

Impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in relation to Carers – response to the call for evidence from Social Care Wales

Introduction

This response is from Social Care Wales.

Social Care Wales was established (under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2014) in April 2017 bringing together social care workforce regulation, workforce development and service improvement in one organisation. We will have an influential role in shaping research priorities and building strong links with stakeholders to improve care and support. Social Care Wales also has a responsibility for the development of the workforce in the social care and early years sector. Our work aims to support the priorities for the well-being of future generations for the sector, the public and Welsh Government.

Our three strategic aims below define what we do:

- providing public confidence
- leading and supporting improvement
- developing the workforce

In our strategic plan for 2017-22 we acknowledge that more can be done to support unpaid carers who it is estimated provide 96% of the care in Wales enabling vulnerable, sick and disabled people to maintain their independence and continue living at home (Social Care Wales, 2017).

One of our primary roles in relation to carers is supporting the paid workforce to work effectively with carers. We do this by setting standards for the workforce, influencing the design and delivery of qualifications for social care workers, regulating social work training, publishing learning resources, setting research priorities and commissioning some specific research projects. In addition we contribute to the improvement of services across the sector including to carers and the people they support. We are contributing to the recently established Ministerial Advisory Group for Carers.

Should you require further information please contact:

[Redacted contact information]

The impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act on carers

Our role preparing the workforce to implement the Act 2015 - 2018

As Care Council, we were asked to develop a national learning plan for the Act and create a website to hold all resources about the Act. The aim was to have a consistent approach to learning across Wales and all parts of the workforce. The scale of the task was huge: 8,000 workers attended awareness raising sessions and 12,000 core training modules were completed in 2016-17 alone.

One of the 5 core modules we developed was 'Assessing and meeting the needs of individuals'. Whilst this was a generic module on assessments of need, the content included specific reference to working effectively with carers throughout. Later we produced detailed case studies focusing on assessing and meeting needs and these include specific focus on the carer as well as the 'cared for'.

<https://socialcare.wales/hub/hub-resource-sub-categories/assessing-and-meeting-individual-needs>

We worked in partnership with Carers Wales, Carers Trust Wales and Hafal to produce additional, detailed learning resources on working with carers under the Act. We commissioned these same 3 partner organisations to deliver expert classes on working with carers and these were delivered across Wales.

<https://socialcare.wales/hub/hub-resource-sub-categories/carers-and-the-act>

We evaluated our work and know we made an impact: the average score for a worker having the knowledge to deliver services in line with the Act increased by 40%. Partnership working on the training plan was regarded as very strong.

Our on-going work supporting workforce development and service improvement

We know we have much more to do and we continue to work with partners to identify workforce needs in relation to the Act and carers. This work will contribute directly to improving the experiences for people using care and support services and their carers.

We are about to publish a free e learning module to raise awareness of carers' circumstances. We hope this will help with the identification of carers when they make contact with services (a crucial first step leading to assessment). This has been developed jointly with the NHS. We recognise some of the issues raised in Carers Wales' 'Track the Act' project in 2017 around assessments and have been working with colleagues in Welsh Government and local authorities to develop a competency framework that supports the development of knowledge, skills and competence of a wide range of Information, Advice and Assistance workers. The needs and experiences of carers is specifically referenced in this emerging framework. This will build on our work to support IAA workers to understand and implement the Better Conversation requirements within the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

<https://socialcare.wales/hub/hub-resource-sub-categories/better-conversations>

We have a specific project to produce learning resources to improve assessment practice with carers – we intend to publish a new toolkit for working with carers by the end of the year. The need for this was identified in discussion with Welsh Government and evidence from Carers Wales’ ‘Track the Act’ project. The tool kit will include helping carers to prepare for their assessment and get the most out of it, skills in conducting the assessment with a particular emphasis on communication and listening skills and good support planning.

In 2018/19 our business plan includes the service development priorities care and support at home and dementia – two areas where a recognition of carers is essential.

We are also working on generic improvements. For example, we have a detailed programme of work to support social services with how they work with people to achieve their personal outcomes.

We recently published a rapid review of evidence for working effectively with carers and we intend to repeat this work in relation to young carers.

<https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/working-with-carers>

Comment

Clearly, the workforce requires access to high quality resources, research and learning opportunities to meet the aspirations of the Act and improve the quality of services across the sector including to carers - and we hope we are making a valuable contribution in these areas. In all our work, we try to ensure a focus on preparing the workforce to meet the ‘spirit’ of the Act, to ensure that improvement to services is at the heart of our work, as well as the letter of the law. We also work with managers and senior leaders in local authorities to help identify their learning and service improvement needs.

We would like to stress to the Inquiry the critical importance of on-going learning and development with regards to working with carers. Crucially, this applies to senior managers and those involved in designing, commissioning and contracting support for carers as well as front line practitioners. Local authority staff at all levels, and in their full range of roles, must have a well-developed understanding of the issues faced by carers as well as an understanding of the huge contribution of carers providing unpaid care and support in their area. Local authorities must be able to articulate a clear vision and practical ‘offer’ for their work with carers with the assessment process acting as an important vehicle for responding to each individual carer’s unique situation.

The responsibility, however, should not be with local authorities alone. It is essential, in particular, that colleagues in health services are able to recognise and respond appropriately to individual carers. Health services have clear responsibilities under the Act. Health partners should be required to contribute to the local authority assessment and support plan, where appropriate.

Welsh Government policy on carers

In addition to the points raised above, we would encourage Welsh Government to consider carefully their policy in relation to young carers. Whilst realistically it may be necessary and appropriate to support young carers in their caring role, it is important to understand and put policies in place that support people needing care and support to access that from available services, and significantly reduce a reliance on children to provide significant amounts of care and support to their families. This may well require more investment in paid care and support. However reducing the reliance on young carers would be consistent with the Welsh Government's aspirations for supporting children and young people to thrive and develop their own life path.

We suggest that more research is necessary to explore any unintended consequences of the Act in relation to adult carers. For example, is an emphasis on information and advice and signposting to other agencies resulting in lost opportunities for local authorities to support carers in the longer term?