

**Minutes of the Adult, Community and Housing Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**Monday, 19th January, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor M Hanif (Chair)
Councillor R James (Vice Chair)
Councillors R Body, I Cooper, A Goddard, Z Islam, J Martin, D Perks, D Tyler
and D Vickers.

Officers:

M Williams Chief Officer (Corporate and Customer Services), (Lead Officer to the Committee), M Bowsher Chief Officer (Adult Social Care), S Asar Paul (Head of Policy and Performance) – (Both Directorate of People Services) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer) – (Directorate of Resources and Transformation).

Also in Attendance:

Paul Acutt – Carer – For Agenda Item No. 6 – Carers and the Care Act, only.

26. **Apology for Absence**

An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Turner.

27. **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

28. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th November, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

29. **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item heading.

30. **Carers and the Care Act**

The Chair introduced both Paul Acutt who was a carer for his wife and Shobha Asar-Paul, Head of Policy and Performance.

Mr Acutt advised that he had been a paid carer for his wife for a period of four years. Mr Acutt outlined his wife's condition together with the impact upon himself, advising that constant supervision was required to prevent harm and ensure medication was administered.

Mr Acutt described his transition from full time employment to full time carer as difficult and frustrating.

It was noted that Mr Acutt's property had been adapted to meet the needs of his wife, however he referred to the difficulties encountered in relation to accessing services and knowing the entitlement of carers to both services and benefits including assistance with mortgage repayments and the provision of transport especially given that Mr Acutt's wife was a wheelchair user.

In relation to the provisions of the Care Act 2014, Mr Acutt advised that he was aware that the provisions would relate to himself as a carer and was also aware of the limited budget attached to the Act which would result in the need for further interaction between service providers in order to provide value for money. It was thought that within the first month of implementation many carers would be requesting assessments from the Council.

In responding to a question from a Member, Mr Acutt advised that he was entitled to a lump sum payment of £300 per annum towards the cost of a holiday, however this was not treated as part of respite for himself as he would always holiday with his wife.

In relation to the provision of respite for carers, Members suggested that:-

- Carers should be entitled to benefits under the Options Plus Leisure Scheme for both themselves and those they were caring for;
- That a representative from the Council should be available to provide advice to carers in relation to benefits and adaptations and attend the Carers Network Team meetings in order to provide such advice;

In responding to a question from a Member Mr Acutt referred to the twelve month period following him becoming a full time carer advising of the difficulties he encountered in relation to the provision of services and benefits and advised that advice as to service entitlement in the main came from the Citizens Advice

Bureau as at that stage he was unaware of the Council's website and was unable to access websites but had since become aware of the free provision to access the internet at local libraries with libraries also providing details on access to information.

Mr Acutt advised that becoming a full time carer had affected his mental and physical wellbeing as he had become very frustrated especially when his wife had encountered stages of depression.

In responding to a question from a Member in relation to whether the work and role of Mr Acutt was valued and whether there were any difficulties encountered when applying for benefits, Mr Acutt advised that obviously his wife valued his work and role, however there was a general perception whilst out in public that he should be at work and not out with his wife during the daytime. However, it was imperative that they go out of the house on a regular basis and in view of the check on medical records there were no problems in obtaining the benefits that Mr Acutt and his wife were entitled to.

In relation to action that the Council could take in order to improve services to carers, Mr Acutt suggested that the Council should promote their website in order to make this more easily accessible to carers and also raise awareness in relation to facilities available at local libraries for those who cannot access the internet at home.

Regarding a suggestion that a single point of contact was required, Mr Acutt advised that a deputy would also be required should that single point become unavailable and there was a need for interdepartmental work in order to implement the new Care Act which would hopefully result in services for carers becoming more transparent and easily accessible.

Members thanked Mr Acutt for attending the meeting.

The Head of Policy and Performance thanked Mr Acutt for his contribution towards the Adult, Social Care services through his membership of the Carers Network Team.

The Committee considered a presentation of the Head of Policy and Performance on Carers and the Care Act. The presentation had been circulated to Members and was available on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS).

The Head of Policy and Performance advised that Local Authorities across the Country were attempting to shape their response to the Care Act 2014 which imposed an obligation on Local Authorities to promote the wellbeing of all people receiving services in relation to Adult Social Care with the Care Act simplifying and bringing together and improving existing legislation.

It was noted that the Care Act focused on support with an emphasis on prevention in order to reduce formal care support.

In responding to a question from the Chair, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that certain elements of the Care Act were specific to financial reforms however those would not come into effect until April, 2016 and responses to the financial reforms would be developed at a later date.

It was noted that the Care Act defined a carer as an adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult. Under the Act Local Authorities would be obliged to offer every carer an assessment in order to provide direct support for carers and the aim of assessments were to prevent complex support where necessary in order to promote independence with universal support being offered with a view to providing additional support through those services.

It was reported that assessments would concentrate on investigating the ability of the carer to provide the care and whether they would be able to carry on being a carer for the person they care for and their desire to continue doing so in the future. In addition to that the assessment should cover ranges of quality of life and wellbeing in relation to the carer for example in relation to a younger carer the impact upon their education, training and leisure time.

The Head of Policy and Performance indicated that the support would be dependent upon assessments with support being much less localised and would be standardised throughout the country which would prevent a past criticism that level of support had previously been a post code lottery.

It was noted that the implications of the Care Act would be the ability to understand at an earlier stage the needs required and provide personalised support and care where needed and it would also enable those with caring responsibilities to fulfil their educational and employment potential and enable the carer and those being cared for to continue to participate in family and community life together with ensuring that young carers would not carry out inappropriate levels of care and could continue to achieve in education and employment.

In responding to a question from a Member in relation to those carers who wished to remain in employment the Head of Policy and Performance stated that should that be the case a whole range of possibilities could be investigated including the provision of care from the voluntary sector.

In responding to a question from a Member in relation to the right to challenge assessments the Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) responded stating that should it be the case that it was alleged that the assessment had been carried out incorrectly there would be an internal right of appeal and should a care plan not be operating effectively there would be an internal review in order to encourage re-negotiation. In addition to this there would be the right to challenge in law.

The Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) advised that there was a set statutory framework to ensure that assessments followed a more simplified process during the first month and this would also include a clear marketing campaign

setting out what was available and raising public awareness, it was stated that there would also be the requirement for Welfare Benefit advisors in order to assist people in their own homes including focusing on referrals, those people who were already in the Adult, Social Care system and a focus on transport issues.

In response to a Member's question and suggestion in relation to helping those carers who wished to return to work and encouraging employers to offer interviews to carers, the Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) referred to the various partners that the Council currently worked with and agreed that a focus was required on those who specifically wished to return to work following being full time carers, advising that investigations in relation to such provision could be undertaken with Dudley Council for Voluntary Services and Jobcentre Plus in relation to signposting people to those services.

The Head of Policy and Performance referred to young people who were caring for their parents and advised of the work that would be required with service providers in order that they could access skills and qualifications in order to gain full time employment.

The Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) suggested the possibility of new carers receiving advice, assistance and signposting to services by those who were already full time carers with a view to providing remuneration to those involved as an incentive to provide this service.

The Head of Policy and Performance summarised some of the key areas of work undertaken in readiness for the implementation of the Care Act including the formation of a Carers Network Team in Adult Social Care and an appointed Carers co-ordinator advising that 37,974 people had identified themselves as carers. It was noted that following further re-modelling work it was anticipated that the cost of carers assessments had increased to a likely cost of £1.4 million and it was now envisaged that around 2,000 requests for carers assessments would be received in 2015/16.

In responding to Members concerns that estimates were conservative given that approximately 37,000 people had been identified as carers, the Head of Policy and Performance responded stating that the uptake responses in relation to some services such as respite care and direct payments had been low and estimates had also been based on that fact, however should the numbers predicted increase investigations in relation to providing further support would be undertaken with work continuing with other providers such as We Love Carers and Age UK in order to conduct mapping work with the situation continuing to be monitored following the implementation of the Care Act.

In responding to a Member's query in relation to contingencies should the predicted increase in costs exceed £1.4m, the Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) advised that there was very little funding available from Central Government in order to support the responsibilities arising from the legislation. He also stated that informal carers were the most valuable commodity as there were

insufficient resources available to deliver a social care package to for instance an additional 15,000 carers.

It was noted that of the 37,974 people identified as carers upon the census data, there were a proportion who provided care for over 50 hours each week and it should not be assumed that those identified provided 50 hours of care each week.

The Head of Policy and Performance provided a summary of the approach to the Care Act in the Dudley Borough referring to the information and advice that would be provided to carers at an early stage, the Care Aware online training for stakeholders, carers champions and the specific remit of Health Watch which was to assist people with the provision of information on services available to them.

The Head of Policy and Performance reported on the work to develop assessment forms in order that Assessments were conducted in line with the duty of well-being and that capacity and resources required consistency and as remodelling tools materialise there may need to be a re-design in relation to the assessment of the number of carers and cost implications.

It was noted that the Care Act and Children and Families Act overlapped and work with Children's Services was required in order for transitional planning for child carers who were shortly to attain the age 18 years to be undertaken and consideration given to the provision of services to those in that category.

In responding to a Member's concerns, the Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) advised that further reports would be submitted to the Committee in relation to the Care Act in order that resources and cost pressures upon the system could be scrutinised.

In responding to a Member's suggestion that the situation in relation to carers should be monitored given the increase in birth rates and the likelihood of this impacting upon the number of young women being in a position to care for their parents the Head of Policy and Performance reported that the Care Act was to be implemented as the response to an increasing aging population with resources being targeted at prevention by providing early support which should reduce the need for public resources.

It was noted that the Council continued to work with the voluntary sector in relation to the provision of services to carers including Dudley Council for Voluntary Services and Health Watch.

The Head of Policy and Performance reported that the promotion of the Care Act would commence in February by the Department of Health and that work was being undertaken with Dudley Council Plus in relation to access points for services.

The Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) advised that details of access to Adult Social Care Services were available at the Citizens Advice Bureau and libraries throughout the Borough with one consistent message in relation to referrals.

The Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) agreed to forward the link to the Care Aware Training to all Members of the Council.

Following the conclusion of the presentation on Carers and the Care Act the Chair thanked the Officers in the Directorate of People Services for their continued work in relation to preparation for the implementation of the Care Act.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation on Carers and the Care Act, and as reported on at the meeting, be noted.
- (2) That the Chief Officer (Adult Social Care) be requested to email to all Members of the Council the link to the Care Aware Training.

The meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.

CHAIR