

Notes of a meeting with the Blind & Visually Impaired Service User Group for Somerset County Council Adult Social Care.

Thursday 3rd April 2008. SAIN Offices in Taunton.



PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING

Respond to a number of topics Adult Social Care (also known as Social Services)

- Topic 1: Response from Social Services to previous Consultation in 2007
- Topic 2: User expectation of Social workers/social services
- Topic 3: Social Service Standard Equipment List for Hard Of Hearing service user.
- Topic 4: Perceptions of Day Services
- Topic 5: Other issues



INTRODUCTION

Participants talked about their experience of Social Services. Five of the participants have had contact with Social Services in the last twelve months with regard to own personal needs. Others had made contact in their occupational roles or on behalf of friends and relatives. All participants consider themselves a 'live client' of Social Services. Each participant spoke about their current experience of Social Services:

- “[Social Services] used to write to me every 6 months or so but now they don't do that - I ring them if I need

anything”

- “I use the frozen meal service [Wiltshire Farm Foods] but it was along time before anybody came – if you use it through the County they will lend you a freezer”
- “I was very impressed with a visit from a trainee social worker and we had a very interesting conversation – I think a shortage of staff is the real problem. They have quite a load these social workers”
- “Always a satisfactory experience for me”
- “I broke a bone and needed a help but unfortunately because I have no social worker allocated to me I ended up staying with friends. I did not ring for help because my home help and neighbours doubted the honesty of the people I met get to provide assistance. If I had a social worker I might have acted differently”
- “After moving here [to Somerset] I made one call [to Social Services] and it was extremely good in the Taunton area. After that initial visit I was well looked after and the service was better than where I came from”.
- “I could not tell you that last time I had personal contact with a social worker”



Notes and responses from Social Services Report feedback from the meeting in 2007

Participants briefly considered the response from Social Services to the previous consultation in 2007 with an opportunity to update on any items.

Information outlets

Participants were invited to update useful sources of information. In particular:

- Many of the group were unfamiliar with Somerset Direct, the Community Services for Adults and Older People. Their contact number is 0845 345 9133.
- West Somerset Advice Bureau was also mentioned. Their number is 01643 704624.
- Participants were confused about services that may have a geographical focus (e.g. social services) and with services that are Somerset-wide (e.g. Somerset Direct). The implication of this to participants was a lack clarity and therefore trust as to who is actually providing services to meet their needs.
- Somerset Association for the Blind continues to be important to most of the group for advice, signposting and support.

Adult Social Care (Social Services) Newsletter

- Participants are keen to know when the newsletter, promised for early 2008, will be available and questioned how people will receive copies.
- Participants were keen that more articles are submitted from Social Services to the newsletter of Somerset Association for the Blind – no participant remembered their article mentioned in the consultation response.

Websites

- Four participants use websites to varying abilities. All those four have used the County Council website but their view of it is that it is not 'very accessible'. Only one person has used the 'hearing and sight' section of the County Council website but using this always requires personal assistance.
- The publications section of Adult Social Care (Social Services) sight section does not have functional links to 'sight related' publications

Getting in touch with Social Workers

- No recent problems experienced



USER EXPECTATIONS OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE (SOCIAL SERVICES)

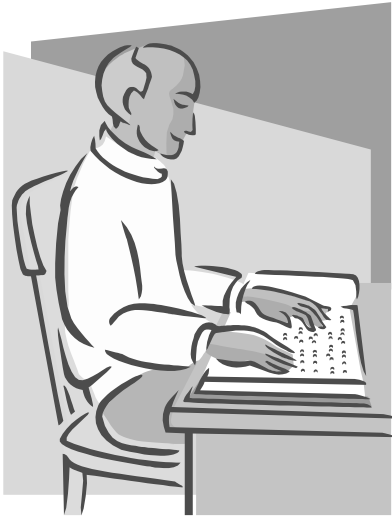
Participants were asked about their current expectation of Social Services. Participants comments

- Concern expressed about how easy it is to fall off the client list
- Many participants were unclear about when they 'fall off' the live client list and someone were surprised they no longer have an assigned social worker.
- There is no periodic contact from the social worker
- Concern for those that are not a 'live client' whose condition deteriorates but are unable to call for help?

Extracts of participants comments are outlined below:

- "I know social workers have a big caseload but a good social worker will learn their patch and know the clients that need extra support. The way social workers work has changed and their styles of help have changed. Today it requires the client to call for help where once social workers would have made the periodic checks themselves"
- "I would like to see social services being more proactive so that they contact people to see if everything is fine". Another participant suggested "Regular emails to people that can use them could be a useful way of keeping in touch with clients or those no longer on the client list"
- "I always had a really good service, but now the service seems limited. I don't need my social workers as much as I used to use them but the social worker is there when in want them or an assistant is there. They have determined the degree of contact they make but my needs may change in the future"
- "Whenever we need help, social services come and are very helpful. I can see a point with some cases who need help but are not confident about making contact with social services. There should be a follow up. I know one lady who needs new equipment but she is apprehensive about making contact with social services, mainly due to her age. It would be easier if someone kept in contact now and again."
- "The sad thing is that social services is changing but nobody can help that. It is difficult making contact with a living person but they are helpful as a rule, particularly if you take an interest in their work too – they are human beings after after all. When you see a County Councillor we really should tell them to spend more but that puts the rates up"

- “Personally social workers view me as someone who does not need support, and then they expect me to contact them when I need help. I think that’s wrong. I may need support but not sure whether I can or cannot seek help. I see the change in the role of social workers, which these days are done by other agencies. Social services could be more creative about how they keep in contact service users. It does not have to be a social worker who contacts people periodically, it could be another organisation on their behalf.”
- “I get a letter every year to check if I need anything from South Somerset office” This was not common experience to other participants
- “We have monthly club organised by someone but we feel people that Burnham on Sea does not have much arranged for them compared to people in Bridgwater and Taunton. Most people don’t make much effort to get involved and get a bit isolated”
- “My circumstances have changed significantly but social services probably don’t know that and because I have not had contact for so long, my neighbours and home help have discouraged me to make contact because of the uncertainty of who would come.”
- “My wife is my carer but she does not get carers allowance. So I contacted social services who arranged for someone to come and see us and they advised ‘we have too much money in the bank’”
- “I understand you have to have around £20,000 or less in savings before you can get help. That’s not easy when it is not clear what big bills you have around the corner, funeral expense for example. Someone will have to pay it”
- “Although my neighbours are good I would not want to trouble them. I would contact social services if I need to contact them”



Equipment

Participants were asked their views about the Standard Equipment List. This list contains equipment available on personal loan from Social Services for as long as required by the client.

- Most participants have assumed items are free of charge but not everyone knew that.
- Most participants did not know whether the standard list items are generally available to them – if they are no longer a 'live client' can they still ask for items?
- The group considered each item and give their collective view

General approval

- Liquid level indicators -

- Bump on to cooker control
- Writing frames
- Cooking time
- Talking watches
- Tactile watches
- Easy to see watch
- Talking clocks
- White walking sticks

Less clear support

- Signature guides
- Envelope guides
- Heavy lined writing paper

Not clear about what this item is

- Type scopes
- Pocket recorder for recording messages
- Symbol canes
- Anti glare shields
- Talking watches
- Tactile watches
- Easy to see watch

ITEMS NOT MENTIONED ON THE LIST

- Task lighting (Livel Lamp)
- Magnifiers
- Talking calendar

Other comments

- One participant queried the cost of these 'standard items' to the service user as they have had to privately purchase most of them and they are in regular contact with their social worker. Contrary to that another participant from within the same Social Services Locality team has had many of the standard items free of charge.

There was concern of inconsistencies within teams as well as between different teams across Somerset.

- There was a significant level of agreement that participants did not know about this standard equipment list.
- It must be pointed out that participants are cautious about saying items are not relevant as their needs are not representative of all visually impaired people.
- Other items such as a suitable small chair – not specifically for visual impaired – had to be purchased privately. Two participants mentioned that a trolley was recently loaned from Mediquip on permanent loan, and these are not specific to visually impaired people.
- The group were asked whether Social Services should provide low cost items which are generally available in shops
- The group felt strongly that this standard list must be retained and updated as products come on to the market. There are concerns however that people do not have access to these items because ;
 - participants from different areas appear to be getting a different service
 - awareness of the list is dependent on when you get assessed
 - its not clear whether the user or the social worker have access to this list
 - guidance and creative solutions are needed to help people access more expensive equipment, such as low or interest free loans
 - people should have the option of buying the options too.
- On the Adult Social Care (Social Services) website it says that ‘We provide a wide range of specialist aids and equipment. Contact us for further information.’ The website does not specify what equipment is available and on what terms. Participants are easily deterred if terms are not clear.
- The Livel Lamps are not bright enough and need a halogen bulb
- Also organisations such as CAB or CVS that maybe able to help find grants to enable individuals to access expensive equipment, for example ex-services may get financial assistance.



Day Services

There were no participants that use day services so the group discussed their perceptions and expectations of day services.

Perceptions about current day service provision

- For elderly and frail people
- For physically disabled
- People who cannot get out very much
- People not safe to be left at home alone without a carer
- For carers that need respite
- People who sit around and play bingo and chat
- Only for people who are out of work
- Providing stimulating things to do
- For people with learning difficulties
- Not really for people with sensory loss

Thoughts about the future development of day services...

- Should be innovative and personalised
- Should be for people either in or out of work
- Organised around what people actually want to do rather than organised activities
- I would like them to organise exercise
- I would like something like 'Golden Oldies' where they exercise to pop music
- Should be a service tailored around what 'you want to do'
- The group reflected on whether any other agency currently provides this signposting to personalised activities. Nobody could think of an agency providing this service already
- Transport to personalised activities is seen as a major barrier to participation in activities. Community Transport was mentioned by one participant but others felt that was limited to those that are mobile and somewhat independent.
- Personal assistance is also a major requirement to overcome the barrier to participation.
- Participants living in towns think there is a shortage of activities.
- One participant raised the possible difference between rural and urban service users, however another participant believed even in their large market town there is a lack of facilities compared to Bridgwater and Taunton



Other issues

The group were invited to share any general points that may be of interest to others in the group.

- Paramedic services – Two participants shared concerns of Paramedic services having difficulties finding addresses in rural areas. Participants felt that if Paramedics also used the patients name then neighbours can direct them to the right house as opposed to using house names which are often less familiar.
- The group shared information about walking groups, gardening, clubs and societies
- Talking Telephone Bill via BT was valued because BT phones the customer with details about the bill is and asks about any problems I am having with their service. For more information on this please contact BT on 0800 919 591.
- One participant made enquiries about changing their telephone contract to Talk Talk service but the sales person could not confirm access to the “195 service”. BT's 195 service provides a free directory information service and onward connection on request for customers who are blind or disabled to the extent where they are unable to use a Phone Book. One participant understands the law says all providers must make this service available. To register for this service contact BT on 0800 587 0195, you do not have to be a BT customer.
- One participant wanted to let others know about a free of charge bus pass they just have secured available to use.
- Another participant was concerned that their new bus pass has been issued without the facility for a ‘companion pass’ for personal assistance. Other participants were aware of this and concerned the criteria for allowing companions to accompany them free of charge had been changed without either consultation or proper notification. Other participants are concerned about this when they have their pass reissued in future. The guidance said that if people were eligible for a ‘companion pass’ in the past this would continue but for one participant this had been discontinued.
- There was support for increasing the frequency of these consultation meetings because “people gain an awful of knowledge” and we enjoy feeding back information to Social Services.
- Participants were concerned about the increased cost of “0845” numbers being used by Council services
- One participant wanted to alert everyone to a website called “Say no to 0870” which gives an alternative geographic number. Having investigated this unfortunately it appears to be a service that you can only access via a computer (www.saynoto0870.com)
- Participants were keen to know whether “Changing Focus” – a publication for advice and information by Somerset County Council being updated? How will people with a visual impairment know when its available?