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Report for Langdon

Langdon, Together Building Our Future

Langdon 5-Year Strategy Stakeholder Engagement
Report – Executive Summary

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By Mobilise Public Ltd



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Langdon 5-Year Strategy Stakeholder Engagement Report – Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This report forms part of the work that Langdon has been undertaking to set out a strategic framework and 5-year strategy. It is an important step in that work as it consults with staff, members, families, Langdon committees and donors on the strategic objectives set out by the Board and Senior Leadership Team. It helps build a much deeper understanding of where Langdon is now and how to ensure it is well set up for the future. Our work was conducted against a backdrop of enormous change and turmoil as Langdon, like other organisations, has had to adapt and evolve to deal with the COVID pandemic. We learned a great deal about what makes the organisation successful and unique and where there is room for development - the main learning is summarised below. The outputs of this report should be enormously helpful to Langdon's Board and SLT as it will help Langdon understand which of the strategic objectives are the highest priorities, alongside many suggestions from Langdon's community as to ways forward.

Where Langdon is Currently

Langdon operates in Manchester and London providing supported living for 110 members with mild to moderate learning disabilities. It provides a transition programme for young people in London who are not yet ready for supported living. It also operates Langdon College in Manchester and London, and two social enterprises it uses to place Langdon members for work experience, New Chapters and E-traders. Under the guidance of the Chief Executive who has been in post for 2 years, Langdon began to grapple with some of the core issues and questions it faces. Langdon's accommodation is full and it uses private rentals in order to accommodate all members. Against a backdrop of a growing learning disabled population in the Jewish community, a review of the respective and potential joint roles of Kisharon, Langdon and Norwood, dealing with a pandemic and fundraising challenges, and significant changes in the management team during that time, Langdon has had a turbulent time. However, Langdon is still a strong organisation and has the opportunity to emerge even stronger if it can learn from this exercise and put in place the changes needed to address its challenges.

2. Langdon's Strengths

Our conversations with staff, parents and members consistently highlighted a number of organisational strengths. The aspects that parents most value about Langdon include the ability to give their sons and daughters a more independent and better quality of life and that the staff genuinely care about the residents. They also value Langdon's Jewish environment, and that Langdon gives both parents and siblings peace of mind about the future. Langdon parents value the warmth of the environment, the acceptance of the members, and that those at the youth club have somewhere to go where they can make friends. Members and parents value the friendship and community that Langdon brings. It is clear that there is a strong commitment to the organisation and that both members and families place great importance on Langdon's role in their lives.

When we asked staff what they value about Langdon, they also value Langdon's friendly atmosphere and teamwork, the support for one another during Covid, the diversity and shared values among staff and the ability to make a difference to members with learning disabilities and autism. The management team are led by a senior leadership team who are working well together particularly responding to the challenges of the pandemic. They are

committed to tackling the issues Langdon faces and want to understand what is going on to ensure members can enjoy the highest quality living experience.

3. Areas for Development

When we asked ‘what could make Langdon even better’, we found that staff and families raised a number of issues. The main ones are summarised below and explored in more depth in the report.

Communication is the issue that came up most consistently throughout this engagement. Section 4 goes into this in detail but it is clear that without tackling this issue and what is behind it, it will be hard to Langdon to galvanise staff and families behind any future plans.

Parents talked about a lack of communication between staff and themselves, and about their sons and daughters not knowing about things either. Families would feel better supported if communication were improved. Some parents talked about the basics being missing on communication and some staff agreed. They particularly referred to when a member first moves into Langdon accommodation, and keeping up with the changes of staffing that were referred to as frequent. *They should at least be talking about multidisciplinary meetings with the staff, what about a 6 monthly meeting with the parents? I give up after a while. I’m so much on the fringe. It has been the most significant factor of the 5 years M has been at Langdon – the non-communication.* (parent)

Staff realise that poor communication is leading to unnecessary escalation of issues and suggested that managing parents’ expectations around what communication they should be receiving and how often is a major challenge. Some suggested that part of the problem stems from a lack of boundaries and that poor conduct continues to be accepted.

At its worst, staff reported that a small minority of parents can effectively debilitate a staff member or office for a whole day. There were also reports that frontline staff face incidences of racism from families and that this has caused a lot of upset. If this is the case, this is a serious issue and must be tackled as a priority. Even one incident of this kind is too many to be tolerated and this is likely to have a detrimental effect on trust within the organisation, staff motivation and feelings of vulnerability. Parents suggested a number of areas for improvement and these are explored in Section 4.

It is clear that much needs doing throughout the organization to develop a culture of communication, however, as this work developed, we started to wonder whether communication is also perhaps a ‘presenting’ issue, perhaps a symptom of deeper, underlying issues that Langdon needs to resolve.

4. A New Partnership?

An area that this engagement has highlighted is some mismatch in understanding and expectations of the respective roles of each other - parents, staff, and members. This is leading to confusion and distrust and potentially getting in the way of collaboration that could improve members lives and experiences. From what we heard, staff understandably

take a 'person centred' approach. 'Person centred' means a way of working that customises support to members according to their individual needs and learning styles. However, our sense was that person centred has become a shorthand for a focus on maintaining the independence of the member. Through this lens, parents can be seen as meddling or overbearing. Support staff feel a need to protect the member's independence from this, and parents believe support staff use this to restrict parental involvement, wishes and concerns. Other members we spoke to felt it was the support staff that were treating them like children and getting in the way of their independence. This only goes to highlight the challenge of understanding the capability and development of each individual member and responding with the right amount of support or empowerment.

Parents and support staff should and could be on the same team. Parents really appreciate the independence that Langdon gives their sons and daughters, however they would never want to relinquish their own responsibility for their welfare while they are still able to. They believe they have insight and knowledge built up over many years that can help support staff understand and motivate their sons and daughters. This should only help staff be more person centred. They also believe that they must provide some consistency to the process due to the number and turnover of support staff.

This underlying tension needs addressing urgently as we believe it to be a key driver at the heart of Langdon's communication problems. It is vital that Langdon develops training and tools for staff, members and families so that they are all starting from the same position about this issue and are clear about boundaries, the guidelines and law surrounding this area.

One parent described it as a 'them and us' situation between parents and staff, a description of embattlement and sides, which is very far from where the organisation wishes to be.

Working in closer partnership with parents, according to the capabilities and wishes of the members, is clearly nuanced and a challenging goal to achieve. But it is clear, that the potential rewards could be great – both for the development and independence of members, whilst supporting improved communication in Langdon. Tackling this issue should therefore be seen as of the highest priority.

5. Healthy Living

Health, activity levels, healthy food, and members putting on weight also came up regularly as an issue for parents. Low levels of daily activity for many members were referenced by some, of course exacerbated for many by Covid restrictions. Other concerns were also raised relating to preventative medicine. Many parents were complimentary about how Langdon had stepped up to provide activities online and opportunities to engage during Covid. However, overall, concerns about physical activity, healthy eating and members becoming more overweight had become greater during Covid.

6. Support Staff and Engagement

Few frontline staff took up the opportunity to be part of this strategy engagement. We asked senior leadership team and senior management team to encourage support staff to

get involved. It was suggested that they would not do it in their own time and therefore they would need to be rostered into an engagement session and paid, though we understand this did not happen. It is hard to draw conclusions about how frontline staff feel and are behaving without engaging with them directly. We heard from 2 support staff, one who was also a parent of a member. One parent reported talking to a senior encouraging staff to participate who said *'How can they participate, they are not going to do it in their own time, and if they do it in work someone has to cover... at the moment, I don't think there is a mechanism for them to attend.'* It was also suggested that frontline staff would not be interested in attending as consultations had happened before and there is a perception that 'nothing ever changes'.

Other issues raised were around relationships between staff and head office, the challenges of the support staff role, and the need for better staff training, motivation and career progression.

7. Family Support

Parents feel that they could be better supported, and that improved communication would be a part of this. Opportunities to get together with other families, perhaps as a forum, could be a way for families to better support each other. It was also suggested that parents could be supported to further support each other if there were more social opportunities to interact and a buddying system put in place. This was particularly relevant for parents of children who are not yet residential members of Langdon.

8. Member Development and Transition

Family members talked about noticing how Langdon's supported living was helping develop members skills but that this was not being captured nor were targets being agreed. Parents also told us that shared development planning and review used to happen but that this has not been happening for about five years. Some parents talked about initiating development planning meetings for their sons/daughters themselves. Staff agreed with parents about the need for a more robust personal development planning process. Some said that parents should be involved in the process because it would help break down tensions whilst others were more circumspect suggesting that if parents were involved there would be tensions between what members want and what their parents want. There is an opportunity here to create a new and collaborative way of working for members, staff and families to track and understand what the member is doing and what options are open to them. This could be a digital solution or something visual.

Staff and parents told us that **volunteers** are critically important for member development as staff can never spend the kind of quality time needed to support members with enough activities. Staff felt that volunteers could help support development goals and activities. It was said that volunteers should be treated like staff, offered training, and even be involved in member development planning where appropriate.

Staff reported that there is nowhere you can go in the organisation to find out what activities are going on that members can get involved in. Members talked about wanting to be able to undertake a wider range of courses and activities. Parents and members talked about **New Chapters**, but some suggested that New Chapters had become a default option

for work for Langdon members rather than an option. There is a need to be clearer with members and their families about what is on offer so people can make informed choices in order to follow their own interests.

Most agreed that the programme at Maccabi House was a great way for young people to get to know Langdon and that this supported transition. It was pointed out that an equivalent doesn't exist in Manchester. Members suggested producing a video of their lives in Langdon for youngsters coming through and buddying was also mentioned.

9. Accommodation

Generally, parents and members described their homes in positive terms. In Manchester accommodation has historically been seen as of a lower standard. Some of the problems involve properties that cannot be adapted for disabled access, a lack of maintenance or problems arranging repairs. Generally rented properties were less liked, were often less suitable and in worse states of repair than Langdon owned properties.

10. Should Langdon Grow?

Some parents and staff felt that Langdon should only grow once it can get things right for existing members, while others thought that if the need is there then Langdon should meet it. Areas that members felt needed improving to be ready for growth were more activities and more help to find jobs. To be ready for growth, Langdon should address staff shortages and training and develop a more substantive volunteer network. It was understood by many that growth is needed as a bigger organisation can support a larger infrastructure and create more opportunities for existing members.

11. For All In The Jewish Community?

We asked if Langdon was ready for members from all parts of the Jewish community, acknowledging that it had traditionally provided for those outside of the more orthodox Jewish communities. Parents felt that Langdon could do more to offer a stronger Jewish communal experience, for those who choose to take part. It was felt that changing that would not happen overnight and that lots needed doing to get ready for members from a broader Jewish spectrum. Parents and staff agreed that Langdon should be open to taking all Jews regardless of observance level, however many also wanted reassurance that more members from orthodox backgrounds would not change the level of observance or practiced require of them. It was also felt that when it comes to the wider spectrum of the Jewish community, Manchester currently does it better and London may have something to learn from Manchester. Generally, orthodox parents, whilst they would prefer more care is taken over kashrut and Shabbat in homes and that Jewish staff and volunteers are more involved, they understand that there are limitations Langdon needs to work within.

12. Growing Old

Parents and families felt strongly that Langdon is a family and community to members and that it would be both wrong and difficult to move them on once they are in an older age bracket. For those who are autistic, change to living arrangements could be devastating and this was likened as for any older person yet more so. Some also referred to the 'for life' promise that had previously been made by Langdon. Some said that staff would need to be trained with specialist skills to work with elders and there was some support for partnering

with organisations that can provide specialist support to Langdon in providing elder care. Members felt strongly that Langdon needs to continue to provide for them as they get older. Many also talked about a promise once made that Langdon is for life – which is a highly emotive matter. There was some concern from staff around Langdon being the right organisation to support members as they grow older, in part due to the need to develop a better understanding of aging and autism and also because they felt the majority of the properties would not be suitable to meet older people's physical needs.

In summary, members and their families and staff we spoke to were all deeply engaged with the organisation and wish to see it running successfully. It does appear that trust has broken down in some areas and that boundaries are not being adequately observed. There are a number of issues arising that need to be pursued and a full set of our recommendations from this work appears in the next section. However, we would advocate that the recommendations underlined are undertaken as quickly as possible.

13. Recommendations

Communication

- 1. Introduce a clear contract with families about expectations around behaviour and communication - a code of conduct for staff and families should set out expected standards of behaviour and communication.*
- 2. Ensure a zero tolerance of any kind of harassment becomes the norm and that policies and processes are put in place to ensure families treat staff with appropriate respect.*

Person Centred & Partnership

- 3. Send guidance to families around Person Centred Planning and the legal framework and ensure staff are familiar with this too.*
- 4. Work towards each member having a personalised agreement that specifies the degree to which they wish to / need to have family involvement in decision making in keeping with best practice government guidance.*

Staff Support & Development

- 5. Provide for all support staff to participate in appropriate mental health, autism and ageing training - 80% of our staff to be QCF Level 2 qualified*
- 6. Develop a programme of staff benefits and incentives that reward good performance and long service; work towards becoming a Living Wage employer.*

Member Development

- 7. Re-Introduce annual learning and development plan reviews (skills, activities, training, employment, roles etc.) with members and where appropriate families invited to take part/or informed of.*
- 8. Ensure a wider range of activities & more sophisticated programming is designed to encourage things like healthy lifestyles: growing vegetables, local sourcing, healthy eating/cooking; food poverty: food collections/food banks, etc.*

9. *Develop an enhanced approach to volunteer recruitment, training and deployment ensuring they can support member activity, development and Jewish ethos/practice.*
10. *Consider opening up and sharing all training, work experience and employment opportunities with Kisharon and Norwood in order to expand the offer to Langdon members.*

Transition (and Family Support)

11. *Implement a buddying programme to ensure families embarking on their relationship with Langdon are supported by 'old timers' - parents buddying parents, members buddying young people.*
12. *Undertake feasibility of extending the Brady approach to other London communities, Borehamwood, and Manchester.*

For the Jewish Community


13. *Consult with more orthodox Langdon families to explore together how Langdon needs to change in order to be ready for more orthodox members and their families.*
14. *Undertake a feasibility study exploring the costs and benefits of separate houses for orthodox members in Manchester and the feasibility of doing the same in London*
15. *Actively reach out to more orthodox communities in Edgware seeking volunteers who can support Jewish practice, home hospitality on shabbat and Yom Tovs, and potential employees for Langdon.*
16. *Continue to improve existing Jewish programming and reassure all that they will take part at the level they wish to.*

Growing Old (and Accommodation)

17. *Invest in our workforce to ensure they can develop the skills needed to look after members as they age – in particular to understand autism and ageing.*
18. *Begin to ensure existing and all new housing is fit for purpose and suitable for adaptation for needs as members get older.*

For more information

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