

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CARER SUPPORT SERVICES – STAGE 3 REPORT

Report By: Head of Social Care (Adults)

(The detailed Review report is enclosed separately for Members of the Committee and is available to the public on request.)

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To consider and approve the Stage 3 report and outcomes of the Best Value Review of Carer Support Services.

Financial Implications

1. Social Care, Carers' Officer post (- to continue to provide an operational function)

This post is currently funded through the Planning & Partnership budget. Funding ends March 2004.

To continue this post from March 2004 at its current grade and as a FTE post it will require ~£31,000 (£22,689 plus on costs). However a significant proportion of this funding could come from the Carers Special Grant, as the post holder will be responsible for the infrastructure of Grant purchased carers services, which is allowable under the Grant. **Additional funding required: ~£10,000**

2. Carers Officer post (- to provide a strategic function)

This would be a new post possibly managed by Planning & Partnership. Assuming similar costs to the post above, Social Care & Strategic Housing's contribution to this post would be approximately £16,000. **Additional funding required: ~£16,000**

Background to the Review

The review covered the information and support services provided by Herefordshire Council for informal carers of: adults with learning disabilities; physical and sensory disabilities; children with disabilities; people with mental health conditions and older people. It also included: the Assessment process for carers; services provided using Carers Special Grant and short term breaks, information and support services.

The review team had 11 members:

- An independent Chair - (Operations Manager, Princess Royal Trust. PRT is a national registered charity with 117 Carers Centres in the UK. PRT has no presence in Herefordshire.)
- 2 Council members
- 2 current Carers – one living outside Herefordshire but with in depth knowledge of caring both as a SSI Lay Inspector and as Chair of a Carers Organisation in Worcester. The other with in-depth knowledge of carers' services in Herefordshire, particularly learning disabilities, and of the Community Health Council.
- Outside challenger – Best Value Review Officer (Environment Directorate)
- Managers of Learning Disability, Mental Health, Children with Disability and Older People & Physical Disability services.
- Carers Officer - who facilitated the Review.

Data collection

The scoping exercise proved complex due to the nature of the service for the following reasons:

- Carers are adults and children caring for people for all ages with a range of disabilities and/or health conditions. The links between carers, service users, the voluntary and statutory sector are therefore complex.
- The vast majority of the Social Care budget funds the provision of services for people who need care and support. Although these services are not directly provided to support carers, they do in fact do so and therefore also needed to be considered.
- Services for people with learning disabilities and for people with mental health conditions are provided by 'integrated teams' with a pooled health and social care budgets and staff. (A Service Manager employed by Social Care manages the Learning Disability Service and a Service Manager employed by the PCT manages the Mental Health Service.)
- The services being reviewed covered both adult and children services.

Comparative information from other authorities regarding the number of Carers Assessments carried out was difficult to collect and analyse, because it is only recently that Authorities have had to provide this information to the Department of Health. The definitions used when recording data also vary.

Best Value Reviews from other counties were collected and proved to be an excellent source of information. However because the scope of each review was different and the services were provided and funded in different ways, it was not possible to make direct comparisons.

Challenge

The Group had an outstanding combination of members who were able to cover the wide range of issues and services required by this review. This also ensured an effective challenge throughout the process. In addition the Group collected information from a variety of sources and consulted with a range of groups e.g.:

- Undertaking a mystery shopping exercise

- Carrying out a comparative analysis of service provision
- Undertaking a SWOT analysis

It also considered, in depth, the links between the Best Value Review and the Carers Strategy Group now called the Carers LIT (Carers Local Implementation Team).

The Best Value Review Group considered what local carers want from the service both now and in the future, and took into account the availability of future funding. The recommendations outlined in this report identify the results of this challenge process.

Consultation

Consultation was carried out with:

- Members of the voluntary sector through two Stakeholder exercises
- HCS and Carers Action

Consultation with carers including:

- carers caring for someone receiving a home care service
- carers over the revised Carers Strategy
- young carers,
- the public through Herefordshire Voice,
- hidden carers

It was evident that the Council has strengths and weaknesses in the provision of these services. The main issue arising from consultation with the voluntary sector was the difficulty they have providing quality services on levels of funding that change from year to year, often with little notice.

Carers main issues arise from the difficulty they have accessing the information they need, at the time they need it, and in a format that they can easily understand. They also need an increase in the number and variety of services, most particularly short term breaks services, which will enable them to maintain their own health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of those for whom they care.

Comparison

Information from other authorities was collected and used as a comparison. It was evident that Herefordshire should be increasing the number of Carers Assessments it was carrying out and also its performance in recording these Assessments. The quality of assessments carried out and the links between the assessment process and resulting services must also be improved.

Using completed Best Value Review reports from other counties as comparisons, it was apparent that almost identical issues arose in every authority and as outlined

above these relate to assessments, information and the provision of services particularly short term breaks services.

Compete

The Best Value Review Group discussed what impact there would be if Social Care & Strategic Housing ceased the provision of services. It concluded that:

- There is a requirement to continuous improvement of Council services.
- There is a duty to carry out assessments if the carer is eligible for one.
- The Council have a duty to provide information to carers about their eligibility for assessment and services.
- Although there is no requirement to employ a specialist Carers Officer the post currently provides a vital strategic and operational role.
- If additional carer support services were not purchased from the voluntary sector there would be greater pressure on social work staff to provide the information and support required. A considerable preventative element of support would therefore be lost. In addition there would be a loss of funding into Herefordshire from the additional funding that is available to support carers.

The Review Group considered whether services could be provided in a different way, but concluded that no single provider would be able to meet all the requirements of Best Value and that there are distinct advantages to having a range of providers of carer services. However in funding a range of providers the Council must ensure that each provider's remit is explicit and unambiguous and each works in partnership with all other providers of services.

In conclusion the preferred option is for the Council to continue to provide and commission a range of services, subject to the recommendations outlined below.

Risk assessment

If improvements to services are not made, then there is a risk that resources (both in staffing and financial terms) are not used as efficiently and effectively as they could be, in order to best support carers in Herefordshire.

Process issues

The scoping exercise proved challenging because of the very wide-ranging nature of the Review.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Review Group's recommendations as set out below are accepted and recommended to the Strategic Monitoring Committee:

- Improve operational delivery and strategic planning of services by:
 - Supporting the introduction of a Herefordshire Council 'Carers Charter', that makes a clear and unequivocal statement recognising the worth of carers to the community and within its own workforce.
 - Supporting the introduction of 'Carers Champions' within each Council Directorate, whose role would be to promote issues that relate to carers
 - Reviewing the role and responsibilities of the Social Care & Strategic Housing Carers Officer post
 - Supporting the recommendation for an additional post to take on the strategic planning of carers services
 - Writing and implementing a Service Improvement Plan for Carers Services which links directly into the Carers LIT.

- Improve core functions of assessment and information activity by:
 - clarifying its policies and procedures and improving its performance with regard to Carers assessments
 - improving the way it provides information
 - Introducing 'Carer Champions' within each service area of Social Care & Strategic Housing

- Improve commissioning and contractual arrangements by:
 - Reviewing the length of contracts agreed with the voluntary sector

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 3rd Stage Best Value Review Report of Carers Support Services.