

TITLE	LINK Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 September 2012
WARD	None Specific

WOKINGHAM LINK

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT NETWORK

Main Points

Customer Experience Report

Michelle Wooff (LINK Development Worker) and Marlena O'Donnell (Wokingham Borough Council) have prepared and published a review of the experiences of people accessing Adult Social Care services. The review covered assessment, reassessment, reviews, support planning as well as information, prevention and support services, safeguarding and the overall satisfaction with self-directed support.

This is an excellent piece of work that has been acknowledged by the local authority. An action plan to address some of the findings is being prepared.

Please see copy appended.

RBH dignity and nutrition survey

As a joint project with the West Berkshire LINK, 500 surveys on patient experience of dignity and nutrition are about to be delivered to the Royal Berkshire Hospital for distribution to inpatients aged 65 and over on being discharged.

LINK legacy report

A legacy report on the LINK is being prepared. It has yet to incorporate feedback from NHS sources.

Other matters

The LINK was sad to have discovered that one of the members of the Steering Group, Wendy Teeton, had passed away on Saturday June 16th.

Together with other Berkshire LINKs approval is awaited for a survey of access and information arrangements at local NHS Dentists. A pilot has already been completed.

Christine Holland and Tony Lloyd attended an initial meeting of the National Health Service Commissioning Board Thames Valley Local Area Team at the Hilton in Reading on Tuesday Sept 11th which explored ways of working differently in the new commissioning arrangements.

Advice has been given to two local residents wishing to make complaints about NHS services.

A letter setting out the problems that disabled patients experience at the Pre Op Assessment Unit at the RBH was sent in early August. We still await a response.



Review of the new adult social care pathway

Feedback from social care customers and carers

August 2012



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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Executive summary

In 2011, Wokingham Borough Council changed the way new and existing customers access social care services. Within the new adult social care pathway, the Council's traded company, Optalis, manages most of the non-statutory services previously provided by the Council. Statutory services are provided by the Council's adult social care service. In addition, social care customers and people who are not eligible for social care services can also access prevention services commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council and provided by external organisations and signposting services provided by Wokingham Direct (an in-house customer information service).

The customer experience of the transformed social care services was reviewed jointly by Wokingham Borough Council and the Wokingham Local Involvement Network (the Wokingham LINK). A separate review of the back office functions, systems and processes as well as the transfer of services to Optalis was carried out concurrently by Wokingham Borough Council.

The review focused on the customer experience of different processes such as the assessment, reassessment, reviews, support planning as well as information, prevention and support services, safeguarding and the overall satisfaction with self-directed support.

Over 100 social care customers and carers gave their views during workshops, telephone interviews and by filling out questionnaires.

Main findings

- Social care customers greatly benefit from the flexibility and personalisation of their care and support. Being able to choose own support services and having control over who provides these services has been described by social care services as “empowering” and “life changing”. However, the process of getting the personal budget is very long and has been described by many people as “confusing”.
- Reviews and reassessments are irregular and inconsistent.
- Social care customers and carers do not know what they can expect from adult social care services in terms of standards relating to quality, timescales and frequency.
- A number of social care customers said that assessments / reassessments make them feel uneasy as what they say during this process may have a negative impact on their services (i.e. their services

may be reduced or withdrawn). Also, people are concerned that a reassessment inevitably leads to a reduction in services.

- Social care customers and carers have a positive experience of direct payments and value the support from the Direct Payments Team.
- There are gaps in the provision of information about the adult social care pathway. There is no easy ready information about self-directed support for people with learning disabilities.
- Not all providers of care and support services offer people flexible support and there are not many opportunities for shared support services.
- Social care customers and carers would like more brokerage options.
- There is a low level of awareness of self-directed support among people with mental health problems and older people. People with physical disabilities, carers and people with learning disabilities on the whole have a good understanding of personal budgets and its benefits.
- Social care customers find it difficult to communicate with the Council as they do not know who to speak to. They would like to have a named person who knows them and can respond to their enquiries. In addition, social care customers reported that the Council and Optalis employees use a lot of jargon and written information is often complex and said that they have to repeat information about their circumstances to a number of different people in the Council and Optalis.
- On the whole, social care customers know who to contact if they have any problems such as a change in their circumstances, breakdown in services or if they feel unsafe or are abused.
- There has been no deterioration in the level and quality of support services received by social care customers. Most people are not even aware of the separation of the statutory services (provided by the Council) from brokerage and other support services (provided by Optalis)
- There is a low level of awareness of the Wokingham Information Network (WIN) as well as advocacy services and peer support among social care customers and carers. In addition, not many potential and existing social care customers are aware of prevention services.

The customer journey can be improved by informing social care customers of timescales, frequency and standards they can expect from both the Council and Optalis, ensuring that the right information is given to them at the right time and in the right format and ensuring that everyone is given the same level of support and flexibility with accessing services.

1. Introduction

Over a year ago, Wokingham Borough Council changed the way new and existing customers access social care services. Statutory services such as assessments and allocation of personal budgets are provided by Wokingham Borough Council and non-statutory services such as brokerage, day care, residential care and domiciliary care services are provided by Optalis, the Council's traded company.

The new adult social care pathway is reviewed a year after its implementation to establish how successful the changes were in terms of outcomes for social care customers, number of people with personal budgets, efficiency of internal processes and management of finances.

Feedback from social care customers forms a vital part of the review as the new social care pathway was designed to make it easier for potential and existing social care customers to access information and advice as well as care and support services within the framework of self-directed support.

2. Background information

Our Health, Our Care, Our Say (2006) White Paper set out a vision to provide people with good quality community based social care and NHS services. *The Putting People First* (2007) national agreement provides further direction for the reform of adult social care services and introduces a shift from institutionalisation to personalisation. Some of the changes to social care services include giving users of services choice and control of their care and support, provision of prevention and signposting services and engaging wider networks of support.

A personal budget is one of the practical ways of enabling social care customers to have choice and control of their own care and support. This means that rather than relying on social care professionals to arrange services, social care customers are told how much money is allocated for their individual services and encouraged and supported to choose how they want to use their budget.

Before self-directed support was introduced, local authorities provided in-house services and also had block contracts with local providers of support services. The way people accessed and received social care services had to change to make it easier for social care customers to plan and arrange their

own services. After three years of planning and extensive consultation with all stakeholders, in 2011, Wokingham Borough Council introduced a new adult social care pathway. Within the new pathway, the Council's trading company, Optalis manages a number of support services such as day care, employment services, home care, residential care and supported housing services, sensory needs services, as well as brokerage and reassessments. Wokingham Borough Council's adult social care team carry out assessments and manage other social care services that the Council is legally bound to provide. In addition, social care customers and people who are not eligible for social care services can also access prevention and signposting services either provided directly by Wokingham Borough Council or commissioned by the Council and provided by voluntary or private sector organisations.

3. Scope and methodology of the review

A year after the implementation of the new adult social care pathway, Wokingham Borough Council set out to review adult social care services to improve both the internal processes and the customer experience. The review of the customer experience initiated by Wokingham Borough Council coincided with a project planned by the Local Involvement Network (the LINK)¹ to obtain feedback from social care customers about their care and support services. These two planned reviews were combined and the LINK worked in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council on gathering customers' views.

The review of the customer experience was carried out between April and June 2012. A separate review of the back office functions, systems and processes relating to the new adult social care pathway was carried out concurrently by the Council.

The review of the customer experience focused on the principles of personalisation and putting outcomes at centre stage outlined in the *Vision for Adult Social Care Capable Communities and Active Citizens* (2010). Social care customers and carers were invited to share their views on the following aspects of self-directed support:

- Signposting
- Access to prevention services
- Access to adult social care services
- Assessment / reassessment
- Brokerage and support planning
- Experience of personal budgets

¹ Wokingham Local Involvement Network (LINK) is an independent network of local people and groups. It listens to what people in the borough have to say about health and social care services and tells the Council and NHS what it has discovered. LINK recommendations aim to ensure that health and social care services that are commissioned in Wokingham are what people need and want.

- Access to information
- Safeguarding
- Support services

Feedback from the following stakeholders was obtained during the review:

- Older people (supported housing residents and people who use day care services)
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health problems
- People with physical disabilities
- *Choice Champions*²
- Carers

Social care customers and carers were invited to take part in the review in various ways: workshops, filling out a questionnaire or taking part in telephone and face to face interviews. A special workshop for people with learning disabilities and carers was organised by the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Feedback from this workshop was incorporated into this report. For further information, please refer to the report produced by the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

Over 100 people took part in the review. Approximately, 70% of people who gave their feedback were either personal budget holders or carers of social care customers with personal budgets.

4. The review findings

4.1. Assessment / reassessment

4.1.1. The process

Several older people and people with physical disabilities who went through the process of getting a personal budget 2 – 3 years ago commented that the process was not very clear. Also, one of these people made a comment that they had to appeal following their assessment as they felt that their assessor didn't know how to carry out an assessment. They were satisfied with the outcome of the appeal and they said had a better rapport with the social worker the second time as "she understood the circumstances better".

² Choice Champions are social care customers trained to provide peer support to people new to self-directed support and as community leaders.

Most of the older people, people with physical disabilities and people with mental health problems who received a personal budget within the last 12-18 months, stated that they were fully engaged in the assessment process and all their views were being taken into account. However, this positive experience was not shared by everyone. Some people with learning disabilities did not think that they were able to contribute a lot to the assessment process. Several people thought that their parents' views were being taken into account rather than their own.

In addition, some people with learning disabilities and people with physical disabilities felt that the assessment or the reassessment was rushed and they did not have enough time to give all their views during the meeting with the assessor.

"Not enough done to prepare someone for assessment." (social care customer)

A number of social care customers said that the whole process of waiting for an assessment, being assessed and waiting for an allocation of a personal budget was too long and arduous. In a number of cases, this process took more than six months.

Some carers who took part in the review were not sure if they had received a carer's assessment or that they are entitled to assessment of their needs as a carer.

"Carer's assessment was tagged on the end of my daughter's assessment and it was not made clear, that it was a separate process to assess my needs as a carer." (carer)

4.1.2. Contributing to the assessment / reassessment

Some social care customers and carers said that they found the assessment / reassessment process very stressful as they did not want to say something that would have a detrimental effect on their services.

"You feel as if you are on the back foot during the reassessment and you are worried about saying the wrong thing, i.e. saying too little or saying too much." (social care customer)

"Scary process, worry about what you say may mean loss of support." (social care customer)

Some people did not understand the assessment process and how the assessment relates to the allocation of their personal budget. Moreover, several people said that the eligibility criteria for social services were not explained to them before the assessment took place.

"Important process, but not easy to understand what the process is for, i.e, it affects your personal budget." (social care customer)

"You don't realise how important the process is to your overall package of care." (social care customer)

"It would be helpful for some parents to be told what is meant by critical needs as defined by government guidelines and /or given information about where this is available as this is what the whole assessment is based on." (carer)

4.1.3. Timescales and frequency

Most people did not seem to know how long the assessment / reassessment process should take and it appears that length of this process varies from one person to another. There is a lack of understanding of why and when reassessments take place and who carries them out.

A couple in their 70s who are looking after a person with a learning disability were extremely distressed when after receiving a personal budget for two years were told that they need a reassessment and no further explanation about the purpose and the process was given.

"My son had no review in 2009 then in 2011 he had a review which we did not receive a copy of until almost 1 year later in 2012." (carer)

Some people felt that they had no choice in their needs being reassessed and others were refused a reassessment when their circumstances changed, for example, moving out of a family home into independent living.

Several social care customers and carers questioned the need for a long and complex reassessment if their needs have not changed. Some people said that they would only require a phone call every so often to check if things are OK and only go through the reassessment process if they required different services.

"Huge forms to fill when there has been no change in circumstance." (carer)

Some people with learning disabilities reported that they were not kept informed about their personal budget and found it difficult to find the right person to explain to them what the process of getting a personal budget was and how they can be involved.

4.1.4. Continuity of staff

One person said that when they were first assessed, they got on very well with a broker, but they were not allowed to have the same broker when they were reassessed.

Some people said that when assessments are carried out and a budget is set the carer / social care customer is then transferred to the brokerage team. The assessor will often inform the family that they are no longer involved. Some people said that this leaves them "high and dry" if they still have questions about the assessment.

4.1.5. Appeals

Several people said that reassessments did not accurately reflect their needs resulting in loss of services and they had to appeal against statements made by brokers. Most of these people reported that their appeal was successful and their services were reinstated as a result. This, however, caused a lot of unnecessary stress and anxiety. Some people said that if the broker had known their circumstances better, the appeal would not have been necessary.

A carer reported that the person they care for had their long standing respite care suddenly withdrawn without a reassessment. They were informed of this by a phone call. The carer appealed against this decision and said that it took almost a year for a replacement service to be provided. This period of uncertainty caused a lot stress and anxiety to both the carer and the person they care for.

One person said that they appealed their assessment and that this was "torturous". Someone else said that their appeal took 6 months.

A carer commented that they would like to have had information about how they could challenge a decision about their allocation of a personal budget. The information about appeals is not routinely given to people.

4.2. Support Planning

People with physical disabilities and older people find the support planning process easy to understand and feel fully supported in making decisions about their services by both the Council staff and their family carers.

"The support plan process was good. I felt involved and it was made easy."(social care customer)

"I feel that the support plan enables me to get the help I need." (social care customer)

"Broker was pleasant, helpful and clear." (social care customer)

"The planning stage was good and my needs were met." (social care customer)

Some people with learning disabilities were fully engaged in the process of writing their support plans and reported that the broker helped them consider different activities they could try. However, on the whole people with learning disabilities do not feel that they have any ownership of their support plan.

Some people said that they feel it is too difficult to change their support package if their circumstances change.

Some people are concerned that if they try to change their services and they do not work out, they might not be able to revert to what they had before and / or lose a part of their personal budget (this is a message given to them by brokers).

A few people commented that there was too much paperwork involved in both the assessment and the support planning.

A number of people stated that writing and implementing the support plan took a long time.

Some people are not sure what they can and cannot spend their personal budgets on, especially in relation to health services (e.g. physiotherapy) and transport.

Most people feel that they are able to make choices about their services. However, people are not always aware of what is available. Some people said that their broker was very good and gave them a lot of information, whereas other people did not feel fully informed about what they could use their personal budget on or the level of control they had over their services. Several people said that they found out about activities from other social care customers or providers of services rather than from brokers.

Several carers are concerned that there are no checks in place to ensure that the residential care providers are meeting the needs identified in the person's support plan and do not know whose responsibility it is to monitor this.

A carer of a person who lives in residential care and is currently attending a college course funded by Wokingham Borough Council, has recently been told that following the completion of the course, no replacement day time support will be funded by the Council as the residential care provider already receives funding for day time activities. This carer is concerned that the residential care provider may not be able to adequately meet the needs of the person they look after and would like the Council to ensure that this monitored.

Some carers of people with learning with disabilities reported that their brokers arranged access to prevention services commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council, so there would be more money left in their personal budget

for other services. This means that critical needs are being met through prevention services rather than personal budgets.

4.3. Personal budgets

4.3.1. Awareness of personal budgets

There is a low awareness of personal budgets / direct payments among people with mental health problems. Some people had heard of personal budgets, but they did not know a lot about them. One person started using adult social care services in August 2011 and was not given any information about personal budgets. Another person made an enquiry with a social worker who subsequently left Community Mental Health Team and nobody else has got back to this person with further information about personal budgets.

Most of the older people that took part in the review had very little understanding of self-directed support. A lot of older people rely on their relatives to set up and manage their support.

4.3.2. Experience of self-directed support

Most people said that the process of getting a personal budget is long and difficult. However, once the services are set up, social care customers and carers feel that having a personal budget has a positive impact on their lives and they are happy with their care and support.

“ Having an individual budget has meant my son has had choices in what he does with his life which make me as a carer feel good but also raises his self esteem making him feel more in control.” (carer)

“Personal budget gives a better deal and a better service.” (carer)

Two people who use mental health services and have a personal budget took part in this review. One person found the experience of self-directed support negative. They did not feel fully involved in the assessment process and did not think that they were given control over how money in their personal budget was spent and that the personal budget met all their care and support needs. They also found direct payments difficult to manage.

The other person found the process of getting a personal budget confusing and said that they would not be able to manage the direct payment without their family carer taking on this responsibility for them.

A number of people said that rather than being passive recipients of services, they are now able to make decisions about their support.

“Personal budget allowed me to take some control of my life.” (social care customer)

"I like the freedom to change care agencies." (social care customer)

People like the flexibility of managing their personal budgets in different ways - for example, as a direct payment or a combination of a direct payment and a Council managed account. Some people start with a Council managed account and gradually transfer all or most of their services to direct payments as their confidence in managing their own finances increases.

"I like that I can manage my own money." (social care customer)

The personal budgets also offer opportunities for sharing support. For example, two friends shared support to go out for the day using their direct payments. However, people commented that there are not enough opportunities for sharing support as people find it hard to find out if anyone is interested in doing the same activities.

Every personal budget holder was asked if there was an activity that they were not able to spend their personal budget on. Most people could not think of an example. However, a couple of people said that they wanted to use their personal budget to pay for physiotherapy, but were told that this service should be funded by NHS.

Although on the whole, people found that a personal budget gave better control, some people with learning disabilities said that their timetable of activities is not very flexible and they end up doing the same activities week after week. Some people reported that they do not have enough to do at the weekends.

In addition, some people with learning disabilities said that their residential homes do not offer personalised services outlined in their support plans or do not offer choice and flexibility in the way services are provided. An example of this is where someone has to leave an activity at a time that suits the residential home because it fits in with their staff rota.

4.3.3. Timescales

Most social care customers and carers reported long delays in accessing personal budgets and not being told how long this process would take. People find this very frustrating and detrimental to their health and wellbeing and financial circumstances.

"Even though our daughter turned 18 in October 2011, we have not been able to access the budget as the process has not finished." (this comment was made by a carer in May 2012 which indicates a seven month delay)

"I am extremely stressed by the whole process and I can no longer deal with it." (carer)

4.4. Direct payments

On the whole, people who have direct payments are empowered to manage their own support.

*"We do have a personal budget and receive direct payments and this works extremely well meaning we do work "out of the box" giving my son a more "normal" life meaning he can access his local community."
(carer)*

Several people commented that the Direct Payments Team is very supportive and helpful.

"The Direct Payments Team are very friendly and always help sort out my problems." (social care customer)

"Needed help with paying tax and national insurance and the Council were able to recommend an accountant to help with this which was very good." (social care customer)

However, the Council does not offer a wide of range of services such as managing payroll and sorting out paperwork. This means that some social care customers have to rely on a family member to help with the paperwork and this puts extra pressure and responsibility on their carers.

Several people stated that they would like to have even more flexibility with managing their direct payments – for example, it is not possible to carry money over from one year to the next.

"Would like to be able to have enough to pay in advance for activities (e.g. to pay for a college course as have to dig into other money reserves to pay for it" (carer talking on behalf of a social care customer)

4.5. Reviews

A number of people stated that the review process appears to be random and inconsistent as the reviews take place at different intervals and nobody knows when they are due to have one (for example, one person said that they have not had a review for three years).

People do not seem to know what the review process is. Some people commented that they do not know who should be attending the review

meetings. One person reported having to wait 11 months for the notes from their review meeting. They arrived just in time for their next review.

There appears to be confusion between reviews and reassessments as some social care customers as well as staff use these two terms interchangeably.

4.6. Transition

Carers of people with learning disabilities said that adult social care services are not engaging with a person until 6 months before their 18th birthday in cases where the needs of the young person are complex, for those with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities this is not long enough.

Some carers felt that in transition between children's and adult services, information from schools, children's services and other settings such as respite is often lost and not fed into adult services.

4.7. Awareness of the new adult social care pathway

4.7.1. Understanding the changes

Most of the social care customers and carers do not understand the new adult social care pathway and why the changes were introduced. There is very little awareness of which services are provided by directly by the Council and which services are provided by Optalis. Some people commented that as Optalis and teams providing statutory services are co-located, it is even harder to make a distinction between different services.

One of the carers commented that those who understand the process know how to make it work for them. A number of people said that it would be beneficial to understand how and what social services / prevention services can be accessed.

"Not sure who is managing the money, I think it is still the Learning Disability Team." (carer)

"Nobody knows who does what in Optalis and I don't know what they do." (social care customer)

Some social care customers and carers said that as Optalis provide both the brokerage and support services, there is a conflict of interest. They are concerned that they are directed to services provided by Optalis rather than community based services.

A number of people do not understand the process of allocation of personal budgets (i.e. how the amount of money given to them relates to their individual needs). This leads to comparisons between services provided for different social care customers and carers (e.g. some people claim that their friends in a similar situation to theirs receive more support from the Council).

"I know someone with the same disability who receives more services than I do." (social care customer)

4.7.2. Timescales and standards

Customers do not know what they can expect from services in terms of timescales and standards. They do not know how long the process should take, where they are in the process and who should be involved.

"The whole process took a long time. Thankfully, I was already receiving services and was waiting for my new services to be arranged, but had I been new to social care, I would really worry about not having help." (social care customer)

A lot of people said that in the past they had to wait for an assessment and for services to be arranged. Now they have to wait for an assessment / reassessment, wait for an allocation of a personal budget, wait for the support plan and finally wait for their services to be put in place (CRB checks for staff further elongate the last stage of this process).

Some social care customers commented that their experience of self-directed support was influenced by their broker – some brokers offer better support and are more creative than others. There is no consistency in the standard of services offered by the brokerage team.

4.7.3. Named contact person

There appears to be an inconsistency with regards to having a named contact person in Adult Social Care / Optalis. Following the implementation of the new adult social care pathway, some people were not aware that they would no longer have a named person (they thought that they still had a named social worker who would be dealing with their case), some people knew that they no longer have a named contact person and others said that they still had a named contact person who deals with all their enquiries. Those who did not have a named contact person said that they would like to have one as they do not know who to contact in the Council with specific enquiries.

Also, people find it easier and safer to talk to someone who is familiar to them and have empathy with their situation. One person who is in their early 20s has already had four workers. A carer commented that they have had six

workers within the last few years, so building a good rapport has not been possible.

"I wasn't aware that I would not have a named social worker. No information about this was given to me." (social care customer)

"We both feel it would be important to have a familiar face, someone who knew my son and us as a family rather than have to start all over again with each new worker". (carer)

"My son does not like change and it takes him a long time to trust someone so for him to have his views listened to it had to be with someone that knows him and he can trust". (carer)

4.7.4. Day care and supported living services provided by Optalis

On the whole, most people who use day care and supported living services have not noticed the change in management of these services or noticed any significant difference in the level of support services since the new adult social care pathway was introduced. For example, at Cockayne Court, minor changes have been observed such as closer links between residential and day centre activities and a new afternoon tea service. These changes were perceived by some to be positive, whereas others felt indifferent.

Residents at Cockayne Court commented that they are very satisfied with the level of support from staff and felt they had an input into the running of the place.

"Happy, friendly atmosphere, good choice of food." (Cockayne Court resident)

"Tea service offering sandwiches or doughnuts is a new service in the last few months with Optalis." (Cockayne Court resident)

Some people at Cockayne Court and Westmead said that they received a letter from Optalis about the changes, whereas others could not remember receiving such a letter (this does not mean that the letter was not sent to them). For example, at Westmead, only 5 out of 15 people had heard of Optalis and some of these people either did not know or misunderstood what Optalis was (for example, a couple of people said that Optalis was a private company).

"The Council set up Optalis to charge for social services." (social care customer)

4.8. Transport

A number of people said that taking part in activities was difficult due to the lack of / limited access to transport.

Moreover, there are inconsistencies around allocation of funding for transport in personal budgets. Some people are told to use their mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or their Motability car to go to activities whereas others are allocated money for transport even if they receive DLA. This is perceived by social care customers to be unfair and they would like more clarity around charges for transport.

4.9. Keeping safe

Everyone who took part in this review knew who to contact if they had any problems such as a change in their circumstances, breakdown in services or if they felt unsafe or abused. However, not everyone would contact statutory services directly. Some people rely on their relatives or professionals to solve any problems relating to their safety and well-being.

"I have fallen and needed to call for help twice last week. Someone at Cockayne Court then called social services for me." (social care customer)

"My daughter was stealing money from my bank account. My other daughter and the manager of my home helped to sort this out" (social care customer)

4.10. Prevention services

On the whole, there is a very low level of awareness of prevention services among older people, people with physical disabilities and carers. Even people who use them, do not know that they are commissioned by the Council. For example, an older carer uses the Crossroads sitting service and was not aware that this service is paid for by the Council, some carers do not even know that this service exists. A number of older people who took part in the review have not heard of the SHINE programme³.

Cockayne Court residents have a weekly seated exercise session, but feel that more physical activities would benefit them. No physical activities take place at WADE day centre and some people who took part in the interviews commented that they would greatly benefit from seated exercises if they were held at the day centre. Older people with restricted mobility find it impossible to take part in the SHINE programme.

³ The SHINE (Some Health Improvements Need Exercise) is a programme of physical activities for people over 50 living in Wokingham borough.

People with physical disabilities also commented on the lack of access to sport activities. Some people who attend Westmead day centre said that they greatly benefited from a programme of physical activities run by the Sports Development Team at the Loddon Valley Leisure centre. Unfortunately, this programme was stopped abruptly over a year ago due to the lack of resources.

Older people who use social care services, either use or are aware of assistive technology such as personal alarms. However, awareness of assistive technology was very low among people who do not receive support from the Council.

People with learning disabilities who took part in the review are aware of the prevention services commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council and a few people said they benefited greatly from services offered by Rose Buddies⁴ and the travel training.

4.11. Peer support and advocacy services

Most social care customers and carers have not been told about the Choice Champions peer support scheme by assessors or brokers. Some people found out about the Choice Champions scheme through their own social networks. Customers and carers commented during the review that they would find peer support very useful.

Similarly, there was a very low awareness of advocacy services. Some people thought that this service was only available to people with learning disabilities.

"I don't know what an advocacy service is – never heard of it." (social care customer)

4.12. Signposting – Wokingham Information Network (WIN)

The majority of people who took part in the review have not heard of WIN. Only 10% of people reported that they were aware of WIN although not all of them used WIN or knew what services it offered. Most places visited during the review, did not hold any information about WIN. There was an old poster at Westmead publicising the first anniversary of this service, but the poster did not offer any information about what WIN has to offer.

⁴ Rose Buddies is a social club run by Wokingham Borough Council as a prevention service for adults with learning disabilities who do not receive any services from adult social care. It runs a cooking group, an internet cafe and helps people learn how to use computers.

People who had used WIN complained that a lot of information is out of date. Some people commented that WIN is internet based and they do not have access to the internet. They did not realise that WIN also offered a telephone service.

*"I don't always find WIN easy to use or find the information I need."
(carer)*

4.13. Contacting social care services

Most people know how to contact adult social care services either directly or they would ask their family carer or support networks to contact social services on their behalf. Some people rely on other professionals such as a stroke nurse, occupational therapist, day centre staff or a community psychiatric nurse.

However, although people know how to contact the Council to enquire about adult social care services, a number of people (especially those with learning disabilities) commented that they find it difficult to speak to the right person. Also, some people reported that they would like to have a named person, rather than contacting a team.

4.14. Accessible information and communication

A number of social care customers and carers said that they were given leaflets and booklets about self-directed support, but did not know what information was relevant to them. Nobody used any of the leaflets produced by Wokingham Borough Council and Optalis to make informed choices about their services.

"When I first got in touch with social services, I received so much information, I could not process it all." (carer)

Some people said that they would like a leaflet that describes a customer journey (i.e. social care pathway) and what services they are entitled to. In addition, carers commented that they would like to see the carer's emergency card reinstated.

People with learning disabilities complained that publications about self-directed support are too wordy and difficult to understand and they are not in easy read / pictures. They also commented that information about their own services was too complicated, incorrect or inconsistent leading to confusion and anxiety.

A number of social care customers and carers said that the Council staff use a lot of jargon and therefore it is not always easy to understand the process of getting services.

“Communication and social skills can be lacking in staff carrying out assessments, which heightens anxiety.” (social care customer)

A lot of people said that they find it difficult to communicate with the Council as they do not know who to speak to. Also, some people commented that they do not receive responses to their emails.

Social care customers and carers also said that they have to repeat information about their circumstances over and over again as there is no continuity of staff and no exchange of information between different social care professionals they encounter during the process of getting care and support services.

Some carers commented that they are asked to submit information to the Council within very tight timescales and one carer described the tone of the Council's letters as threatening. One carer said that there was not enough notice given in a letter for a reassessment appointment.

“I received a letter saying they were coming the next day.” (carer)

Carers said that they would like to see copies of all documents relating to their assessment including those that are used to make decisions about the allocation of a personal budget.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Standards and timescales

Social care customers and carers do not know what they can expect from adult social care services in terms of standards relating to quality, timescales and frequency.

The process of getting a personal budget is very long as social care customers experience delays at each part of the process. In addition, reviews are irregular and inconsistent. Some reviews take place within the first year of receiving a personal budget, but most of the social care customers reported that they do not have annual reviews and they do not know when they are supposed to have them.

Recommended improvements

- Inform social care customers and carers of the standards and timescales relating to all aspects of the adult social care pathway.
- Ensure that reviews are carried out regularly and their format and duration reflect the changes in the social care customers' personal

circumstances (for example, some social care customers said that they would like a phone call rather than a formal meeting).

- In addition, the review of the back office functions and processes (carried out alongside the review of the experience of social care customers and carers), should address the following issues:
 - *Complex process and long delays in receiving services* - rather than experiencing a seamless service, social care customers and carers experience long delays at each part of the personal budget process (i.e. assessment, allocation of a personal budget, support planning and setting up their care and support services).
 - *Reported inconsistencies in charges for transport services, using prevention services to meet critical needs* – if any irregularities are found, they should be rectified to ensure that all social care customers receive transparent and equitable services.

5.2. Choice and control

Social care customers and carers are encouraged to take control of their services and choose how they want to use their personal budgets. However, this principle of choice does not apply to the brokerage service.

In addition, not all providers of care services offer flexible support and there are not many opportunities for shared support services.

Recommended improvements

- Offer more brokerage options (for example, sign post people to services provided by private and voluntary sector organisations). Guidelines on arranging own care and support should be offered to social care customers interested in self-brokerage.
- Information about opportunities for shared support should be available to brokers and social care customers (for example, through the Wokingham Borough Council's website).
- The Council should ensure that private and voluntary sector providers are flexible and offer support that is person centred rather than service centred through their commissioning and contracts arrangements.

5.3. Awareness of self-directed support among people with mental health problems and older people

The level of awareness of personal budgets is low among people with mental health problems. The same applies to older people, especially those who rely on their relatives to arrange care and support services on their behalf.

Recommended improvements

- Promote benefits of self-directed support in publications and ensure that assessors and brokers explain the different options of managing services to all social care customers.
- Involve Choice Champions in encouraging people to take up personal budgets (through a mentoring scheme).

5.4. The experience of assessment / reassessment

A number of social care customers are worried that they may say something during the assessment or reassessment that will have a negative impact on their services. Also, people are concerned that a reassessment inevitably leads to a reduction in services. Some people do not understand why they need a reassessment if their circumstances have not changed.

Recommended improvements

- Give social care customers copies of the assessment / reassessment form in advance of the assessment meeting, so they can prepare questions and be fully engaged.
- Clearly explain the eligibility criteria for social care services both verbally and in a leaflet.
- Explain to social care customers the reasons for reassessments.
- Services should not be discontinued or changed abruptly without enough notice being given to the social care customer or carer to appeal or make alternative arrangements.

5.5. Clear and accessible information about the adult social care pathway

There are a few publications outlining specific services or parts of the adult social care pathway, although some of them are out of date and none of them are in easy read. There is no publication outlining the adult social care pathway in its entirety.

Moreover, social care customers and carers are often given too much information and they do not always understand what is relevant to them.

Recommended improvements

- Produce a publication explaining in easy terms the different elements of the adult social care pathway.
- Clearly explain what Optalis is and why it was established (current leaflet about Optalis does not give enough information). Clarify which services are provided by Wokingham Borough Council and which services are provided by Optalis.
- Address gaps in public information, in particular, the roles of assessors and brokers and what can be expected of them, appeals and complaints, prevention and signposting (WIN).
- Produce information about specific services / aspects of the adult social care pathway in easy read for people with learning disabilities.
- Assessors and brokers should explain to social care customers and carers what information is important to them and when.
- Update Wokingham Borough Council's website to accurately reflect the new adult social care pathway.
- The carer's emergency card should be reinstated.

5.6. Communication with the Council

Social care customers find it difficult to communicate with the Council as they do not know who to speak to. They would like to have a named person who knows them and can respond to their enquiries.

In addition, social care customers reported that the Council and Optalis employees use a lot of jargon when talking to them about their services and written information is often complex.

Recommended improvements

- Information about social care customers should be kept up to date, so they do not have to repeat the same information to various members of staff. This should be addressed through the review of internal processes.
- Ensure that all social care customers know how to contact social care services and speak to staff who will be able to help them with their enquiry (information about this should be published in leaflets and letters).
- Provide an online course or a workshop on communication skills for Wokingham Borough Council and Optalis staff.
- Write all publications and correspondence in plain English (free online tools are available to assist with this).

5.7. Awareness of signposting, prevention and support services

There is a low level of awareness of the Wokingham Information Network (WIN) as well as advocacy services and peer support among social care customers and carers. In addition, not many potential and existing social care customers are aware of prevention services.

Recommended improvements

- All social care staff in the Council's statutory services and Optalis should be responsible for alerting the WIN team of any new services / changes to the existing ones.
- Services provided by WIN and customer experience should be reviewed to ensure that the service meets the needs of the existing and potential customers.

- Promote WIN services to existing and potential social care customers. New posters and other publicity materials should be produced to replace out of date information. The telephone services should be publicised more effectively as currently, most people think that this is an internet based service only.
- Ensure that information about prevention services is widely available (Wokingham Borough Council website, presentations at partnership boards and newsletters and engagement with the Voluntary Sector Forum).
- Assessors and brokers should tell social care customers and carers about the advocacy services and the peer support scheme.

6. Conclusion

From numerous comments made during the review of the customers' experience, it is apparent that Wokingham Borough Council's social care customers greatly benefit from the flexibility and personalisation of their care and support. Being able to choose own support services and having control over who provides these services has been described by social care services as "empowering" and "life changing".

The adult social care pathway was transformed last year to make it easier for people to access prevention services and personal budgets. However, a number of social care customers and carers find the process of applying for a personal budget and arranging services long and at times confusing. There is a lack for clarity about what services are provided, how long each part of the process of getting a personal budget should take and what is involved at each stage.

Although the process of getting a personal budget or making changes to the existing services has been described by many as "long" and "strenuous", since the new adult social care pathway was introduced here has been no deterioration in the level and quality of care and support services received by social care customers. Most people are not even aware of the separation of the statutory services (provided by the Council) from brokerage and other support services (provided by Optalis).

Everyone who took part in the review knew how to contact adult social care services in an emergency and they were also aware of who to contact with any safeguarding issues. However, on the whole social care customers and carers find it difficult to communicate with the Council about issues relating to their personal services and a number of people reported that they do not know who to speak to.

The customer journey can be improved by providing clear and accessible information, ensuring that customers are aware of what they can expect from the Council and Optalis in terms of timescale, frequency and standard of services and offering better support with understanding and accessing services.

Wokingham Borough Council Response

This report was commissioned as part of a review of the new Adult Social Care Pathway in Wokingham which was implemented in 2011. This new pathway was conceived and designed to achieve greater personalisation for all our social care customers and enable them to have more choice and control over their care and support arrangements. It does this through availability of personal budgets to all *and tailored support which better meets individual needs, preferences and lifestyles.*

I welcome this report and the valuable insight it gives into the experiences of our customers in this new way of working. I'm very pleased that many people are taking the opportunity to *direct and manage their own support and are now enjoying the benefits that this more personalised approach can offer.* However, I also recognise that there are clearly still improvements to be made in refining our processes and practice to make for a better customer experience.

We know from this report that we need to help our customers have an improved understanding of the way in which the process works and that they know what they can expect. This includes making sure that people receive good information at the right time and that we respond in timely and satisfactory way when people need vital care and support

The recommendations of this report will now be considered and actions will be taken forward through our pathway improvement project sponsored and overseen by the Leadership Team. We will of course continue to engage with our customers to ensure that the improvements made achieve the right results. In addition we will also be working with our customers and partners to develop a Local Account to be published early next year that will report on our progress and achievements, as well as our priorities going forward.

Lastly I would like to take opportunity to thank all those who gave their time in contributing their views and experiences which now help us to ensure that all our customers can benefit from the improvements we make.

Mike Wooldridge
Senior Manager – Improvement and Performance

The Wokingham LINK (Local Involvement Network)

The Wokingham LINK (Local Involvement Network) is an independent body of voluntary workers. We listen to the health and social care concerns of people living in all areas of the *Wokingham Borough* and investigate them. We recognise people's views about the need for improvements in local care services, and will tell the council and local health services what has been discovered and make recommendations. The council and the local health services are legally obliged to give the LINK information it asks for, and to respond to recommendations made.

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