



Home Care: A Case Study

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The Elders Council of Newcastle has maintained an active interest on health and social care for many years as these are issues that concern most of our members as we all grow older. In particular, we know that support in the home is a major factor in improving the quality of our lives when we find it hard to manage independently. Our expertise and activities on home care are based on the direct experiences of receiving home care from different providers. Given our unique perspective, we have worked in partnership with, among others, Newcastle City Council, Age UK, Healthwatch Newcastle and local clinical commissioning groups. A priority has been to ensure a high quality of care is available to all older people should they need it.

Range of work on home care

The Elders Council has been active in several different ways:

1. monitoring and giving feedback to commissioners and providers of home care on a regular basis. This has been in response to public consultations as well as when particular issues have arisen
2. raising awareness of the need to plan ahead and providing information on the different types of home support and how to access it. This has been achieved through our regular newsletters and as part of a series of Information Days organised by the Elders Council which are open to the public and particularly targeted at older residents of Newcastle upon Tyne
3. acting as a form of reference group which provides specific advice and expertise on quality standards as part of the commissioning process regarding local authority contracts with home care providers

Influencing policy and developing services

In recent years the Elders Council has extended its manifesto commitment to be active citizens in using our skills and experiences to develop solutions and contribute to improving home care in Newcastle. As a result, the following initiatives have been taken forward:

- **Developing a vision of what the future of home care services might look like.** In 2015 we were asked by Newcastle City Council to assist in imagining what future home care might be like. We organised a special event to enable older people to discuss information, consider guidance and talk about their expectations of home care that would enable them to live independently at home. This successful event also provided both the Council and Healthwatch Newcastle with information on both the views of those anticipating but also using home care services. Invitations were sent to our members and other representatives of organisations such as Newcastle Society for Blind People, Wa Hong and Deaflink. Our findings considered wider issues such as access to services, expectations of what a good service would look like and perceptions of a poor service. The Elders Council wrote up these findings in the report *The Future of Home Care Services*, published with Newcastle City Council and Healthwatch Newcastle. Informed by this report, the council then developed a set of service requirements that they expected all contracted home care providers to meet. This included objectives about the quality of care and provision of information that we, at the Elders Council, had been promoting for some time.
- **Providing input into a new home care toolkit** that set standards to promote the monitoring of home care. This was developed by the Northern Neurological Alliance in 2016 and the Elders Council were invited to review the standards and providing informed comments on the feasibility of service users operating such a toolkit.
- **Working in partnership with Healthwatch Newcastle on developing their survey *Spotlight on Home Care*.** This survey focussed on service users' views on publicly funded home care provision in 2016 and resulted in the Elders Council giving formal presentations on our work at their annual conference.

- **Setting up a Moderation panel for the Newcastle City Council** by invitation as part of their commissioning process for home care contracts. It was recognised that the Elders Council had developed a significant body of expertise, largely based on the direct experience of many of our members. We developed our own set of key criteria by which we could comment on the individual (anonymised) tender responses by home care providers. In 2016 and again in early 2017, a group of us then reviewed the written responses in dozens of applications and commented formally on every submission. We know that the findings of the moderation panel have influenced and informed the decision making process of the contracting process as officers have told us our *“comments were invaluable and reinforced the views of the Evaluation Panel”*. Our input has subsequently been used to support changes in providers.
- **Continuing to monitor the impact of changes.** The Elders Council is reviewing how the changes in home care providers have affected older people receiving these services. One of the key points we continue to make relates to the importance of the continuity of care and the quality of the relationship between the care worker and the older person.

Challenges and opportunities

There were a number of challenges in the above areas of work, particularly as we are a small voluntary organisation consisting entirely of volunteer members. One challenge is to ensure the authentic voice of the person receiving home care is consistently heard and not subsumed into second hand accounts. Another challenge was to involve members who, given their circumstances, found it difficult to be as active as they would like. For example, it was not so easy to set up a moderation panel a particular date and time that consisting solely of older people in receipt of care.

However this provided opportunities to explore alternative ways to ensure the meaningful involvement of members. For example we developed our own criteria on the priorities in receiving home care, based on personal experiences obtained through written feedback and discussions on a one to one or small group basis. Members recognised the importance of seizing opportunities to influence local policy and provision and to share that with the wider membership. There was also the individual and organisational

satisfaction of making a difference and being recognised as an active partner in working with other organisations.

Home care and living independently continue to be important to Elders Council members and we will do whatever is necessary to promote quality of service, positive relationships and the older person being at the centre of decision making as much as possible.

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