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Investigating Allegations of Bullying and Harassment

Background

Undertaking investigations into allegations against senior managers within an organisation can often require independent support due to the need to separate roles during grievance and disciplinary processes, and ensure objectivity. Inventures consultants have undertaken a number of such investigations and a number of common themes emerge:

The Challenge

Allegations are often complex, involving claims and counter claims, sometimes over a period of years. Attempts to manage the situation internally have failed due to a lack of confidence in the investigation, failure to adhere to process and managers being too close to the situation to be able to retain objectivity. The challenge is to quickly assess the situation, identify whom to interview and undertake the investigation within short timescales to avoid any further escalation of the situation.

The Solution

A review of events, taking into account the timescale and application of organisation procedures is always important. There is a need to review paperwork and interview the complainant to fully understand the nature of the allegations, followed by interviews with the alleged 'bully' and witnesses if appropriate. Investigations of this nature tend to be emotionally charged and adequate time is required to ensure that all parties feel they have had sufficient opportunity to state their case and be heard.

The Benefits

Allegations of bullying and harassment can be very difficult to prove but as an independent investigator Glenys Taylor has been able to provide a completely objective report of the situation. Many incidents are perceived differently and witnesses or written evidence are rarely available. Outcomes may not, therefore be clear cut but the value to the organisation from an independent investigation is that the conclusions are seen to be unbiased and generally accepted by the parties concerned. Typical recommendations will include the need for clear role responsibility, training and coaching interventions, closer monitoring by senior line managers, changes to organisational policy and procedure.



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Effective Team Working

Background

The Improving Working Lives (IWL) Standard in the NHS sets a model of good HR practice against which NHS Employers and their staff can measure the organisation's HR management. The IWL standard promotes areas such as effective team working. The provision of effective services is driven by effective teams and communication, both upwards and downwards is an essential element of an effective team. Staff costs form a major proportion of organisational finances and in a time of financial pressure it is critical for trusts to ensure that teams are working effectively and efficiently.

The Challenge

Swindon PCT provides Child Health Services to the Borough of Swindon. Over a period of a few years there had been a number of changes within the department, which resulted in staff and senior management voicing concerns about the team and working environment. The PCT Directors recognised that there was a need for the PCT to begin to identify key issues and work on improving these for the staff. The challenge for Alison Kingscott, Senior Consultant was to conduct an independent review within the department identifying key issues impacting on working relationships and developing an action plan for resolution.

The Solution

A series of interviews were held with all staff within the Child Health Services department, including managers, team leaders, staff and doctors. To ensure consistency and openness a series of standard themed questions were put to each interviewee. A number of stakeholders from the local borough council and hospital were also interviewed to provide an external perspective. A number of key themes were identified from the interviews, which were then presented clearly in a report to the PCT's HR Director. The report contained realistic recommendations and an action plan for the PCT to take forward.

The Benefits

The PCT now has a robust independent report which will act as a solid foundation for action and resolution of departmental issues within the Child Health Services. By using an independent consultant from outside the organisation the review was objective and unbiased with the process enabling effective challenge to the status quo within a safe and confidential environment. Staff were fully involved in the project and were given the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement for the future.