

CABINET	Paper No. 7(1)(b)
Meeting date: 5 May 2009	
From: Acting Corporate Director – Adult and Cultural Services	

RESPONSE TO “CARERS IN CUMBRIA”

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report responds to the recommendations made in the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group report “Carers in Cumbria”, a scrutiny review of the current situation faced by adult carers in Cumbria. The review did not explicitly include issues relating specifically to young carers. This is a distinct and important group of carers whose needs can differ somewhat from other groups of carers. Close working between Children’s Services and Adult and Cultural Services is important to ensure that these needs are met.

2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

2.1 Carers are key individuals. They touch all of our lives at one time or another, maintaining families and communities in the widest sense. The Council’s ability to support social care in communities, for all ages and abilities, depends upon a good understanding of carers and the role they play. We also need to understand the interaction between carers and the wide range of services the council commissions and engages with. In a county with an ageing population, support to carers is an essential part of the overall support system.

2.2 There are statutory duties to provide good information to carers, to assess their needs and to support carers through a range of funding streams. The Carers Grant supports a lot of this activity and Cumbria also supports carers through core funds, for example, with residential respite care.

2.3 The role of partner organisations is crucial to Cumbria’s approach to supporting carers. A number of third sector Carers organisations in Cumbria play a significant role in assessing and supporting carers needs, as well as other specialist organisations that support carers.

- 2.4** *The new National Carers Strategy has directed additional support for carers through other statutory organisations, primarily through Primary Care Trusts and Department of Work and Pensions. This has further emphasised the need to work both strategically and operationally with these partners.*
- 2.5** *The equality and diversity agenda in this area of the Council's work is addressed in two ways. First, by a focus on providing information and access to hidden carers, by a range of methods that complement the support work with carers we already know about. This includes providing access to information and support in a variety of settings, including both primary and acute health settings, where carers may first be identified.*
- 2.6** *Secondly, by directing the strategic work of the council through the existing multi-agency steering group and ensuring that other strategies (e.g. End of Life Care; Dementia) include clear references to carers and are "joined up". Potentially, all strategic planning can be checked to be "carer proof", as well as the overall Carers Strategy being subject to an equality impact assessment (EIA). An EIA will be carried out on the new Cumbria Carers Strategy and additional actions identified as needed.*

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1** *Cabinet is invited to accept the Scrutiny report and ask Officers to respond to the report's recommendations in the way outlined in this paper.*

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1** The Improving Council Services Scrutiny Committee has conducted a Task and Finish investigation into carers in Cumbria. The report is a very welcome review of an agreed set of issues that are important to carers and will help enhance the council's work to support carers. The process has also helped to raise the profile of carers and is timely in relation to both the new national strategy and new funding streams for support for carers. The outcome of the scrutiny review will also be added to the new Cumbria Carers Strategy for specific action, implementation and review.
- 4.2** The scrutiny paper makes a number of specific recommendations and this report responds specifically to each of these points.
- 4.3** **Recommendation 1**

Measures are put in place by NHS Cumbria that would compel GPs to comply with their contractual obligations to register carers to ensure that the provision of support to carers through their GP surgeries is consistent across the county.

This recommendation is supported. Partnership work with NHS Cumbria and Carer organisations is essential to achieving this as a minimum standard and seeking to build on a basic register to give better support to carers in Primary and community health care settings. There are no predicted financial implications for Cumbria County Council. This recommendation should be achieved through best practice on the part of NHS Cumbria.

4.4 Recommendation 2:

Cumbria's Carers' Organisations should consider a coordinated approach undertaking any planned research into the profile of carers in Cumbria rather than doing it on a district-by-district basis. Members recommend that Cumbria County Council play a lead role in encouraging all carers' organisations in Cumbria to develop a coordinated approach to data collection on carers with a view to providing better carer support across the county.

This recommendation is supported and the lead carer organisations are committed to working together in this way. The Council will facilitate the specific work discussed to widen our detailed knowledge of carers needs in communities in Cumbria. We have a common database with the 5 main carer organisations that allows data reporting on different groupings of assessed carers and records the details of support they are receiving. This best practice work is attracting interest from organisations outside Cumbria.

4.5 Recommendation 3:

Cumbria County Council should update its policy regarding carers' rights and its responsibilities towards carers in line with the latest government legislation. Scrutiny recommends that this work be carried out within 6 months to ensure that Cumbria County Council is treating all employees fairly and in accordance with current legislation.

This recommendation, which refers primarily to Human Resource requirements, is supported. The focus from Scrutiny and the proposed 6 month timescale will help to ensure that carers who are employees of the council have access to at least the statutory minimum requirements, such as consideration of requests for flexible working arrangements.

4.6 Recommendation 4:

Cumbria County Council should undertake a staff survey in order to identify the number of employees who are also carers with a view to understanding the range and level of support the authority could provide to them. By getting good information on carers within its own employ, the County Council will be better able to support them. This in turn will lead to improved skills retention and a happier and more productive workforce.

This recommendation is supported. There are good "business case" arguments for supporting working carers, especially in an ageing population

so that experienced and trained staff are not lost because of the impact of a new role as a carer for example. The scale of the survey will require the work to be discussed further and planned with the Corporate Communications unit.

The financial implications are identified below for the survey work, however, a full survey of all Directorates' employees (8760 people) would cost approximately £12,000 based on the current staff. A smaller focus on a targeted group would possibly be the most effective and efficient way to undertake this recommendation. In addition, there will need to be further consideration of any costs associated with supporting working carers, depending upon the result of the survey and the type of issues identified by employees.

4.7 Recommendation 5:

Cumbria County Council should cease to means test carers for Carers Services for the purpose of support and short breaks. This is considered unfair by Cumbria's carers' organisations and it is unlikely to have a large negative financial implication for Cumbria County Council. Cumbria is one of the few authorities in the country that means test carers. Stopping means testing for carers would result in more carers being encouraged to apply for support and breaks and thus improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

This recommendation is supported. The policy to financially assess carers in some situations is an historical one. There is no significant income generated as a result of this policy, since any regular support for a family that includes, for example, home care or residential respite provision would be formally excluded as they require the service user (cared for person) to be financially assessed, not the carer. Loss of income is likely to be less than £10,000.

Many support services for carers are not usually those financially assessed (e.g. attending a group; some training; relaxation session; one off small grant for item; etc). However, the existence of the charging policy has at times caused confusion and is seen as a barrier to engaging with some carers who need support. Therefore this change would simplify the assessment and support processes for carers and staff, and as a result improve this area of work with carers.

4.8 Recommendation 6:

NHS Cumbria should give more clarity on the amount of funding received from central Government to provide extra breaks for carers and details of the their plans to work with partners to administer these funds. Scrutiny are concerned that not enough information has been given by NHS Cumbria on the detail of this scheme such as how funding will be allocated, budgetary considerations for Cumbria County Council and the exit strategy.

The Council and partner organisations have worked with NHS Cumbria (PCT) to produce proposals for using the newly announced funds for extra support for carers (approximately £500,000 in 2009/2010 and £1,000,000 in 2010/2011). The outcome of this planning if implemented will be to identify carers at GP practice level and to provide additional support to carers in more isolated situations, as well as directly funding more short breaks for carers. The proposals for this build upon existing good practice, would be countywide and would be implemented through partner organisations, reporting to the overall Carers Strategy Steering Group.

These proposals are included as part of the Operating Plan for NHS Cumbria, however there are a number of priorities reflected in that plan. At this point final decisions about priorities for funding within the NHS Cumbria operating plan are still to be made.

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1 Cabinet could decide to reject some or all of the responses to the recommendations outlined in this report.

6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Recommendation 4 (4.6 above), the cost of the staff survey will be in the region of £2000- £4000 for producing and distributing survey material to a proportion of employees. £12,000 for a full survey across all Directorates. Managing the project would be absorbed into existing work programmes and would have no additional cost implication.
- 6.2 Recommendation 5, charging policy. The financial implications of removing the present means test for carers could result in a small reduction of income of up to £10,000. This would be managed from within the existing Adult and Cultural Services budget.
- 6.3 There are no other specific financial implications arising from this paper. It is appropriate to re-emphasise the need for work with partners such as NHS Cumbria to be undertaken through detailed joint planning to ensure an integrated approach to service development.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The main area of legal implications is that concerning the Council as employer of carers. The recommendation 3, namely that the council should update its policy regarding carers' rights and its responsibilities towards carers in line with the latest government legislation, will help ensure that the council is meeting legal requirements under the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 and the landmark Coleman v Attridge Law ECJ case. Regarding the Coleman case, in effect this ruling extended the Disability Discrimination Act to cover the able-bodied carer of a disabled person, and it is essential that Council managers are aware of this and related issues.

The Council's overall duty to provide information to carers and to inform carers of their rights, including their right to their own needs assessment, will be enhanced by actions proposed in the recommendations, such as better information in primary care settings.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The involvement of council in producing the scrutiny report has been a welcome stimulus to the overall work being undertaken to support carers in Cumbria. It has been timely in following closely on after the launch of the National Carers Strategy and will allow the local strategy to be enhanced with whatever recommendations are agreed.
- 8.2 The process has raised awareness of the issues facing carers amongst councillors, enhanced by the survey of councillors who are also carers. The involvement of the Equality and Cohesion manager in the development of future support for carers will help to ensure other strategies take into account carers' needs.
- 8.3 The scrutiny report has identified some critical areas for development, in the context of the existing wide ranging set of initiatives to support carers. The support to develop these areas with partners will be extremely beneficial in continuing to improve the council's services

Richard Parry
Acting Corporate Director – Adult and Cultural Services

3 April 2009

APPENDICES

No Appendices

Electoral Division(s): All

Executive Decision

Yes	
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Key Decision

*	No*
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If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?

*		N/A*
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Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?

*	No*
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If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?

	*	N/A*
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Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny?
 If so, give details below.

*Yes	
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Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?

		N/A*
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Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?

		N/A*
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PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS
[including Local Committees]

No previous relevant decisions

CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

This report responds to a scrutiny review

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers

RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER

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