ADULT SOCIAL CARE SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Report Head of Adult Commissioning and Health

1. Recommendation

1.1   That the Scrutiny Committee notes the insight gained from the service user and carers focus groups held to discuss the service user and carer survey results, and the actions being taken as a result of listening to individual experiences.

2.   Purpose

2.1   The January Scrutiny Committee received a report which referred to the results of two national surveys in which Devon County Council participates. It was also reported that focus groups of service users and carers had been convened to discuss those survey results. At the March Committee it was agreed to submit a report describing the focus group findings and the action being taken in response to them, with Councillor Wright taking a lead on behalf of the Committee with the appropriate senior officers.

3.   Background: About the Surveys

3.1   DCC participates in two national mandatory surveys:

- Annual Personal Social Services Adult Care Survey (ASCS) – service users
- Biennial Personal Social Services Survey of Carers in England (SACE) - carers

3.2   Both surveys are nationally produced by the Department of Health and are sent to all relevant local authorities in England.

4.   The Service User Survey

4.1   The 2016/17 Adult Care Survey took place between 16 January and 10 March 2017.

4.2   1,281 surveys were issued, 561 were completed, a response rate of 44%.

4.3   We have just completed the 2017/18 survey and the results will be announced nationally in October this year.

5.   The Carers Survey

5.1   The 2016/17 Carers Survey took place between 1 October 2016 and 30 November 2016.

5.2   992 surveys were issued and 655 were completed, a response rate of 66%.

5.3 The 2018/19 will take place during October and November this year and the results will be announced nationally in August 2019.

6. Survey results in our Annual Report

6.1 The results of both the Service User and Carers surveys were presented to the Scrutiny Committee as part of the 'Supporting evidence' section of the Adult Social Care Annual Report 2017. The report was published on the Devon County Council web site at: [Adult Social Care in Devon 2017 Annual Report](#)

7. About the Focus Groups

7.1 The results of both surveys were discussed by a number of focus groups to add qualitative insight from service users and carers to the figures presented in the Annual Report.

7.2 Three focus groups were held in late 2017 to discuss the results on the 2016/17 Service User survey, of which one group was for people with learning disabilities. 14 people participated in those groups. Devon currently provides services to around 17,000 adults.

7.3 Four focus groups were held in the autumn on 2017 to discuss the results of the 2016/17 Carers survey. 25 people participated in those groups. Devon currently provides support to around 3,500 carers.

7.4 Participants for all groups were independently recruited by Living Options Devon and the same simple format was used at each session. Participants were simply asked how they would have responded to the questions which prompted the most negative responses, and to consider the experiences which lay behind the results.

7.5 Given the self-selection of the groups, a motivating factor for participation was the chance to air personal discontent, and how groups focused on the survey questions which had the worst results, our approach was to deliberately provoke criticism and the must be read in that context. Comments made by group members were aggregated and fed back to participants who agreed that our thematic analysis had not distorted their views.

8. Themes which emerged from the focus groups

8.1 Clarity over what social care offers

8.1.1 The Service User focus groups highlighted how confused people can be over what level and type of support they actually receive from social care. Some people mixed up welfare benefits with social care support and most could not easily describe our 'offer'.

8.2 Confusion over what support is for the carer or cared-for person

8.2.1 The Carers focus groups highlighted how people are often unclear about whether they are receiving social care support as a carer or on behalf of their loved one. The group discussions uncovered some disconnection between carers services and adult social care management which was compounding this issue.

8.3   Difficulty in managing Direct Payments

8.3.1   Both carers and services users expressed frustration with the Direct Payments system and their ability to manage them. Some carers questioned why they were receiving Direct Payments rather than commissioned services and concerns were raised about the information provided on Direct Payments.

8.4   Dissatisfaction with Direct Payments monitoring

8.4.1   The way in which the care managers were monitoring what Direct Payments were being spent on and the way in which unspent payments were reclaimed was a concern raised by carers.

8.5   Lack of choice in provision

8.5.1   Some service users told us that providers were not giving them enough choice in the way they received their support.

8.6   Getting 'the basics' right

8.6.1   Service users reminded us how distressing it is when a carer worker fails to turn up on time or changes to arrangements are not communicated.

8.7   What makes people feel safe

8.7.1   When discussing what makes service users feel safe, the issues raised were far wider than social care support: street lighting, the built environment, isolation and fear of crime were cited.

8.8   Our role in making people feel safe

8.8.1   Interestingly, some service users stated that they thought social care had either no role or a very limited role in making them feel safe.

8.9   Reductions in support following reviews

8.9.1   Some carers expressed concern that they been receiving the same support for years which had then been reviewed from a perspective of helping promote their independence. They perceived the level of reduction to be unreasonable and stated that they had not been listened to effectively in the review process.

8.10   Lack of alternatives to day provision

8.10.1 Some carers focus group participants raised the way in which previous day services reductions had taken place without viable alternative sources of support.

8.11   The importance of GPs in supporting carers

8.11.1 Carers were clear about the difference that having a GP who understands carers issues and offers proactive support can make to their wellbeing and ability to cope.

8.12   The importance of informal carers support

8.12.1 Carers emphasised how important carer-to-carer support is in terms of practical advice and the ability to share experiences with people in similar circumstances, and questions were asked about how well DCC supports informal carers' networking.

8.13   Carers felt taken for granted

8.13.1 Some carers were quick to remind us how much the support they provide would cost us if they were not in their caring roles.

8.14.   Some improvements too

8.14.1 Although the focus groups homed in on areas of concern, they did highlight some areas in which our performance has improved. The online 'Pinpoint' directory of local support had proved very useful for some people and there was some very positive feedback about the new 'Community Connector' role.

8.15   Action in response to insight

8.15.1 Holding focus groups in which people have a safe environment to comment on our services gives us valuable insight into the impact of our decisions, policies and practice on individuals. While the small size of the groups and the motivation of participants means our response must be proportionate, we are committed to acting on the what we have heard.

8.15.2 The insights gained from the focus groups have been shared with management in both social care commissioning and operations, and have informed a number of actions which have been grouped thematically below. Almost all of the actions listed below build upon work which was already underway before the focus groups, and receiving the feedback from individuals meant resulted it the acceleration of some workstreams, especially those which strengthen the links between the carers' provider and adult social care teams.

9.   Public information

9.1   Adult social care public information is being reviewed, with service users and carers participating in that process. Following the focus group feedback, the review of public information has prioritised information for carers and information about Direct Payments. A new Devon Carers web site went live at the start of May.

10.   Direct Payments

10.1.   The review of the Direct Payments Strategy is looking at the circumstances in which the payments are offered and the way in which the offer is explained and monitored. This will include whether they are the most appropriate means of receiving support and the way in which reductions identified in reviews are managed.

10.2   The documents which accompany the Direct Payments process are being reviewed to ensure they are as user-friendly as possible.

11.   Carers and adult care management join-up

11.1   There will be new training in Carer awareness and working with carers for Devon County Council Social Care staff and relevant Devon Partnership Trust staff – targeting staff who undertake assessments of people who may have a Carer.

11.2   Staff who undertake service user assessments are being prompted to undertake Carer assessments where appropriate, with appropriate training and familiarisation.

11.3   The Carer Champion role in DCC operational teams has been enhanced and extended to cover all adult social care teams.

11.4   Arrangements are in place to increase informal contact between the contracted Devon Carers provider staff and DCC and Devon Partnership Trust operational teams.

11.5   A Carers focus is being reinjected into operational staff development activity and project and change management documents and tools are being reviewed to ensure they do not overlook the Carers' perspective.

11.6   The Carer Recognition Tool is being rolled out to all community teams, hospitals and, crucially, GPs.

11.7   The carers contract provider is accelerating training for its staff in adult social care practices and processes.

12.   Basic social care provision

12.1   The feedback received about a lack of choice and control being offered to service users by providers and the need to 'get the basics right' will be raised with them via the Provider Engagement Network.

13   Social care and safety

13.1   The wider reasons given for people not feeling safe have been raised with the parts of Devon County Council responsible for broader community matters via the LG14 leadership group.

13.2   People will be asked how safe they feel during reviews and the role social care support plays in making someone feel safer will be explained to them. This is being implemented as part of the ongoing development of professional practice.

13.3   The survey results and focus group comments have been reviewed by the Devon Safeguarding Adults Board and haver informed the Board's business plan for this year.

14   Summary and conclusion

14.1   The focus groups provided individual insight into the experiences which influenced how service users and carers responded to the surveys. That insight has been considered within the context of the small number of participants relative to the number of people receiving social care support, but is still valuable and has influenced our service development including the creating the action plans listed in this report.

Tim Golby
Head of Adult Care Commissioning and Health

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Services: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Chief Officer for Adult Care and Health: Jennie Stephens
                                            [

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact for Enquiries: Damian Furniss/Paul Giblin
Tel No: 01392 382300   Room: First Floor Annexe

BACKGROUND PAPER   DATE   FILE REFERENCE

Nil