

HEALTHWATCH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

SUMMARY OF CARE ACT WORKSHOP HELD ON 11th SEPTEMBER 2014

Our recent Care Act 2014 Workshop, held on 11th September 2014 at the Park Inn Hotel in Northampton attracted around 90 people, representing individual users and carers, local voluntary and community sector and statutory sector representatives.

We were fortunate to have a good range of speakers and the day got off to a flying start with an interview with Janice Tillett, a local woman who is married with one daughter. Until recently she worked for a national charity and represented her country as a Paralympian swimmer, winning two silver medals. As a deaf/blind person, with other physical impairments and used a wheelchair, Janice described her experiences of social care, both the positive aspects and the difficulties she and her family had had to overcome. Her plea was that whatever system we might have, the person should always be central.

Mark Major, Chief Executive Officer of Northamptonshire Carers, highlighted the impact of the Care Act on the 70,000+ informal carers it is estimated there are across the county. It is hoped there will be some significant improvements in terms of recognising and supporting carers.

Frances Billingham, Policy Officer with Northamptonshire County Council gave an overview of the Act, including the new duties on local authorities, such as providing information and advice, undertaking more assessments and the changes in paying for care.

A national perspective was given by Stephen Lowe, Policy Advisor with Age UK England. He described how a group of national voluntary organisations representing a range of disability groups had worked together to influence the passage of the Act.

Following the presentations there were table discussions about different aspects of the Care Act and the main themes and issues identified were:

Eligibility and Assessment

- importance of people having really good information and signposting processes.
- ready access to information about the new eligibility criteria and how it is interpreted locally
- a culture of user and carer involvement in developing the new systems
- advocacy support to be available from the beginning to anyone needing it
- a person centre system
- Recognition that good effective assessment and support is cost effective and preventative

New System of Paying for Care - Personal Budgets and Solutions

- Personal Budgets should be set at realistic levels and cover admin costs
- A commitment to fund ongoing training for staff, so there is a consistent approach and understanding of person centred planning and support
- Carers should have personal budgets which are set at realistic levels
- Development of information sharing network across the county
- Need a fair system of charging self funders for organising services

Developing the local market and quality standards

- Importance of developing a local market with quality standards which are realistic and encourage local provider development
- Need to develop a diverse market to meet the needs of the county's diverse communities
- Care packages need to ensure there is enough time and funding for them to be effective
- Need to prevent high turnover of care staff and lost knowledge - more costly in the long term than paying staff low wages and zero contracts
- Commissioning and contract - needs to be smarter with realistic timescales and funding.

Carers' Issues

- Information needed in a range of formats to easily accessed.
- Carers are busy people - can't always attend meetings, so need different ways of connecting with them
- Importance of respite services - need a range, including day centres, sitting services. Also need consistency and continuity. It's not a break if no confidence in service
- Concern about charging carers for services. Already propping up statutory services
- Number of carers growing - need to consider social mapping and ensure systems in place for earlier identification and support
- Good that parent carers will have greater recognition - links with Children and Families Act important
- Young carers must be helped and not left to do inappropriate tasks
- Need commitment and funding

Personalisation

- Need to be clear what the rules are, how money can be spent so no confusion
- Staff caseloads need to be realistic so they can be responsive
- The Cs which help personalisation to happen - contingency, consistency and continuity
- Support planning needs to include contingency plans
- Listening to carers effectively and appropriately

Effective User and Carer Involvement in Planning and Implementing the Care Act locally

- Involvement of individual users and carers from the start

- Engagement needs to be more diverse and innovative - as well as clear and simple
- Comprehensive consultation processes, well planned and different timings offered, including evenings and weekends.
- Need for a big information campaign to reach all the different communities and age groups across the county - with a sub group of young people
- Ensuring providers of care are aware of the Act and can adapt and respond appropriately
- Project Alpha should not be seen as the only vehicle - voluntary and community sector have really effective communication channels

Feedback from Attendees on the Event

The majority of people found the workshop very informative and particularly liked the fact that information wasn't just from the presenters, but the opportunity to talk, listen and share information with other people in the table discussions.

A number of people said they had learned about carers and the valuable work they do looking after others.

Many people were really inspired by Janice Tillett and particularly liked the way her presentation centred on the person and quality of life issues such as family. Others liked having a range of speakers giving different perspectives of The Care Act.

The need for further sessions was also highlighted as important, so people can see and learn what is happening locally and play their part in the implementation of this important Act.

Next Steps

Healthwatch is committed to work with Northamptonshire County Council to develop a really effective user, carer and wide public engagement and involvement process.

We will also have further workshops and dialogue a wide range of users, carers and other stakeholders across the county. As a first step, we hope to arrange a similar session in the north of the county.

If you are interested in being consulted and giving us your views, please contact us so that we can include you in further opportunities to be involved and play your part in shaping how the local authority will deliver the Care Act 2014 in Northamptonshire