

Best Value Review of Home Based Services

Executive Summary

Derbyshire County Council
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Scope of the Review	1
3. Terms of the Review	1
4. Overview of Service	1
5. Review Activity	2
6. Current Performance	3
7. Intended Outcomes of the Review	3
8. Key Findings and Recommendations of the Review	3
Fair Access	3
Findings	3
Recommendations	4
Services are Commissioning Led	4
Findings	4
Recommendations	5
Provide a High Quality Service	6
Findings	6
Recommendations	7
Make Best Use of Financial Resources	8
Findings	8
Recommendations	8

1. Introduction

Best Value must ensure that there is a clear vision for the service, based on the needs of the local community, with explicit and challenging aims and a commitment to improve through motivated staff and efficient delivery systems.

People in Derbyshire have repeatedly told the Social Services department that when they need care their preference is that it is provided in their own homes. How the Council delivers care for people at home is therefore at the heart of its community care policies.

2. Scope of the Review

The review considered home based services that are funded by the Authority and that are provided to people in their own homes to enable them to remain there. It included:

- in house home help/home care service
- independent sector provided home care
- direct payments
- the laundry service

The review excluded day care, outreach services, supported housing and meals on wheels but is complementary to other Best Value reviews in the Social Services department.

3. Terms of the Review

The review was undertaken within the terms of appropriate national policy and legislation and within the context of Derbyshire's procedures and policies.

4. Overview of Service

- By December 2001 some 17,600 people in Derbyshire received home care. Nearly 90% of these were older people. However, 23% of expenditure was on the 8% of home care service users who were disabled adults.
- Between 2001 and 2016 the number of older people over 85 is set to increase by 33%. Currently 84% of the over 85 population in Derbyshire have a home help service.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- At £28.7 million expenditure on home care is 21.2% of the Social Services net budget. The Home care service in Derbyshire does not secondarily charge, the system of voluntary contributions having ended following decisions taken in the light of “Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and other non residential Social Services”.
- In January 2002 Derbyshire employed 1804 Home helps. 98% of home care staff are female and 20% will be eligible for retirement during the next 5 years. Home care staff have been a stable staff group in Derbyshire with a turnover of 14.2% in 2000/2001 compared with a national turnover rate of 32% (“People Need People” SSI and Audit Commission - 2000).
- By September 2001 39.4% of home care was commissioned from independent providers having risen from 16% in 1998. Contracting is by means of “spot” or “cost per case” contracts. In December 2001 Derbyshire had 768 home care contracts with 47 agencies. Of these a core of 35 agencies had multiple contracts with the Council. In 2001/2002 contracts with independent and voluntary agencies were valued at £6,140,392.
- The use of direct payments in Derbyshire increased from 88 recipients to 124 between February and December 2002, the direct employment of personal assistants proving more popular than purchasing services from an agency. Direct payments accounted for 2% of total home care expenditure in 2001/2002.
- The laundry service is currently contracted out to one supplier. By October 2002 there were 2768 people in receipt of the service. It has a recorded satisfaction rate of 95 to 97%. Expenditure on laundry services was £328,328 in 2001/2002.

5. Review Activity

To find out how good home care services are in Derbyshire and how they can be improved the review team used the 4 Cs of best value to inform its activity.

Having established how well the Council’s Home Care service performs, the review team sought examples of good practice from both within and outside local government with the aim of transferring learning from best practice into the recommendations of the review.

This summary report will present the key findings and recommendations. The detail of how the review team arrived at these conclusions and the supporting evidence is in the full report and appendices.

6. Current Performance

Best Value is about improvement and therefore concentrates on those areas that need attention. This report cannot do justice to the many excellent examples of good practice that were found within Derbyshire.

The Authority compares well against a number of national performance indicators. With a relatively modest unit cost the home care service plays a large part in supporting a high number of older people to live at home.

7. Intended Outcomes of the Review

The home care service will:

- Provide fair access
- Be commissioning led
- Provide a high quality service
- Make best use of its financial resources.

8. Key Findings and Recommendations of the Review

Fair Access

Findings

- Nearly 90% of service users surveyed said the service they received from their home help or home care worker is excellent or good irrespective of who provides the service. Satisfaction levels with laundry services are high and users of direct payments report that they value the reliability and flexibility of their services.
- There is no evidence that age or disability prevents people from using the services.
- Better information is required about the purpose of home based services, what services do and do not provide, when services will be provided, who to contact to get a service and what to expect from an assessment.
- The needs of minority communities are not always specifically catered for.
- The management of in house home care and its budget remain in the Social Services division for older people's services even though the home help service is delivered to all user groups. Control of home care

resources therefore needs to be reconsidered in the light of the current structure of Social Services to protect the interests of children and younger adults.

Recommendations

- Up to date, clear information about the home care service should be produced in a range of media. It should include the purpose of the service, its eligibility criteria, its standards and what people can expect from an assessment. It should be available for the public, potential users and partner agencies.
- A handbook should be produced for users of the service outlining how to complain and any restrictions (e.g. health and safety) that affect a Home Help's duties as well as the aims and standards of the service. This will need to keep pace with the development of Home Help roles.
- A dialogue should be started with minority community representatives with a view to exploring the use of direct payments for bespoke schemes, joint commissioning of specialist services with neighbouring authorities or the purchase of specialist services from neighbouring authorities.
- Training and information should be provided to assessors of home care on identifying and meeting cultural needs with associated guidance incorporated into procedures.
- The budget should be separated into service user groups, with protocols agreed. The management of the service should stay within the older people's division because of economies of scale, but with service level agreements set up with the other divisions.

Services are Commissioning Led

Findings

- The review team found that services were generally provided on the basis of doing things for people rather than assisting them to do them for themselves. This is counter productive in the long term where there is potential for improvement in independence.
- Service users, staff, providers and partner agencies are unclear about the commissioning strategy for home-based services.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- Consultation with service users and other stakeholders showed how much help with practical tasks is valued. This provision is difficult to maintain when there is pressure for the service to undertake more complex tasks to keep people at home and to relieve health professionals.
- The organisational constraints and the commissioning of services means that home care is not always delivered at a time when people need it (over 7 days, evenings, night time).
- Consultation showed that people wish to be contacted more frequently about any changes to their service and that reliability could improve. Continuity of carer was highly valued and not always achieved.
- Derbyshire's system of Direct Payments puts great emphasis on strict audit trails that can lead to complex administration deterring the service user although this finding should be balanced with the fact that Derbyshire is in the top 17 authorities for take up of Direct payments.

Recommendations

- The first weeks of home care should be delivered by a reablement/promoting independence service.
- A commissioning and a purchasing strategy should be produced that reflect the findings of this review.
- Decisions are required about how or whether to provide help with occasional simple practical tasks (putting up curtains, changing light bulbs). Options include grants to voluntary organisations to stimulate provision and working with District Councils. Alternative ways of providing help with regular practical tasks should be explored to see if contracting for fire lighting and cleaning could provide these services more efficiently in instances where they are the only services provided.
- For those services that border health responsibilities, options are to develop joint teams/joint working with Primary Care Trusts to minimise duplication and gaps or to seek out the potential for joint funding generic care worker posts.
- Capacity should be matched to demand by profiling demand on a regular basis, undertaking predictive analysis, establishing contracting arrangements, rotas and shifts that reflect the profile of demand and focusing resources on peak delivery times.
- An analysis of night time need should be undertaken to inform service planning.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- New standards for communication with service users should be set.
- Options should be built in to cover for absent staff at peak times
- IT solutions are available, linked to GIS to improve efficiency of travel, which schedule home care staff and which enable carers and staff to check that the service has been delivered on time. Their introduction should be pursued.
- Managers of home care should be trained in scheduling
- Reliability, punctuality and continuity of staff should be a performance measure for which independent home care agencies receive financial incentives.
- The numbers of care packages where there is more than one provider should be measured and targets set for their reduction.
- Extra assistance from a finance officer should be provided in the early stages of direct payment use and the frequency of financial returns reduced, especially after 12 months of trouble free use by the service user.
- All assessors should be trained in the use of direct payments. The creation of independent living advisors either within the Council or contracted out to an independent/voluntary agency should be considered.

Provide a High Quality Service

Findings

- The percentage of Derbyshire County Council Home Helps and Home Care Aides holding or working towards NVQ 11 or a higher qualification has increased to 69%
- Improvements need to be made to meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act.
- The provider of the service often carries out the assessment. This can mean alternatives to their own service are not fully considered.
- Choice of provider is limited in parts of the county where the independent sector is not present or is fragile.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- The ability to recruit and retain care staff is already an issue in parts of the county and is likely to become a pressing problem for both independent and in house home care.
- Some service users indicated that skill levels could improve in parts of the independent sector
- Sickness in the service has reduced but still has room for improvement.
- Despite nearly 80% of Home Helps being employed on the Council's flexible contract introduced in 1996, service users still complained of being rushed and of going to bed too early or getting up too late. Staff working patterns do not match the increasing requests for home care at peak demand times.

Recommendations

- A programme should be established to implement registration standards.
- The review supports the separation of assessment and management currently being rolled out across the county and would wish to see it developed to improve contract monitoring.
- Cost / volume contracting should be introduced, based on geographical zones, giving some certainty of business to independent agencies and ensuring all parts of the county have the choice of independent sector care.
- A clear understanding of agencies' costs should be developed. A survey of local wage rates in the retail and leisure industries would inform that understanding.
- The current mixed economy of care should be maintained subject to further assessment of risks and benefits in the light of changing needs.
- A workforce plan should be developed. This should take into account narrowing the gap between staff leaving and being replaced, work/life balance, the predictability of working patterns, training for new skills and for competencies that can link into career development, support to staff (especially out of hours) and the marketing of the home help role. This will need to include a judgement about the job title.
- An application should be made for European funding to deliver basic training in social care to disadvantaged and isolated members of Derbyshire's community in order to raise the profile of social care as a career.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- Minimum standards for the training/qualifications of independent agency staff should be set and a training programme delivered.
- A range of human resource improvements, detailed in the review, should be implemented, with the aim of providing more certainty to staff about when they are working and which also remove incentives for absence.
- Staff working patterns should be organised to match the profile of demand.

Make Best Use of Financial Resources

Findings

- Research has shown that a number of factors can distort unit cost comparisons between the in house and independent sector providers of home care.
- The review team found that comparing the actual costs of care delivered in one week by two Home Helps showed that the patterns of care delivered by the Home Help who worked mornings only, Monday to Friday were delivered for the least cost by the in house service.
- Minimum length of calls and standard travel payments in the independent sector as well as enhancements paid to Council homecare staff for working unsocial hours result in cost comparisons being affected by patterns of service. It appeared to the review team that, with the current patterns of service the overall service could have been delivered for less cost in the independent sector. In rural areas the difference in costs is less because of increased travel payments to independent agencies.
- There are improved methods available for income collection and payment for laundry services.
- Issues of stability, skill levels and risk are all important in determining the best use of financial resources.

Recommendations

- One budget should be introduced for independent sector as well as in house care so that decisions about the chosen provider are not influenced by which budget to use.
- A change in the process of income collection should be considered at the point of re-tendering for the laundry service to bring it in line with that for meals on wheels.

Derbyshire County Council
Best Value of Home Based Services
Executive Summary

- Travel payments to independent sector agencies should be absorbed within the overall fee.
- The impact of the financial modelling should be taken into account when determining the balance of independent sector and in house care in the commissioning strategy.