

Community Care Services: Eligibility Criteria Consultation

Staff Meeting 24th January 2007

Question/issue: Social workers can overplay people's needs to make sure they qualify if they don't want to get uncomfortable with the service user. Having eligibility criteria can take away a collaborative approach. The social worker becomes the gatekeeper of resources.

Response: If you need to target resources then need you need eligibility criteria.

Question/issue: If we don't give people what they want they may go to their councillor and get the service anyway.

Response: We are carrying out this consultation work on behalf of the Council. If the proposals to change our eligibility criteria to better target our recourses are agreed by the Executive then our expectation is that councillors will sign-up to the new arrangements. If people are not happy with any decision we make they have a right to make a complaint if they wish to.

Question/issue: We support people with 'Low' needs now and navigate them to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), for example. People need this support and advocacy to access other services.

Response: We need to do some preventative work to avoid future problems. Therefore we may decide to help people in the short term even if they don't meet our criteria. We also need to promote people's independence rather than their dependence on us. There is a balance to be struck. Also it may not be us who provides help but voluntary organisations which people can access themselves. We need to write some good guidance to help staff help people who come to us.

Question/issue: What about charges for services!? If we put people in touch with other organisations who charge they can't benefit from us waiving our charges or providing services at a discounted rate!

Response: Yes, it's a risk. We need to develop a safety net. Also some people don't want to come to us for help but would much prefer a service from a voluntary organisation.

Question/issue: If we don't provide services to people with lower needs then this could lead to us having to do more crisis work in the future!

Response: We will need to develop a prevention strategy to avoid this. There are many organisations that offer help and we need to help people find alternatives to us.

Question/issue: Which organisations will pick these people up? The CAB is difficult to access. Are we going to attract other organisations to provide this help?

Response: Some voluntary services already exist but we need to identify the gaps in services and fill them.

Question/issue: It feels like we're moving into health care/nursing care and losing social care services and social care skills.

Response: We will still provide social care services but we need to target our resources on those that need them most!

Question/issue: How will you implement any new criteria?

Response: We will need to develop proper guidance and training for staff on a model of care that promotes people's independence and the uptake of preventative services.

Question/issue: How is this going to save money? Assets are expensive!

Response: We want to target our resources and signpost people to other services better rather than just save money. In the longer term we will save money some money by not providing all the services ourselves.

Question/issue: Screening people on the phone is dangerous and unreliable. How are you planning to assess people's eligibility?

Response: Yes, we need to strike a balance. We cannot assess everyone so some people may need to be screened over the phone. We will need to develop some guidance on this. Once people know how any new system works they will be more likely to access services directly themselves rather than come thorough us. Also there is an equity issue, for example, more women then men use our Day Services at the moment. You may get more men using services if they had direct access to them!

Question/issue: Can't we look at our charging policy again to save money? Some people can afford to pay a lot more.

Response: We have no plans to revise this at the moment. We want to keep these two areas separate.

Question/issue: If you no longer provide services to people with 'Low' and 'Moderate' needs, then hospital discharges may be delayed.

Response: It depends how we write the guidance. Maybe we could offer our services to people in this category but put a time limit on the care and support we provide. We don't want to refuse people services if this costs us more in the long run.

Question/issue: I worked in the Sutton Age Concern discharge team and we used to check with people to make sure they were ok with their shopping and so on. This service was very helpful to people and to social workers.

Response: Yes, this kind of preventative service is good. We will need to think about this kind of approach if our eligibility criteria changes. We also need a good information strategy similar to the one they have in St Helens local authority where they keep a data base of all local services. There is too much information available for social workers to keep in their heads, particularly around welfare benefits, so this approach is a good solution.

Question/issue: But it is part of the social work role to know about welfare benefits!

Response: Is it? We need to think creatively about what we do and how we do it and if there are better alternatives.

Question/issue: the local Pensions Service will provide awareness of benefits for social workers and where to go for more information.

Question/issue: How much will you save if you introduce new criteria?

Response: We think around £100, 000 per year.

Question/issue: Where will people go for help and preventative services other than Age Concern?

Response: We will need to look at the gaps in local preventative services. This will form part of our prevention strategy.

Question/issue: We will need clear guidance because the Government's Fair Access to Care Services criteria is too vague.

Response: Yes we are starting to look at this and some training and will involve staff and service users in the process but we do not want to be too prescriptive. We are looking to develop some principles that will allow professionals to exercise their judgement.

Question/issue: The guidance needs to be succinct and easy to understand for both staff and service users and we need to stick to it, including the councillors.

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