.

### Measurement

The original requirement identified the need for confidence amongst the Change Advocates. The consultants devised a confidence questionnaire to measure how the Advocates felt and to help identify any weaknesses after the first 3 months. It was also agreed that the number of Change Advocates achieving the Award would be a leading indicator of change competence in the Council.

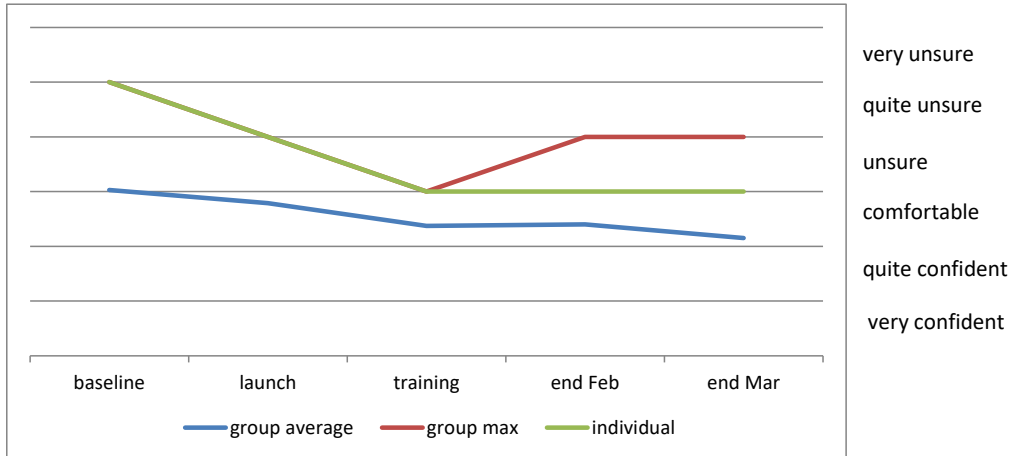
The confidence questionnaire was carried out before the Launch event to give a baseline measure. It was then carried out after the Launch, after the training, and at the end of months two and three. Analysis of the results show that there was a low level of confidence at the start (in the figures 6 is very low confidence, 1 is high confidence). Each event then increased the confidence of the Change Advocates by a significant amount as a group. The group average fell following each event. Most importantly the highest levels of poor confidence dropped drastically for the group. Two individuals who identified a very low level of confidence before the Launch had moved to the group average.

The following graph shows how the average confidence improved over the three months.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Goleman, "Leadership that gets results", Harvard Business Review, 2000, no 3.

<sup>5</sup> Pedlar, Mike and Christine Abbott, Facilitating Action Learning, McGraw-Hill Open University Press, 2013



The group average moved from unsure to quite confident. The average disguises the significant improvement of confidence of some individuals, one of whom is show on the graph, moving from almost very unsure to comfortable in the three months. *Laura Penk, Vivo Services says "The whole experience seems to have given me an inner confidence."* The group max (tracking the level of low confidence) recorded showed an increase at the end of February and March. Discussions suggest this was the group starting to tackle real problems of change in their workplace and the reality of the challenge affecting their responses.

The details of the questions and their responses are shown on the following table.

|                |                      |   | pre launch |     |     | post launch |     |     | post training |     |     | end Feb |     |      | end Mar |     |      | % change |
|----------------|----------------------|---|------------|-----|-----|-------------|-----|-----|---------------|-----|-----|---------|-----|------|---------|-----|------|----------|
|                |                      |   | min        | max | avg | min         | max | avg | min           | max | avg | min     | max | avg  | min     | max | avg  |          |
| 1              | YOURSELF             | Be a successful Change Advocate                                 | 2          | 5   | 2.9 | 2           | 5   | 2.6 | 1             | 3   | 2.1 | 1       | 4   | 2.29 | 1       | 4   | 2.1  | 27%      |
| 2              |                      | Be empowered to deliver successful change                       | 1          | 4   | 3.1 | 1           | 5   | 2.8 | 1             | 4   | 2.4 | 1       | 5   | 2.56 | 1       | 4   | 2.14 | 23%      |
| 3              |                      | Work within the community of Change Advocates                   | 2          | 5   | 3.0 | 1           | 5   | 2.3 | 1             | 3   | 1.9 | 1       | 3   | 1.88 | 1       | 3   | 1.79 | 35%      |
| 4              | ENGAGE & COMMUNICATE | Design and deliver appropriate communications to colleagues     | 1          | 5   | 2.9 | 1           | 4   | 2.7 | 1             | 4   | 2.5 | 1       | 4   | 2.38 | 1       | 4   | 2.24 | 16%      |
| 5              |                      | Facilitate workshops and other change-related events            | 1          | 6   | 2.9 | 1           | 5   | 2.6 | 1             | 4   | 2.4 | 1       | 5   | 2.56 | 1       | 4   | 2.36 | 18%      |
| 6              |                      | Know who in the Council to talk to about change issues          | 1          | 6   | 3.5 | 1           | 5   | 3.0 | 1             | 4   | 2.7 | 1       | 4   | 2.71 | 1       | 4   | 2.31 | 22%      |
| 7              |                      | Contribute to the design of change in my service                | 1          | 5   | 2.7 | 1           | 4   | 2.6 | 1             | 4   | 2.2 | 1       | 4   | 2.18 | 1       | 5   | 2.07 | 19%      |
| 8              | AUTHORITY            | Understand the language of change                               | 1          | 5   | 3.0 | 1           | 5   | 2.7 | 1             | 4   | 2.2 | 1       | 4   | 2.24 | 1       | 4   | 1.86 | 25%      |
| 9              |                      | Control and influence change in my service area                 | 2          | 5   | 3.1 | 1           | 6   | 2.8 | 1             | 4   | 2.4 | 1       | 5   | 2.5  | 1       | 5   | 2.31 | 25%      |
| 10             |                      | Understand what needs to be controlled                          | 2          | 6   | 3.6 | 2           | 6   | 3.2 | 1             | 4   | 2.6 | 1       | 5   | 2.74 | 1       | 4   | 2.28 | 27%      |
| 11             | VOICE                | Engender the trust and confidence of those I have dealings with | 1          | 5   | 2.9 | 1           | 4   | 2.6 | 1             | 4   | 2.3 | 1       | 5   | 2.41 | 1       | 3   | 2.07 | 19%      |
| 12             |                      | Understand how to escalate concerns and issues                  | 1          | 6   | 3.1 | 1           | 5   | 3.1 | 1             | 4   | 2.6 | 1       | 4   | 2.38 | 1       | 4   | 2.14 | 18%      |
| 13             |                      | Articulate the fears and concerns of colleagues                 | 1          | 5   | 2.7 | 1           | 4   | 2.5 | 1             | 4   | 2.3 | 1       | 3   | 2.09 | 1       | 4   | 1.9  | 14%      |
| 14             | SUPPORT              | Provide appropriate feedback to senior managers and colleagues  | 1          | 5   | 2.7 | 1           | 4   | 2.7 | 1             | 4   | 2.3 | 1       | 4   | 2.12 | 1       | 3   | 1.86 | 15%      |
| 15             |                      | Measure the effects of change in my service area                | 1          | 5   | 3.4 | 2           | 5   | 3.2 | 2             | 4   | 2.7 | 1       | 5   | 2.82 | 1       | 5   | 2.41 | 18%      |
| 16             |                      | Ensure minimum impact on normal services during change          | 1          | 5   | 3.3 | 1           | 5   | 3.0 | 1             | 4   | 2.7 | 2       | 4   | 2.79 | 1       | 4   | 2.38 | 17%      |
| 17             | EMBED                | Involve managers and leaders as role models for change          | 1          | 4   | 3.1 | 1           | 4   | 2.9 | 1             | 4   | 2.6 | 1       | 6   | 2.91 | 1       | 5   | 2.34 | 18%      |
| 18             |                      | Be a role model for change in my service areas                  | 1          | 4   | 2.9 | 1           | 4   | 2.4 | 1             | 3   | 2.1 | 1       | 5   | 2.12 | 1       | 4   | 2    | 27%      |
| 19             | EMBED                | Motivate people to change                                       | 2          | 6   | 3.0 | 1           | 4   | 2.6 | 1             | 3   | 2.2 | 1       | 5   | 2.32 | 1       | 4   | 2.17 | 25%      |
| 20             |                      | Identify and manage resistance to change                        | 2          | 4   | 3.0 | 1           | 4   | 2.7 | 1             | 4   | 2.4 | 1       | 4   | 2.41 | 1       | 4   | 2.21 | 20%      |
| <b>Overall</b> |                      |   | 2          | 5   | 3.0 | 2           | 4   | 2.8 | 1             | 3   | 2.4 | 2       | 4   | 2.4  | 1       | 4   | 2.2  | 22%      |

|                     |                 |                  |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 = Very confident  | 3 = Comfortable | 5 = Quite unsure |
| 2 = Quite confident | 4 = Unsure      | 6 = Very unsure  |

By the end of the three month period a quarter of the Advocates had achieved their Level 4 qualification and most of the others were working towards it. By June all of the 40 entered had achieved their qualification.

## What did we learn

The original organisation development requirements were largely met by the activities in the design. The use of external consultants to provide a detailed design and facilitation of events based on their experience of doing change in similar organisations resulted in high quality events that had a significant impact on the confidence of volunteers to step up to the challenge of a new role in the Council.

Claire Darbyshire-Came who has been supporting changes in the Waste Service said: *“We collectively came to the decision that given the sensitivity of the subject, it would be appropriate to offer our colleagues the opportunity to have a confidential one to one discussion with a CA, where they could feedback their comments ... along with an opportunity to discuss any other issues that may be important to them.”*

We found that, as with most change, sponsorship and support from senior managers is essential. The engagement with senior managers by the Change Advocates was patchy. Some advocates did not feel empowered without a solid role description to define the relationship with senior managers. The requirement for flexibility and experimentation in the role, reflected in the original high level role description, has not been achieved. This needs to be part of a larger culture change in the Council and is perhaps a stretch goal at the moment. We have found that, compared to Council employees in general, the Change Advocates are more innovative and of the type to get up and do things. This is not enough in the current culture without strong support from their line managers. Better communication to line managers about the role is required.

## Going Forward

As the Change Advocate role becomes better understood and fully supported by managers, the next stage in development will be the progressive incorporation of the role in the design of all future change organisation and governance. It becomes an integral part of the way change is done in the Council. Through building its change capacity and capability in this way, the Council is substantially enhancing its adaptability and agility to meet the demands of the future.

## The players

**Cheshire West and Chester Council** is a unitary authority in the north west of England.

**Vicki Craven** is an OD specialist in the Council HR who devised the Change Advocate scheme and managed the project.

**Robert Cole** is an experienced coach, consultant and trainer in organisation change. He has been doing change in business and government for 15 years as a consultant and trainer; and for over 25 years as a manager.

**David King** is a consultant and trainer with over 25 years experience in public and private sector change. David is an Examiner in Change Management for global qualifications body APM Group International and a co-author of the Change Management Institute's Change Management Body of Knowledge (CMBoK), published in September 2013.

**Aspire Europe Ltd** is a leading consulting and training company in change, programme and project management.

*the Centre for Change Management* is a provider of vocational qualifications for managing change within the government qualifications framework.