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Carers Insight Report

Carers Experiences of Accessing Social Care Services
March 2022

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Background

In November 2021, we attended 14 carers groups in Leicester, Market Harborough, Coalville, Melton Mowbray, Loughborough, Blaby, Countesthorpe, Hinckley and Bosworth, Earl Shilton, Oadby and Wigston and South Wigston. We engaged with 123 carers and 14 staff and volunteers. Half of the meetings held were online and half in person.

We conducted 11 in-depth conversations with carers about their experiences of accessing Social Care Services.

Initial Contact

Carers told us about how they had come to initially being in contact with social care services. One told us that social services had become involved after they had been unwell themselves. They felt that the response from social care had been very good.

However, not all people we spoke to were positive about their initial contacts with social care. There were comments in relation to the length of time it took on the telephone to get through to someone in social care and then how long it took for anything further to happen. People told us how it had taken several calls to get through to social care with one person saying they had made eight calls before they spoke to someone and another that calls took 25 minutes to be answered before being transferred and cut off.

People told us that it was not always clear where they should go for help. One person told how they had been referred to for help from social care after a crisis but that they had not been referred to the right social care service and were 'pushed around offices' before finally being referred to the right place.

Once people had been in touch with social care services there was sometimes a long wait for anyone to come back to them. One person said that they had waited for weeks before anyone got back to them because of staff shortages. Another said that they had waited six weeks before anyone got back to them and as a result, they had needed to move in with their relative to provide care and support.

However, it was commented by one person that once they had received a response social care were good.

Assessment

There were delays in assessments being carried out with some people saying that they had been waiting for many weeks for an assessment even after social care had been in touch with them. One person told us that they had waited for three months for an assessment on top of a long wait for someone to contact them after their initial referral.

Care Packages

Care packages were raised in relation to both the amount of care hours the assessment said that the person they care for needed and in relation to the availability of care agencies for larger care packages.

It was felt by some that they really needed more hours of care than had been assessed with one person saying that they were carrying a lot of responsibility for the administration side of their adult children's lives such as benefit claims, and they needed more support for this. Another person said that they had had to fight for their parent to receive more care hours. The cost of care hours as self-funders meant that although they felt there was a need for more hours they found it unaffordable and so went without.

There were two people who said that the person that they cared for had been assessed but were waiting for a care package to be put in place because they had a need for a larger number of hours and there were no available agencies at the time. For one this meant that their middle-aged parent was living in a care home with elderly people whilst waiting for their care package to be put in place.

Quality of care

There was mixed feedback about the quality of the care received but on the whole people were positive about the care that was received and the carers that delivered it.

There was some feedback about issues with care providers in terms of communication when there were changes to services such as later calls or cancelled visits. This was compared with the need for service users to let the agency know well in advance if they needed to change anything.

The way that people were charged for visits was raised with one person telling how they had been charged by the agency for a visit that had not occurred and as they paid via the Council. They had been advised that overdue payment would mean recovery action would be taken.

Role of family carers

Those who were provided with a care package on discharge from hospital were reassessed later and care packages had been reduced or removed despite the views and feelings of family carers. Some of the people who gave feedback felt that there was a reluctance to provide care if there were family members who they considered could provide care. In one case the family member themselves was in receipt of a care package but was seen as being able to provide the care needed.

One person told how they had moved in with a parent whilst waiting for an assessment by social care services. When they were contacted by social care it was made clear that by moving in with their parent they had effectively become less of a priority for assessment and care despite it impacting on their ability to return to their paid employment.

The role of family carers alongside the formal care provided by social care services was an area that was raised by some with a view that there was an expectation that those family carers can provide more care than they necessarily feel able to.

Next Steps

We have only spoken to a small number of carers and more work is needed to find out from carers what social care can do to provide the support needed.

It is recognised that over the last two years there has been unprecedented pressure on social care services due to increased demand and staff absence through sickness. However, most of the people who told us about their experiences said that they had experienced delays in being able to access social care services for the people that they care for, and this may be an area that can be revisited on a wider scale to understand if this is indeed the experience of just a small group in a particular moment in time.

During Carers Week 2022 we will be hosting an event for carers to explore the issue raised further.



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