

TITLE	Update on Healthwatch report regarding Carers in Wokingham Borough
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 March 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Wesley Hedger, Assistant Director People Commissioning/Simon Broad, Assistant Director Adult Social Care

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Wokingham Borough Council welcomes the recommendations presented by Healthwatch to Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The recommendations align to the Adult Social Care Carers Strategy. Carers play a key role in society and Wokingham Borough Council wants to ensure that those people who provide unpaid care for others are better identified and supported, including being able to have a quality of life where they are able to have a life outside of caring, they can meet with friends or family, be in employment and take part in recreational activities and interests.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Healthwatch recommendations are to be incorporated within the work of the Carers Strategic group.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council recognises the importance of carers, which is acknowledged through our co-produced carers strategy, aiming to support carers to achieve good health and wellbeing and a high quality of life.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough published 'Caring during Covid: The experiences of unpaid carers in a global pandemic' in Autumn 2021. The report made several recommendations for improving carer support in the Borough, including actions for Wokingham Borough Council, the Clinical Commissioning group and GP practices. Commissioners gave a summary of this report to Wokingham Integrated Partnership in February 2022 and included a provisional action plan.

This report gives an update on progress on the action plan, including dates for delivery for WBC actions. We welcome the recommendations from Healthwatch and are pleased that they align with the priorities within our strategy.

Background

Our collective vision is to enable all carers in Wokingham, children, young people and adults, to be able to access the support they need and to be recognised and valued in their community. Our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be the best borough for young carers and adult carers to live, a Borough where they feel safe and are well supported, are valued and included as a key part of our community. Carers are

supported via carers assessments undertaken by the Borough and a range of commissioned services, including one to one support, respite and carers' breaks, and groups, activities and trips for carers, according to their personal needs.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough published 'Caring during Covid: The experiences of unpaid carers in a global pandemic' in Autumn 2021. The report made several recommendations for improving carer support in the Borough, including:

- A collaborative campaign between local health and social care organisations to identify hidden carers, review GP support, increase support and respite, and continue successful covid initiatives
- WBC to publish written guidance for direct payment recipients for both online customers and those who are digitally excluded
- Prioritise provision and uptake of respite
- GP practices to ensure WBC know about individual carers when they are identified (there is a disparity in numbers at present)

(Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, 2021)

Healthwatch's report included recommendations for the CCG, including updating information on surgery websites and better information about registering as a carer.

Wokingham Borough Council presented an initial response was presented to Wokingham Integrated Partnership Leadership Board in February 2022. The attached presentation provides an updated response with timescales for (see Appendix 1).

Analysis of Issues

Wokingham Borough Council have reviewed these recommendations and have provided an outline of current activity and future actions to be considered by Adult Social Care:

1. Identify Hidden Carers

Action undertaken: Welfare calls to over 1000 carers were made in January 2022 by WBC. As a result, new carers were identified and people who were no longer in a caring role were removed from the database. A data validity exercise comparing lists of carers held by WBC and commissioned providers to ensure accuracy commenced February 2022.

Additional activity: Following this, a 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) project has been devised that puts extra resource into identifying hidden carers. The project works with our existing carer services provider, TuVida, and has a focus on improving the mental health and resilience of existing carers as well as identifying hidden carers in seldom heard groups. The KIT project commences March 2022 for an initial 12 month pilot period.

2. Improve GP surgery support

This recommendation was assigned to Healthwatch, and an update will be provided by them.

3. Increase information and support to known carers

Activity undertaken: Adult Social Care are currently reviewing the Wokingham Community Directory and will ensure information and support for carers is meaningful and accessible. The report recommendation of reviewing carers information packs was discussed at Carers Strategic group; colleagues had found that information packs are not an effective way of disseminating information and support offers as the paperwork is often discarded unread. However ASC are looking at innovative ways of increasing the support and information to known carers including commissioning Project Joy, an information platform and referral app for service users to connect with all registered services in the Borough including carers services.

Additional activity: We are working with TuVida, our commissioned carers services provider, to improve their knowledge of the Care Act so that carers receive better quality information, advice and guidance. Commissioners are currently working on service improvement with TuVida so that carers in Wokingham receive an improved support offer that meets their personal needs. This work is due to complete by 30th June 2022 and the carers services contracts will continue providing high quality support on an ongoing basis after that.

4. Continue what worked well during the Covid period

Activity undertaken: Welfare calls initiated during the Covid period demonstrated the need for anticipatory care, ensuring that service users who suddenly escalate to crisis point remain in touch with services and are supported to maintain their caring role. Wokingham Borough Council's community response to covid was wide ranging and included support to young carers and working carers.

Additional activity: Anticipatory care will be delivered via the KIT project to ensure more carers are supported in their caring role Commissioned services are strengthening their Young Carers offer and increase support to working carers via faster assessments and increased staffing capacity.

5. WBC to publish written guidance for direct payment recipients

Activity: A review on Direct Payments arrangements, to strengthen current practice, will take place in Adult Social Care in March/ April 2022.

6. Prioritise provision and uptake of respite options

Respite is already considered in care planning following assessments and carers' assessments.

7. Carers information on GP websites to be updated

Activity undertaken: Commissioners have worked with CCG to include the correct information on websites via a copied link.

Additional activity: Adult Social Care will continue to consider the link between CCG and WBC websites as a dynamic process.

8. End disparity between numbers of carers registered with GPs and number registered with WBC

Activity undertaken: As part of this work, a data validity exercise commenced in February 2022. While we anticipate the bulk of the work will be completed this spring, the KIT project and better communication between GPs and WBC will ensure that records are accurate and signposting in place within the next 12 months. This is an ongoing piece of work to ensure that our records of carers remain accurate and up to date.

The recommendations will be incorporated into the work of the Carers Strategic Group as part of the strategy implementation. The work will be carried out via the workstream groups for each strategic priority and monitored via the Wokingham Integration Partnership Leadership Board, which feeds into the Health and Wellbeing Board. Wokingham Borough Council are grateful to Healthwatch for the opportunity to put the work of the strategy into focus.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	KIT project - £140,000 (provisional)	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	TBC (if pilot is successful, cost will recur) (provisional)		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	TBC (as above) (provisional)		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications

Unpaid carers are statistically more likely to experience adverse outcomes including poorer health and poverty. As well as the Adult Social Care strategy, effectively meeting carers' needs cuts across Public Health priorities and the Anti-Poverty strategy; improvement in these areas will raise the general health and wellbeing of not only carers as a group but the general population.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to PSED has been taken. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the VCS procurement commissioning carers services. This EqIA can be refreshed with the carers implementation plan.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Appendix 1: HOSC ppt 160322

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