

Social Care – Who Cares?

A Healthwatch Harrow Event, 27th April 2023



April 2023

1. Introduction

On 27th April 2023, 75 local people attended our 'Social Care – Who Cares?' event.

Hosted at Harrow Baptist Church, this in-person event was an opportunity to share experiences around social care, and to put questions to our panel of professionals in the social care sector.

In his opening address, Healthwatch Harrow Chair Ash Verma said that "Social care challenges are significant today, especially around learning, and sharing what is happening in Harrow".

2. Questions and Answers

On the panel (of social care professionals) were:

- Senel Arkut (Corporate Director of People, Harrow Council)
- Sam Proctor (Service Manager, Early Intervention/Hospital Discharge)
- Andrea De-Alwis (Service Manager, Financial Assessment and Monitoring)
- Sebastien Baugh (Public Health)
- Annie Murphy (Service Manager, Children & Young Adults with a Disability)
- Natasha Ramchurn (Head of Mental Health Service, Adult Social Care)

Prior to the event, local people were able to suggest questions, which were submitted to the panel in advance. Their topics included the ability to seek and receive support, eligibility, ensuring that needs are met, accountability (in decision-making), respite, service gaps, parental support and hospital discharge.

Question 1: Seeking and Receiving Support

How do you get help, and how do you know if you are entitled to help?

Answers by Sam Proctor:

- We look at what needs people have to maintain daily lives and the first step is to get a referral which can be done by the carer, family, your GP etc. They will then contact the referee to make sure consent is given.

- Everyone is entitled to help and this starts with a conversation to establish what the local authority can do for you.
- If you are not eligible through the Care Act, they would look at other services within the community to provide information and advice.

What happens when you ask for help? How quickly will I receive support?

Answers by Sam Proctor:

- If you ask for help there will be a discussion with you which would take place wherever you want it to ie; your home, day centre etc. How quickly this happens depends on your own circumstances ie; is there an emergency risk?
- The assessment is free but there will be fees associated with the care package itself.
- If you need to appeal a decision or make a complaint, firstly talk to the team and social worker then there is a complaints procedure you will need to follow.

Question 2: Financial Threshold

Is there a financial threshold for support?

Answers by Andrea De-Alwis:

- Adult social care is not free for everyone. It is means tested so we look at your income, expenses, capital savings etc.
- A financial assessment is completed to work out how much the council contribute and how much the individual does.

What help can you get if above the threshold and can you still get support?

Answers by Andrea De-Alwis:

- If you have capital of £23,250 pa you will need to pay the full cost of the care.
- If between £14,250-£23,250 you will make contributions from your income/pensions etc.
- If below the above amount, you pay income from the means test and will need a referral from your social team.
- The care cap has been delayed until 2025 and then after you hit £86,000 the Local Authority pay for your care. Yaa, I'm not sure what this bit means!

- On an individual basis there is an admin set up fee (to source providers etc.) which is a one-off payment of £464. Other fees include an annual maintenance fee of £244 which will be invoiced to you.

Question 3: Ensuring Needs Are Met

Given the current issues with finance and recruitment how are you ensuring that people's needs are met?

Answers by Senel Arkut:

- There are not enough social workers as we know and we are now looking internationally and have managed to recruit some excellent staff from India for example.
- It doesn't help that there are financial issues with very low budget available from the government but this does not affect our duties. There are lots of measures and contractual obligations to reduce managers and spend and we work closely with the NHS to ensure spend is not duplicated unnecessarily.

Question 4: Needs Awareness

How do you know what people's needs are?

Answers by Sebastien Baugh:

- We must produce a report to understand the needs via data sources and listening to residents and SEN. For example; from a health care perspective we look at the registers for long-term health issues ie; diabetes, high blood pressure etc within Harrow.
- We look at life expectancies/inequalities.
- A challenge is also the housing situation with over-crowding and the affordability of housing.
- There are pockets of deprivation in Harrow: 1-5 over 60's are income deprived in this borough.

Question 5: Accountability

Why does the Decision Panel (for supported care accommodation) exclude service users, their families and carers in reaching decisions? This results in wrong decisions – and poor outcomes.

Answers by Sam Proctor:

- If the care package works out to over £260 per week it will need to be raised by the social worker to the panel for approval.
- If the panel feel something is missing they would then ask the social worker to review it with you. It won't just be refused.

Answers by Annie Murphy:

- 0-25 year olds are not usually accommodated until at least 18. Some parents struggle with younger children's challenges and this will be assessed to see if they need residential schools but on occasion these children are unable to return home after.
- Again, decisions are made by the social worker before presenting to the panel. They will represent the young person and their parents.
- The panel can take up to 4 hours to make a decision.
- We need to reset the wording so that social workers actually listen to the families.

Question 6: Respite

What are you doing to provide more respite services?

Answers by Sam Proctor:

- We understand this is especially important to unpaid carers and believe that respite should be on a needs basis formed by the care package.
- Respite needs and lengths of time required do vary and mean different things to different people.

Answers by Sebastien Baugh:

- Joint strategic needs are carried out on specific needs and there is a process to identify these needs ie; housing etc.

- The evidence tells us for example that in Winter there was a need for warm hubs in the community and these were set up.
- We provided health checks in addition to this and increased SWISH's capacity and introduced the Conversation Café.

Question 7: Service Gaps

What other gaps in services have you identified and how are you going to meet them?

Answers by Sebastien Baugh:

- Joint strategic needs are carried out on specific needs and there is a process to identify these needs ie; housing etc.
- The evidence tells us for example that in Winter there was a need for warm hubs in the community and these were set up.
- We provided health checks in addition to this and increased SWISH's capacity and introduced the Conversation Café.

Question 8: Parental Support

How can you make it easier for parents to get timely and effective support for their children?

Answers by Annie Murphy:

- A statement issued from Santokh: 'we will continue to work with everyone to review the process to ensure we provide the right support at the right time. It is critical we identify the barriers.
- Parents can choose to take the route of the Short Breaks or Cove offer in Harrow.
- If their needs are mid-high this can be done without seeing a social worker.
- Lots of young people are in care but this offer stops when they turn 18 and then it is up to the families to ask for a Care Act assessment.
- There are regular panel meetings that look at the dynamic support register so that young people are kept out of hospital.
- We run a duty service consisting of 2 teams, Monday-Friday's, 9am-5pm for under 18's and those in transition. There is an emergency duty team outside of these hours.

- We are obviously at the mercy of the resources we have available as we know it's difficult to recruit and retain staff but over the last 12 years we've done a good job in recruiting international social workers.
- In addition, some schools have social workers in situ and there are 10 children centres where you can access services.

Question 9: Hospital Discharge

How do you support appropriate, effective and safe discharge of patients from hospitals into the community?

Answers by Sam Proctor:

- We work closely with the hospital discharge teams and assess the care needs of people on discharge.
- All long-term needs are assessed for when someone is out of hospital and we consider the needs of the loved one too when look at discharging someone.
- We ensure everyone is supported.
- If there is a complex or large change in someone's circumstances we will meet with them, the hospital staff and social worker.
- We know how frustrating it can be to keep repeating yourself to various people so the best way is to firstly ask the ward staff to refer you to social services so that everyone meets once and you only have to tell your story once.

Question 10: Response

How do you ensure a person gets a response and is not passed around repeating themselves?

Answers by Natasha Ramchurn:

- There will be a joint assessment wherever possible with people that need to be involved like the physical health team etc.

3. Audience Questions

The audience was able to field questions.

Their topics included digital inclusion, information and response, service integration, advocacy, feedback and communication.

Audience Question 1

If someone is not on a digital platform how can they avoid being passed around and not called back?

Panel Response:

- We are working on improving communications and ensuring you definitely get a response.

Audience Question 2

It would be good to have a summary of the process and the timelines involved together with a contact email address. How often do the social workers contact you regarding the care package? What can the local people expect of social services?

Panel Response:

- We use a clinical system to avoid duplication so you will get a copy of your care package. If you choose to get a response via the post then this will obviously take longer. Please specify the best way to contact you ie; phone, email, letter.
- We understand that it is difficult for some people to access services, thank you for raising that and we will take it back to the team.
- All social workers do have mobile phones and email addresses so you must ask for these details.
- Someone in the audience raised that their social worker said their phone was not working. The response was that all managers must talk to their teams to ensure they are contactable.
- Harrow have 3 generic email addresses (CNWL, Youth and Other) and if you call in they can email your social worker directly.

- Please check the email signature at the bottom of emails from your social worker as their contact details should be listed there.
- There are 2 email addresses for the Carers Team (carers@harrow.gov.uk and conversationcafe@harrow.gov.uk) and a phone number (07522 715765).

Audience Question 3

Social workers have been moved out of Bentley House and into Harrow. How will this work as they will be less integrated?

Panel Response:

- The reason is that social workers are not necessarily doing council duties anymore. You will see not affect to your service level. Social workers now need to come back to the council to make sure they are up to scratch via training needs etc. but they will still be doing social care tasks. This change is a positive move but we welcome your feedback.

Audience Question 4

The council has a legal duty under the Care Act if someone needs to be referred to advocacy. How can you reassure us that this is done?

Panel Response:

- We check that social workers all have an advocate on board to be referred to. A young person's needs will be different and there maybe cases where two advocates are needed, one for the person and one for their parents.

Audience Question 5

The system could be improved by following the health service model - there should be a feedback system.

One example of bad service was that a care coordinator visited a client, rang the doorbell and the client could hear them outside but the social worker only waited a few seconds for them to open the door. Someone else's social worker put down the wrong date when a child was under local anaesthetic so they were not available on the day required.

Panel Response:

- We are starting to improve the service. Mario is forming a local action group to develop new ideas and you are welcome to join. One person praised the work of Pauline Mullins.
- A social worker may not always be able to answer their mobile phone straight away (they maybe in a meeting for instance) so remember there are 3 ways of communicating: email, Teams and phone.

Audience Question 6

I've worked in healthcare all my life and have seen some social workers treat the elderly like they are hard of hearing and are rude to them. These workers need a lot more training in how to deal with the elderly and vulnerable. How confidential is communication?

Panel Response:

- Social workers are trained for 3 years and are judged on their respect and the dignity they show people. They should have a non-judgmental approach and nobody should feel otherwise. All the information will be on your electronic records but there are a limited amount of people who will see it.

Senel Arkut summed up "I want to say a big thank you to everyone and felt that today has been really helpful. We do need to know your feedback and that you feel the council do care so please let us know."

4. Harrow Council: Service Information

Senel provided the following information about the Council's Social Care service:

Harrow Social Care

- We work to support all ages.
- We want to engage in conversations, want to hear from people and the impact on the end user.
- We care and if you think things aren't right we are open to improvement.

- At high-level, Harrow council do lots and serve about 260,000 people in Harrow which is one of the most diverse boroughs.
- You elect your own councillors who set the strategy and officers then make it happen – executive function and decisions.
- New administrative priorities have been set and there is a new vision to restore pride in Harrow, putting residents first. The aim is to create a clean and safe place where people in need are supported.
- There are 3 directorates: people, place and resources departments.
- Peoples services cover Adult social care (taking about 62% of the council's budget); 0-18 year olds; Education service in about 62 schools; Public health and Commissioners.
- The Care Act, created in 2014, added a duty of wellbeing and health.
- We have a duty to assess everyone.
- To provide a care/support plan ie; to identify the services they may need.
- This plan is then reviewed regularly as it may need to be adjusted in time.
- The services are chargeable via a means test to see what people's individual contributions should be.
- Carers can ask to take the council's money and organise their own care package if they wish to, or, they can pay via direct payments where we can organise it for you and you will be invoiced accordingly.
- The care package also includes various activities ie; preventative measures to keep you well and happy in your own homes along with information and advice services if needed.
- We work with all providers to make sure they are up to standard.
- We ensure workforce capacity and integration with health and voluntary sectors to make sure you only need to tell your story once.
- We have a duty to ensure all forms of safeguarding are met and hold regular meetings with the adult safety board to make sure all statutory duties are met.

5. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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