



SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

WHO CARES FOR CARERS? EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PANEL'S SERVICES TO ADULT CARERS IN MIDDLESBROUGH

Purpose - The overall aim of the scrutiny investigation was to assess how the Council is helping to support adult carers in Middlesbrough.

Findings – A carer is defined as someone who ‘provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis’ this could be to a partner, child, relative or friend for example. The panel began its investigation by looking at the local picture. In Middlesbrough there are an estimated 21,000 people who are carers, of which 14,000 are known to the Council’s Social Care department. There are many carers who don’t consider themselves to be a carer, they are just looking after their mother, son or best friend and doing what anyone else would in the same situation, but without the support of social services. The panel considered that it was important to find those ‘hidden’ carers and offer support if it was needed.

There are a number of common issues that carers face including isolation, the need for information and advocacy, breaks from caring, support at work, dealing with the physical demands of being a carer and ensuring that they can have a life of their own.

The panel learnt about the importance of a carers’ assessment, a carers right to an individual assessment to ensure that their needs such as the right to work, to education and to leisure activities is taken into account and supported where possible. The panel learnt that the number of carers’ assessments taking place in Middlesbrough had been low and that a number of steps had been implemented in order to address the performance. As a result the number of assessments recorded had begun to rise.

The Council is aware of the need to support carers who work and as such have developed a Carers’ Leave policy and have established a Working Carers Group. There is also a pool of carers whose expertise is drawn upon to help in the recruitment and selection of some social care staff.

The panel found that the social care department has worked hard to promote services to carers and the new Carers’ Centre, which is funded by the Council and a number of agencies, will be a major source of information and support to carers. Whilst the centre is still in its infancy the panel were impressed with the range of support available. Staff at the centre were also working with the Council in order to develop positive schemes to support carers such as the development of a card which would entitle carers to reduced price leisure facilities.

The Social Care department provided a number of services for carers, listed within the report, which were either on-going or in development.

CONCLUSION

- a) Carers undoubtedly do much more than care, they provide an invaluable service which saves the nation’s economy £57billion pounds per year.
- b) That carers face a wide range of issues and problems for which they need support both nationally and locally and that legislation such as the 2004 Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act that recognises the role of carers in their own right will help councils to support carers.

- c) One of the first hurdles many that carers encounter is to actually recognise themselves as a carer. The panel considered that it was important for the Social Care Department to work towards finding 'hidden carers' and to continue to publicise the support that is available to carers including highlighting the positive aspects of being a carer.
- d) That carers' assessments are an important way of ensuring that carers get the support they need to enable them live a life of their own. The panel were satisfied that the Social Care Department has implemented a number of initiatives which would assist in improvements in the numbers carers' assessment undertaken and the panel were supportive of the department's work in this area.
- e) Carers build up a great deal of information, knowledge and expertise. This experience is invaluable and therefore the panel was supportive of the department's current initiatives to involve carers in the planning, commissioning and monitoring of services and that carers could be asked to help make appointments in the Social Care Department.
- f) The panel recognised the importance of a supportive employer for those carers who also work. The panel was encouraged to hear about the department's initiative to support carers who work for the council and that this best practice should be shared.
- g) That carers find access to information one of their main issues and that the council is working hard to publicise its support for carers
- h) The carers' centre is an invaluable source of support and assistance to carers and although it has only been open since February 2006, the centre has attracted over 200 carers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

- a) That the Social Care department actively seeks new and innovative ways to identify more 'hidden' carers. In order to assess progress with this recommendation the panel would like to receive an update on the comparison between the numbers of carers that are currently known to the Social Care Department with the numbers in March 2008
- b) The panel were supportive of the Council's 'Carers' Week' initiative and in addition to that, the panel would like to see a campaign which raises the profile of carers and their achievements
- c) That the department continues to promote carers' assessments to ensure an increase in the number of assessments that are undertaken. The panel would like to receive comparative information on the take up of carers' assessments and the progress with the LPSA stretch target in March 2008.
- d) The needs of carers can change through time, for example when altering the level of support provided to the service user. With this in mind, carers should be informed that they are entitled to a review of their carers' assessment to ensure that their changing needs are taken into account.
- e) The panel thought that the term 'carers' assessment' could be misleading and dissuade people from undertaking one. The panel would therefore like the department to consider an alternative name for the term. As the focus for the assessment is about supporting carers the panel were in favour of the term support plan.
- f) Carers have a wealth of knowledge, the panel would like the department to ask carers, as part of their carers' assessment, if they receive any support which may be unknown to the department and to check if other carers would benefit.
- g) The panel welcome the new Carers' Leave policy and the panel would like the Council to publicise the scheme to employees as widely as possible, the suggestion to inform all staff via their payslips was welcomed by the panel. The panel would also like the Council to provide a best practice lead in Middlesbrough and provide advice to other employers, in other sectors such as health and education, where appropriate
- h) That the department continues to improve its communication and information sharing and investigates new and innovative methods for distributing information to carers. For example issuing hospitals with the Carer's Pack in order that health professionals can distribute it to people when they leave hospital, where people may perhaps be caring for someone for the first time.
- i) That the department considers the merits of establishing a 'buddying' system for newly identified carers and to draw up a list of volunteer carers who would be willing to participate.