

Key Findings

We have listed below the key findings from the consultation;

Information and Services

- People do not know what services are available and do not have sufficient information, particularly regarding Somerset Direct. There is a need for more advertising of the services available. The name Somerset Direct does not explain what service they provide. A name change would help improve access.
- A view was expressed that the white Somerset Direct leaflet does not fully explain what they do “as soon as you see it you think of government and council tax”.
- The benefits of having peer support and sharing information were raised across all meetings. One person with sensory loss contributed “when I went deaf I asked my social worker if anyone else in the area had a hearing loss that I could pal with...they said they couldn't tell me... that is what we need”.
- There was a strong feeling that you only get to find out about services through meetings like this.
- People would like to have help with shopping and think that Social Service should provide emotional and practical support and support vulnerable people that don't have family or friends.
- Help with upkeep of property inside and outside is also an extra service some would like provided.
- There is disappointment that domestic support is no longer provided unless paid for privately and it is felt that this puts a strain on carers.
- How do people contact the FAB Teams – many would like to access this service.
- Respite services provided for carers and their families are felt to be very valuable and direct payments have enabled some to do recreational activities.
- Direct Payments are not fully understood by some. A Social Worker wasn't sure how Direct Payments are done and one participant phoned A4E to enquire about Carers DP – they said to go back to the Social Worker. Another had a visit from A4E and said “they didn't tell me what I could use the money for or what forms I had to fill in... I don't really understand it”.
- Confusion exists over advocacy services. A carer explained that a referral was needed before A4E could help with a holiday.
- Difficulties were expressed in knowing which services are provided for which type of person. This was particularly difficult for those with multiple impairments and regarding advocacy services.

- Services provided by Age Concern and Citizens Advice were praised. Knowledge was shared that Age Concern appeared cheaper for piper line.

Assessments and Social Workers

- A lack of knowledge of what people are entitled to at the assessment stage.
- Inconsistencies between Social Workers occur when some say they can provide things and other 'won't/can't do that'.
- The service provided by OT's was praised for the knowledge of equipment out there.
- Concerns that the value of the services depends on the Social Worker and how good they are.
- The need for a named Social Worker to ensure continuity. This would also help some feel they can phone Adult Social Care if they have a named person.
- The need for more regular reviews.
- Who should people contact to request a review?
- Some people feel they cannot ask for an assessment.
- There appears to be general confusion over the differences between the various assessments for care and benefits.
- Many had concerns that having an assessment could affect benefits.
- Concerns that nothing would happen and that information has to be repeated when cases have been closed.
- More understanding of a person's age and/or disability is required. Frustrations occur when people are asked to repeat traumatic experiences. When Social Workers change and information hasn't been passed on, users feel uncomfortable when they have to repeat information.
- Need to ensure Social Workers are trained about long term or severe disabilities.
- The need to listen more to individuals was raised as an issue, particularly when people were told they needed equipment which they felt they did not need.
- What happens when a case is closed and the service user is not satisfied that the problem has been resolved?
- There is a feeling that departments don't communicate with each other.
- A need for more understanding of people with hidden disabilities such as angina and diabetes.
- People had experienced difficulties in getting an assessment when they had been removed from the current list. Some thought that you are removed if you are not in contact for 5 years?

- In some cases reviews had not taken place when expected. One person was still waiting for a review following receipt of a Disabled Facilities Grant approx. one year ago.
- Many felt that reviews weren't frequent enough and that cases shouldn't be closed.
- Several thought annual reviews would be about the right frequency for them or six monthly if they are followed up.
- More choice of dates and times for reviews is required.
- Of those familiar with the system they feel they can request a review if circumstances change. Those who are unfamiliar with the system felt they would find things difficult.
- A need for a referral system when people move into a new area.

Complaints

- More available information on the complaints procedure was requested.
- The need for an independent complaints procedure (such as PALS).
- Some experiences of using advocacy services and tribunals to get a complaint resolved were shared. One participant had gone to two tribunals and had used Shelter and CAB to get the help they required.
- A feeling that nothing would happen if you did complain and that you get pushed from 'pillar to post'.
- There was a concern that you cannot get hold of an advocate to help with issues like this anymore.
- When people live in sheltered or extra care housing who should they complain to?
- Of those that had made a complaint there was a feeling that it took a long time to be resolved.

Methods Of Contact

- There is a need for alternative methods of contacting Adult Social Care;
- Concern over the costs of 0845 numbers
- One to one contact - a drop-in service as well as a call centre, moved around the county. A one stop shop for services.
- E mail – can you contact Somerset Direct this way?
- Alternative methods of contact are important for people with hearing impairments, and a preference for one to contact was expressed, as "text phones can cut out when picking up signals from other phones".
- Telephone is the preferred method of contact for many followed by face to face or in writing.
- When e mail or letters were used better responses had been received. Some had used friends to e mail Social Services to help get a

response and this had worked, however many do not have access to a computer.

- There was a general feel that messages left on answer machines were not responded to. Many had got through to answer machines when trying to phone.

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Pride..I don't think I am disabled enough.
- Lack of face to face contact. You have to always deal with different people.
- The need to be listened to more, treated as an individual and not felt like a number/category.
- A lack of verbal and communication skills, made some feel they do want to bother.
- Some conditions (such as chronic fatigue) make people feel too tired to deal with it all.
- Concern that it will lead to a loss of independence and that services may be forced upon them.
- For those with visual impairments literature "should be Arial 14 and left justified and must avoid background colours".

Other Issues

- Transport continues to be an issue. The cost of community transport schemes has increased and is not necessarily cheaper than taxis. There are also problems in getting transport where other services such as Slinky are not provided in all areas of the County.

Recommendations

There is a definite need to increase awareness of the services provided by Adult Social Care. Consideration should be given to how to best reach the target audience i.e. people with a hearing impairment may find telephone contact difficult, older people may not be as familiar with internet information and written literature may not be accessible to people with visual impairments.

Recommendations to resolve this includes;

- Renaming Somerset Direct would increase awareness of the services provided by them. Some names to consider could be; Somerset Information Line, Social Services Directory, Som Direct Information or the Disability Information Service.
- Use of an 0300 number as opposed to an 0845 number which can be costly for those on inclusive minutes packages and callers from mobile phones.

- Provide information in various ways to accommodate the access needs of individuals. Accessible formats for literature to be readily available, an e mail service such as regular bulletin on Adult Social Care services. A drop in service that could be a mobile outreach service held at regular intervals at set locations around the county every six weeks or so, and ensure it's communicated when its coming so that everyone gets a chance to visit. Also move the location for those in rural areas.
- Using local media creatively to publicise the services i.e. HTV local channels, local independent radio, publications such as The Networker.
- Improved partnership working between Adult Social Care and local health care services to enable information concerning Adult Social Care services to be given to people at the point of diagnosis i.e. Information packs at GP surgeries about all services.
- The provision of more coherent and compelling information. Service users should be consulted with prior to the launch of any information to ensure that they understand the message that is being conveyed i.e. one brochure that details all of the advocacy services available so that people can make an informed choice about which service is appropriate for them.
- Leaflets at the assessment stages to inform people what's available would ensure that people were able to access all services relevant to them, thereby improving their quality of life.

Adult Social Care services need to be designed to be user friendly and flexible in order to meet the needs of individuals. Recommendations include;

- Consulting with service users whenever services are being developed, reviewed or introduced.
- The provision of a named Social Worker and direct dial telephone numbers to ensure continuity. This could be supported by the provision of a business card or contact details within a small 'welcome' pack on their first visit from a Social Worker.
- Reviews based around the needs of the individual particularly in terms of frequency.
- Detailed explanations given to service users about the assessment and review process so that they feel that they are included in the planning and delivery of their support. It is particularly important that the need to repeat information about the service users situation is minimised as this can be traumatic and frustrating.
- Those delivering Adult Social Care Services need an increased awareness of all types of disabilities, specifically those with hidden disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health problems.

- All service users to be offered a FAB benefits assessment to ensure that they are accessing all relevant benefits for them.
- Closer working partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to improve access to services i.e. improving choice so that people can get services, information and support from a range of organisations that they feel are relevant to them.
- A clear and available complaints procedure that is independent from Adult Social Care in order for people to feel comfortable. There needs to be a commitment to ensure that all cases are dealt with and an appeals process available to those who feel that the outcome is unsatisfactory.
- Ensuring Adult Social Care services are designed so that people feel that they are approachable. Many people delay contacting Adult Social Care as they feel that 'they are not disabled enough'. This can lead to peoples conditions deteriorating unnecessarily before they access support which could prevent such deterioration.