

Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee BRIEFING NOTE

Date: 4 November 2020

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose:

To highlight the issues experienced by carers in light of the pandemic and to demonstrate how services have adapted to support the needs of adult and young carers needs in Medway

1. Introduction

1.1 Nationally the data shows that 5.4 million unpaid carers provide an invaluable service to the nation. They work tirelessly to support the most vulnerable in our society, and the pandemic has made clear the contribution that carers have made to the national effort.

1.2 A recent report from Carers UK [*Caring Behind Closed Doors: six months on*](#), (October, 2020), looks at the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unpaid carers. It reveals that carers are worried about how they will continue to provide the level of care through winter:

- 81% of carers are providing more care than before lockdown
- 78% of carers report that the needs of the cared for has increased
- 64% report to have not taken a break in the last six months
- 58% of carers say their physical health has deteriorated
- 64% of carers say their mental health has deteriorated

1.3 The Government's Adult Social Care Winter Plan (DoH, 2020) sets out how local authorities should support carers:

- Involving all carers in decision making
- Ensuring respite services are in place and guidance on direct payments
- Carers have access to flu vaccines
- Carers know what support is available to them and who to contact in an emergency

- 1.4 Medway Council is already actively delivering on these priorities through a joint carers' implementation plan. However, several issues were raised in a recent South East meeting of Directors of Adults Social Services that need consideration:
- The Winter Plan must ensure carers of patients being discharged from hospital receive a carers assessment.
 - Supporting carers to see loved ones discharged into residential care
 - Simplifying cross border offer for carers so that there is flexibility to where carers can access support independent of where the person they care for lives.
 - Better support for carers from BAME communities.
- 1.5 During the pandemic it was identified that many carers were struggling in their caring role. These were primarily older carers and those caring for vulnerable family members or friends. It also became evident that people were finding themselves unexpectedly new to a caring role.
- 1.6 A new Medway Home from Hospital pilot delivered by Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) and led by Partnership Commissioning is due to commence 1 November. The service facilitates hospital discharge by supporting the patient's (and their carer) journey from hospital ensuring practical and social needs are met. The service is for frail vulnerable 65+ patients living alone or being cared for by an equally vulnerable unpaid carer. The intervention will in this case be supporting both the patient and their carer for up to 8 weeks.

2. Carers Support Services

- 2.1 During the pandemic Carers First have continued to review, monitor, and adapt to the continuing changes in the government guidelines. Ensuring that the wellbeing and safety of staff and carers is at the forefront of any decisions made.
- A remote working model was adopted to continue providing support to carers during the initial stages of the pandemic
 - The Carers First Infrastructure allowed for rapid mobilisation of staff to remote working
 - Teams were able to respond quickly to the situation, with no gaps in service provision and a seamless transition from face to face support to digital online platforms and telephone support where required
 - The Carers First Hub maintained the helpline support for carers and experienced an increase in carers asking for advice and support
- 2.2 At the beginning of the pandemic Carers First made over 1800 calls to carers to ensure they were coping and had appropriate support in place. Support was offered to help with shopping and medication pickup and drop-offs. These phone calls continued weekly or fortnightly, depending on need.

- 2.3 The service worked in partnership with bereavement organisations, debt support, local food bank, GPs and Medway Council to ensure carers' needs were met. From April to June 2020, 868 Adult carers accessed carers services virtually through online support such as web chat and regular Zoom events. Carers were also supported to access online facilities through the recruitment of IT volunteer buddies. The service continued to provide carers star assessments and reviews via phone and online using zoom.
- 2.4 Young Carers have continued to be supported through WhatsApp groups and regular group Zoom meetings and activities. One to one support has been given where necessary. 24 young carers reviews took place and 14 young carers assessments took place virtually in the height of the pandemic (Quarter one). Carers First were able to access additional funding to purchase laptops for young carers from families suffering from financial hardship.
- 2.5 The Carers Coordinator normally situated at Medway Hospital to support discharge was only able to offer telephone or virtual support at the height of the pandemic. There was a reduction in hospital referrals due to the coordinator being denied access inside the hospital. Only 32 carers were supported in quarter one compared to 48 in the previous quarter prior to lockdown.
- 2.6 As part of the CCG funded project Carers First continued to provide health and wellbeing checks within the GP surgery. They also identified carers from GP lists to invite for checks and signpost to support service
- 2.7 A Survey of Adult Carers England (SACE) report summarises the outcome of a sample of Medway's carers on their caring role in relation to their satisfaction with social services, quality of life, health and wellbeing, employment, and finances. The national 2020-21 Survey was due to be conducted between October and November 2020 but has been postponed by one full year and will then run biennially. The last completed Carer Survey was in 2018/19.
- 2.8 Other key challenges identified by Carers First:
- Accessing bereavement support for carers.
 - Lack of IT resources and broadband for some carers.
 - Increased number of carers experiencing poverty.
 - Young people initially engaged and then engagement reduced following the easing of lockdown.

3. Identification of Carers: 'Hidden Carers' Initiative

- 3.1 The pandemic and subsequent lockdown and shielding programme means that more people are looking after people at home than ever before. Many of them are not previously known to services and referred to as 'hidden' carers.
- 3.2 To support Medway Council to understand how much 'hidden' care is provided within Medway, Healthwatch Medway and Carers First in partnership and

working with the Medway VCS Better Together Consortium considered the issue of identifying carers. An initiative was agreed that aimed to reach out to this cohort of carers to ensure they were aware of the support services available to them.

- 3.3 A social media campaign was put in place and supported by Medway Council communications team and Councillor Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services. The aim was to raise awareness of who a carer is and how to access support. The campaign was monitored to look at the interest generated. Individuals were signposted to Carers First support services or other appropriate services.
- 3.4 A Healthwatch report (Appendix A) sets out the outcomes of the social media campaign to support hidden carers. It demonstrates that although social media has the ability to reach a large number of people, it lacks the personal and face to face interaction needed to help overcome the barriers around starting a conversation about their caring role.
- 3.5 The pandemic has further highlighted the important contribution that carers make to supporting the strategic priorities of Medway Council and the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group. Medway Council along with partners will continue to be agile in its approach to engaging and supporting carers in Medway.

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Appendix A Hidden Carers Report