
Healthwatch Report

Findings from the
Healthwatch
independent consultation
on Stockton Borough
Council's Review of
Homecare Services

February 2015

1. WHAT IS HEALTHWATCH?

The Health and Social Care Act (2012) established Local Healthwatch as the new consumer champion for health and social care services for adults and children in England. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees aims to be a strong, independent, trusted and effective voice and a champion for local people, influencing health and social care delivery and supporting people to access health and social care services. It will strive to ensure the best possible quality and choice in health, social care and wellbeing services for the benefit of all living and working in Stockton-on-Tees.

2. AIM

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees carried out this investigation in partnership with Stockton Borough Council. Healthwatch aimed to provide users of Home Care services with the opportunity to express their views on how their Home Care is delivered to an independent body. It is envisaged that this information will be shared with Stockton Borough Council Scrutiny Review of Home Care Services and will influence the review as well as the design and commissioning of future Home Care services in Stockton-on-Tees.

3. METHODOLOGY

On behalf of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, SBC wrote out to a sample of 380 users of Home Care services in the Borough. These people were offered the opportunity to take part in a telephone survey eliciting their views and experiences on how current services are being delivered locally. In total 28 service users have completed surveys, either on the telephone or via a home visit. This was a relatively low response rate from service users. However, Healthwatch has made efforts to drive further responses to the survey via a number of means such as social media, emphasis throughout Healthwatch Membership and use of the Information Volunteers' grass roots networks.

In addition to this, views and experiences were sought from a focus group of 7 young carers from Eastern Ravens Trust. Healthwatch took a different, more qualitative approach to gathering the experiences and views of this group. As well as highlighting positive and negative elements of their experiences of Home Care services, the young people also indicated the skills, qualities and behaviours they would like to see from Home Care services commissioned in the future. The group were enthusiastic about their views shaping how future services could be delivered.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works within the parameters of the Pioneering Care Partnership Safeguarding Policy. Staff and volunteers have all completed satisfactory DBS

checks. Staff receive regular mandatory safeguarding training which ensures that they are confident in how and when to address possible safeguarding issues should they occur.

4. OUR FINDINGS

Healthwatch collected data through both surveys and a focus group. Although relatively few people have taken part in this work, Healthwatch would ask that the following information is considered as part of the review.

In addition to the findings as set out below, it is important to highlight that this is an emotive area of service delivery. A number of people became slightly distressed when completing the telephone survey demonstrating that Home Care does elicit emotional responses from people. This may be one explanation for the limited response rate received.

General findings from survey

Respondents of the survey were generally positive and results highlighted the findings below:

- Most people reported a general satisfaction with the standard of Home Care they receive.
- The majority of people felt that their quality of life is good or better.
- Most people stated that their carer arrived on time 'always' or 'usually'.
- The majority of people felt that they were treated with dignity and respect. Most people indicated that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had a regular team of carers.
- Most people felt that they were able to keep clean and presentable.
- The majority of people felt that their care workers fully understood their care plan.
- Most care workers were reported as wearing their uniforms and identification badges.
- It was reported that carers usually stayed for the correct length of time.
- More than half of those who responded were confident in their carer's ability to support them to take medicine.
- Most people reported that they received a regular schedule of when to expect calls from carers.
- The majority of people stated that the care they received enabled them to remain independent.
- Of those people surveyed who utilise a Personal Budget, all responses were positive, indicating that this mechanism for organising care met their individual needs.

The survey did, however, highlight where there are issues Stockton Borough Council may wish to take into account as part of this Review.

- 7 out of 28 people commented that they felt less than adequately safe.
- 11 of 28 respondents commented that they did not have sufficient social interaction.

- Half of respondents highlighted that they were not kept informed about changes to their care rota by the care provider. (13 out of 26)
- Despite not appearing as a specific question in the survey, the majority of respondents indicated that they had experienced difficulties when interacting with the care providers' administrative office. People commented that they often had difficulty communicating via telephone and that staff were regularly rude and inappropriate. Many people also reported that staff did not return their calls. People therefore found it difficult to complain, either because the service user felt uncomfortable or because it was logistically difficult to do so.

Key themes from the young carers focus group

The young people from Eastern Ravens Trust were selected to take part in the focus group if the person they care for currently receives Home Care services. The group engaged in detailed discussion about what currently works well in terms of the services they receive as well as highlighting where improvements could be made. Key themes emerging from this discussion are detailed below.

- **A need for staff training**

- General training

Young people generally felt that carers' skills were inconsistent. They were keen for the Review to prioritise training as a key requirement for providers to deliver. Young people felt that communication skills and health and safety should be part of this.

- Confidentiality

Young people gave examples of instances of where confidentiality had been contravened and suggested this should become an essential element of the training process.

- Professional Boundaries

In cases where care is provided to people with complex needs, the carer is often within the household for a significant period of time. In these cases, the young people felt that maintaining professional boundaries was a difficult yet an important factor. They again suggested that there should be mandatory training in place to support carers.



Young Carer: 'If we ring to complain, we'd be scared that we'd end up losing the good carers.'



- **Problems with the administration office** Young people told Healthwatch that they often had difficulties contacting the care provider administration office. This was a particular problem when appointments were either rearranged or a carer had not attended a call.

- Many young people reported that they often struggled to get through to the office on the telephone and that the office staff were sometimes rude.
- The group stated they felt that complaints are not handled satisfactorily and that they may lose the carer if they complain.



Young carer: 'The carer must be good listening to person and the family they work with. Communication is so important.'



- **Delivery of care**

- Young people emphasised a need for an effective care plan to be in place which is 'owned' by the whole family.
- They were very clear that a consistent team of carers is very important to ensure a high level of care is in place. Young people reported feeling anxious when a stranger arrived to provide personal care to their relative. It was also deemed important for providers to ensure carers are an appropriate gender.
- Young people highlighted a need for carers to complete all tasks set out in the care plan, reporting that sometimes tasks are left to young people to complete such as 'putting Mam to bed' or 'doing the dishes'. Young Carers explained that this was down to the carer not understanding that this may be inappropriate or unfeasible for the young carer to carry out.



- Young carer: 'It's such an important job, they should get paid better. If they weren't worried about money, they could concentrate on looking after my Mam.'



- **Concerns for carers' health and safety and wellbeing**

- Young people felt that the health, safety and wellbeing should be a priority for the Review. They commented that the standard of care provided deteriorated when carers are unwell, stressed, under pressure or distressed.
- Young people expressed concern over the hours worked by carers, stating it causes excessive tiredness and mistakes to be made. Many comments were made about financial remuneration for carers, whereby young people were concerned that carers experiencing financial problems caused the quality of care to drop.
- The young people felt strongly that care work is a very important role and should be treated as such. They felt that professionalising the role would improve quality.

5. POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The number of service users who responded to this survey is low. Users of home care services are often particularly isolated, vulnerable and under-represented when feedback about services is sought. As part of the Review, Healthwatch would ask that Stockton Borough Council ensure that service users and their carers are appropriately represented in future engagement activity.

5.2 Those service users who utilise Direct Payments commented that they are very satisfied with all areas of their homecare.

5.3 Some service users were unhappy about the particular elements of their care detailed below. Healthwatch would request that Stockton Borough Council consider these issues as part of the Review.

- Some people told Healthwatch that they felt as though they did not have enough control over their lives. (9 out of 28)
- Some people told Healthwatch that they did not feel adequately safe either in the home or outside of the home. (7 of 28)
- Some people told Healthwatch that they did not have sufficient social contact. (11 out of 28)
- Some people told Healthwatch that they were rarely informed about changes to their schedule of care calls. (13 out of 26)

5.4 Healthwatch received a number of additional responses to the survey in which service users indicated they were experiencing difficulties communicating with providers' administration office. Healthwatch would request that Stockton Borough Council consider these issues as part of the Review.

- Service users were not told about changes to rotas
- Staff were rude or unhelpful
- Staff did not return service users' phonecalls
- Staff in the office seemed pressured.

5.5 Healthwatch recognises the value and complexity of young carers' understanding of Home Care services. It is therefore recommended that the Review encourages providers to engage with young carers more effectively as part of future provision.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank all those service users and carers who took part in completing the survey. Healthwatch would also like to thank Eastern Ravens Trust and particularly those carers who took part in the focus group as well as the staff who supported this.