Good Practice Information on Carers Needs Assessments

Carers LIN Task and Finish Group

October 2010
Introduction

The Carers Learning & Improvement Network was formed in May 2008. During initial scoping exercises, the lack of consistently effective Carers Needs Assessments pan Wales was identified by the group as a priority issue to be addressed. Some 16 months ago a sub group of the Carers Lin was formed to develop the effectiveness of the Carers Needs Assessment Process.

The following information is designed to help Local Authorities and their officers when reviewing or designing their Carers Needs Assessments, Carers Care Plans / Outcome Plans and the associated guidance for both staff and Carers. This work pulls together information from across all 22 Local Authorities, as well as considering legal and statutory guidance information.

Across Wales there is a wide variation in practice of both how Carers Needs Assessments are carried out, by whom and in what detail. This document is intended to summarise the options available with suggested good practice.

The Carers LIN Journey…

The Carers Needs Assessment working group set out to develop an assessment form, merging practice from each and all Local Authorities and a good practice booklet for Local authorities. However, it was soon acknowledged by the group that developments to the form itself would not improve effectiveness of Carers Needs Assessments as the form in any assessment is just an 'aide-memoir'.

It was recognised that the process of undertaking Carers Needs Assessments and the methods of supporting Carers to achieve positive outcomes was where influence should be directed, to improve the effectiveness of the process and the experienced outcomes for Carers, the people cared-for and social services.

The links between the Carers Needs Assessment and the Unified Assessment Process were explored as part of this work. It was found that although each Local Authority practised using a diverse range of criteria contained within their Unified Assessment Domain 2 Carers Perspective, there was a common theme of Carers giving their perspective on the person they cared-for's needs to ensure their assessment of needs was accurate and comprehensive. During this part of the assessment process, given the elements of the Domain 2 directed by the national minimum data set, Carers were being asked about the impact of their role on themselves and provided with signposting, registration, and training information. This, in many cases was seen by both Carers and practitioners as having carried out the full, albeit proportional Carers Needs Assessment.

Carers’ legislation was explored and the contradictory nature of guidance reviewed, giving some explanation of the divergent concepts of what a Carers Needs Assessment was and what the Carers Needs Assessment was for. This lead to the group defining the 'intention' of legislation - that Carers are supported to carry out their role at their chosen level and as individuals to maintain their own life outside their caring role.

Given this intention, the process for Carers Needs Assessments was mapped including all elements of the process. Having a Carers action or outcome plan was defined as an essential part of the process, working to translate awareness of the caring circumstances and the Carers own needs to opportunities for the Carer to achieve positive outcomes.
The Legal Framework
There are three Acts of Parliament directly concerned with the needs of Carers.

- **Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995** promoted by Malcolm Wicks MP
- **Carers & Disabled Children Act 2000** promoted by Tom Pendry MP
- **Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004** promoted by Dr Hywel Francis, MP

In addition, *Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986* Section 8 requires that during an assessment of a disabled person the views of Carers who ‘provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis’ should be taken into account.

The first piece of legislation for Carers, the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 applied to Carers of all ages and gave Carers important new rights and a clear legal status. Under the Act, individuals who provide or intend to provide regular and substantial care are entitled to request an assessment in their own right regarding their ability to provide care and sustain this caring role. Local authorities are required to take into account the results of that Carers assessment when making decisions about the type and level of community care services to be provided to the cared-for person.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 made four principal changes to the law giving them further powers to support Carers rather than placing a ‘duty’ to provide this support as well as enabling them to charge for Carers services. The Act gave local authorities the power to:

- offer support services to Carers (those services which help the Carer to care) as a result of their Carers assessment.
- make direct payments to Carers (including 16 and 17 year old Carers) for the services that meet their own assessed needs.
- run short term break voucher schemes designed to offer flexibility in the timing of Carers’ respite breaks

In addition, Carers gained the right to an assessment independent of the community care assessment for the cared-for person. This enables a local authority to carry out an assessment in circumstances where the cared-for person has refused an assessment for, or the provision of, community care services.

The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 gave local authorities the duty to inform Carers of their right to an assessment which should now also consider the Carer’s wishes in relation to leisure, education, training and work activities. It also provided for co-operation between local authorities and other public authorities in relation to the planning and provision of services that may help support the Carer.

Children (anyone under the aged of 18) who are Carers should be routinely assessed under the Children Act 1989. As a matter of law, they could be assessed under the 1995 Act but in practice it is more common for young Carers assessments are carried out in line with the Children Act 1989 guidance.

In summary, Carers have the right to request a Carers assessment, and social care workers have the duty to make Carers aware of this right. Carers assessments can and should be offered to Carers.
Carer Related Legislation and the National Policy Context

In addition to the Acts of Parliament embodying the right to a Carers assessment, there is legislation which provides protection to Carers in work from discrimination as well as support to continue their caring role via the right to request flexible working and emergency leave. For information about these rights, visit Carers Wales website.

The Welsh Assembly Government is seeking powers "to provide support for Carers by placing appropriate duties on public sector organisations" via a Legislative Competence Order (LCO). This will not come into force before 2011, and is likely to place statutory duties on health and social care providers to identify Carers and provide them with appropriate and accessible information relating to their caring role.

In addition, there is both a Westminster Government’s National Strategy for Carers ‘Carers at the heart of 21st Century families and communities’ and Welsh Action Plan for Carers ‘Caring for Carers’. Both documents have similar themes emphasising:

- The Carer’s health and well being
- Supporting Carers in employment
- Providing breaks and replacement care to meet their needs
- Supporting Young Carers

Legal Eligibility Requirements for a Carers Assessment

Carers have the right to an assessment if they are over the age of 16 and be providing, or intending to provide regular and substantial unpaid care for a relative, friend or neighbour who is over the age of 18. While the Carer must request such an assessment, social services have a duty to inform them of this right.

To be eligible for a Carers assessment, the local authority must be satisfied that the person they care for is someone who meets their eligibility criteria and if not in receipt of services, is eligible to access Community Care services.

Where a Carer requests an assessment in their own right and the cared-for person is not known to the local authority, it will be necessary to establish whether the cared-for person meets the eligibility criteria. This could result in the cared-for person being offered a community care assessment in their own right. If the cared-for person refuses to be assessed or cooperate, it is necessary to establish, through discussion with the Carer, the probability of the cared-for person being eligible for Community Care services in order to ascertain whether the Carer is eligible for a Carers assessment.

If the service user does not receive support from the local authority, but meets the eligibility criteria to qualify for Community Care services, the Carer, if providing ‘regular and substantial’ care will still qualify for a Carers assessment in their own right.
Who should carry out a Carers Needs Assessment?

Across Wales it is generally agreed that the people best placed to carry out a Carers needs assessment is the involved care manager for the service user to ensure that they have a full picture and understanding of the situation.

Some local authorities have specialist Carers assessment workers, who have the advantage of working with Carers in-depth and are therefore likely to have a better knowledge base of supportive services, information and advice available to Carers than the service user’s care manager. These specialist workers can be generic, or only work with specific types of Carers, e.g. mental health Carers or young Carers.

Due to the duty and power of the Carers assessment residing with the local authority, it is not thought best practice for workers external to the local authority to carry out Carers assessments. If pursuing this option, a process where the local authority oversees, sign-offs and agrees the assessment must be in place.

It is thought poor practice for Carers assessments to be self-assessment (e.g. posted self-assessments) unless part of a larger process where the information the Carer completes is then evaluated and discussed with them in further detail.

**Recommendation:** Carers needs assessments to be carried out in person with the Carer by the care manager, or specialist Carer assessment worker.

What should a Carers Assessment Contain?

Legally, a Carers assessment must consider what the Carers wishes and wants in terms of outcomes for the following:

- Their work, and their intention to return to or continue this
- Their education and training, and their intention to return to or continue this
- Their access to leisure and social activities, with particular reference to ensuring the Carer can access social respite from their caring role
- The sustainability of the caring role and whether the Carer is willing and able to continue to provide the current level of care provided
  - The Carers physical and mental health should be considered with regards to sustainability

In addition, many local authorities look at other areas to build a clear picture of the Carers role and its sustainability through reviewing:

- The Carers’ tasks or the type of care undertaken
- Financial implications of caring
- Housing issues in relation to the caring role or the suitability of the house for the service user
- Wider impact of caring on the family or support network
- Contingency plans for if the Carer is not able to care on a short, or long term basis

Furthermore, the Department of Health (2001) (A Practitioner’s Guide to Carers’ Assessments under the Carers and Disabled Childrens Act 2000 states that Carers assessments should:

- Focus on the outcomes the Carer would want to see.
Support them in their caring role and maintain their health and wellbeing.

Make a clear distinction between outcomes and services.

Take a holistic approach to outcomes. (That is, understand the outcomes both the cared and the cared-for person would like to see, for themselves and for each other).

However the information is collected (e.g. through self-assessment, face to face or through using UA or CPA information) for PI and reporting and legal requirements to be met, the Carers needs assessment must be a separate signed document. They should preferably be stored within a Carers individual record rather than within the record of the care for person.

The Carers LIN are currently exploring how information collected from other sources, such as Domain 2 of UA could be used to populate a separate form to be signed by the Carer in order to count as a stand alone specialist Carers assessment.

Questions and Approaches within Carers Needs Assessments

There is variation in how this information is collected across Wales, with some local authorities using more of a ‘tick-box’ approach, and others using more free text. Through reviewing all 22 Carers assessments, the Carers LIN consider the below to be the recommended details that should be sought through the Carers needs assessment process as split by common headings used across Wales. The Carers LIN secure area of the SSIA website contains most local authorities Carers assessments for reference.

A. Personal details

**Recommendation:** The same information is collected as for a service user inclusive of language and ethnicity related data.

B. Cared-for details this can be collated within the ‘personal details’ above

**Recommendation:** Basic personal details are collected in addition to: nature of their illness or disability; their GP details; and their reference number and allocated team / worker if already known to social services.

C. Your circumstances / About the caring role

**Recommendation:** Information about the length of time the individual has been the Carer and whether they have any additional caring responsibilities. Approximate number of hours spent caring and when they do most of their caring.

Other Carers involved in supporting the service user are identified and their personal detail information collected where possible.

D. Tasks undertaken by the Carer

**Recommendation:** If using a combination of self-assessment and face-to-face assessment tick-lists offering a range of tasks can be a simple and effective way to gather data quickly to then be discussed.

As both tick lists of tasks and free text are an effective way to gather this information it is recommended that you develop what will suit practice in your local authority. Examples of both are given.
E. Impact of the caring role

**Recommendation:** Information establishes the impact caring has on their ability to: maintain their health and wellbeing; access work or volunteering opportunities; access education of training; access to leisure and social opportunities; and the effect on their social and / or support networks.

Information establishes the suitability of the home environment, and the financial situation of the Carer / cared-for.

F. Current support situation this can be collated within ‘impact of the caring role’ above

**Recommendation:** Information establishes the current support networks in place and any services that either the Carer or cared-for person are accessing.

G. Contingency / Emergency planning

**Recommendation:** Exploration of who or how the care needs of the cared-for person can be met if the Carer is no longer able to meet them.

Creating a contingency plan to be recorded on both the Carer and cared-for’s records for implementation if necessary.

H. Summary of need to reflect the information gathered and begin initial exploration of how the caring role can be sustained in the short, or long term through information, advice, support or services.

I. Sustainability of the caring role

**Recommendation:** Reflect upon information supplied in previous sections to conclude how sustainable the caring role is currently and projecting forward.

Reflect their circumstances through applying the national identification of need:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified need status</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Substantial</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Not assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

J. Actions / Outcomes / Carers plans

**Recommendation:** Create an outcome focused plan detailing the outcomes as identified and agreed with the Carer.

Use a standard tick sheet to detail any information, advice or guidance they are seeking or they have been given.

K. Recording Unmet Need

**Recommendation:** Unmet need should be recorded in order to inform service planning and delivery. This information should be collated and shared appropriately with those in Carer or service commissioning roles.

L. Information sharing and signatures

**Recommendation:** The same information sharing statement is used as for a service user’s assessment alongside signature and date.
The Process of Assessing Carers Needs

For over fifteen years, legislation has placed a duty on Local Authorities to both involve Carers in planning eligible care provision for the person they care-for and in assessing their own needs brought about from undertaking their caring role.

It is accepted that despite this legislation and guidance, Carers’ Assessments have not become a universally effective method of supporting Carers to carry out their caring role.

In fact the Carers’ legislation and guidance, when analysed can be seen to be contradictory in nature, giving some explanation of the divergent concepts of what a Carers Needs Assessment was and what the Carers Needs Assessment was for.

To maximise the effectiveness of the Carers Needs Assessment Process, the true intention of the process was defined as:

Carers are supported…

✓ to carry out their caring role, at the Carers chosen level
✓ as individuals, to maintain their life outside of their Caring role

The process of assessing Carers needs is a fundamental activity in supporting Carers to achieve positive outcomes; however the context and practice of this process needs to include overcoming all the barriers to engagement such as the jargon (the offer/ definition of who a Carer is/ ‘assessment’/ Carer’s own needs) and the ‘task’ orientated approach applied in practice so often, where it becomes a ‘tick box’ exercise and the meaning of the process is lost (Carer &/or assessor - “what’s the point?...”)

The adoption of key Values can develop practice to ensure the CNAP engages meaningfully:

• Information the Carer discloses is valuable, where/ whenever shared
• An ‘assessment’ includes mutually inclusive assessment processes
• ‘Who the outcome relates to’ indicates separateness
• Measuring Carer satisfaction is the indicator of our performance standard

The process of assessing Carers needs is a natural interaction between the Carer and an assessor, where the assessor facilitates the Carers exploration of their circumstances. Self awareness is key knowledge - and proportionally means this exploration is at whatever depth is appropriate.

Following the exploration of the Carers circumstances, the assessor can support action planning that focuses on the Carer achieving those positive outcomes they feel are important. Action planning is a positive coping strategy and a skill.

The process also includes monitoring and review of the Carers circumstances by arrangements that are agreed between the Carer and assessor which seek to support the Carer, their caring role and the person they care-for into the future.
Where a Carer is present, the holistic assessment process is an integrated and includes the assessment of the person who is cared-for and the Carers Needs Assessment.

Outcome focused assessment and planning

Outcome based assessment is designed to focus on what the service user or Carer wants to achieve in terms of changing and improving their lives, as opposed to assessment which looks at the service provision available. The process and planning focus on what outcomes need to be achieved, and how this can be built towards.

The below framework was developed by the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York from Carer research recognising the complexity of the caring role which changes over time. It highlights four key outcomes which are of primary importance to Carers:

- Quality of life for the Carer
- Quality of life for the person cared-for (the Carer’s perspective)
- Managing the caring role
- Process outcomes (impacts of the way help is provided)

Within these four primary or high level outcomes, there are then subsections which inform the assessor of the current situation and what changes would have the most impact on supporting the Carer:

- Quality of life for the Carer
  - Physical health or well-being
  - Emotional/mental health
  - Peace of mind (freedom from excessive anxiety re person cared-for
  - Ability to have a life of their own (i.e. to work if they choose, pursue interests)
  - To avoid social isolation
  - To maintain a positive relationship with person cared-for
  - Adequate material circumstances
  - A sense of control over their life (income/housing)

- Quality of life for the person cared-for (the Carer’s perspective)
  - Personally clean, comfortable and well turned out
- As independent as possible
- Personal safety and security
- To be in social contact with others (apart from Carer)
- To have meaningful activity/stimulation
- Maintain dignity
- Improve mobility, morale

- Managing the caring role
  - Able to define the limits of their role (level of involvement and nature of task)
  - Feeling skilled, confident and knowledgeable
  - A sense of satisfaction or achievement in caring
  - Sense of shared responsibility/being emotionally supported
  - Able to manage the physical/practical tasks of caring

- Process outcomes (impacts of the way help is provided)
  - Valued/respected as an individual
  - Expertise as a Carer recognised
  - Having a say in the way help is provided
  - A ‘good fit’ with existing life routines and care giving
  - Value for money

Not all the outcomes will be of equal significance to all Carers, but may be worth bearing in mind to ensure a thorough exploration of the Carer’s perspective. One tool to help with prioritising which outcomes are currently those of greatest importance is the Outcome Star, developed by Triangle Consulting. The outcomes star was designed initially for mental health service users but can be altered to fit Carers needs through reviewing the points of the star and reducing the number and / or altering the named points.
While we do not have to provide a separate Carers action plan under the current legal framework, it is advised in the Welsh Assembly Government guidance in certain circumstances. If considering creating a Carers action plan for your Local Authority, it is advised that they are not too divergent from the service users care plans for continuity sake. They should take into account the four key outcomes for Carers and could also consider the following outputs:

**Creating contingency plans**

Some Local Authorities Carers assessments include questions that focus the Carer and assessor on thinking about ‘what if…’ scenarios. By asking who will look after the cared-for person should the Carer become unwell, suffer an accident or injury, or simply be unable to get to the cared-for person in time due to other constraints, the assessor can build a picture of the support available to the Carer.

By discussing, agreeing and recording the processes to be put into place when the Carer is unable to provide the care needed, the Carer will gain peace of mind, and the assessor a clear plan of action for these circumstances.

Contingency planning looks not only at what could happen in an emergency, but can also consider planned admission or respite for a Carer. These discussions can also be used to open up initial discussion (where relevant) regarding who will support the cared-for person when the Carer is not longer physically able to, or is deceased.

**Recommendation:** Carers needs assessments should include questions about contingency or emergency planning in order to collect information about the support available to the Carer with relevant contact details.
Information for Carers about Carers assessments
Dependent on your local authorities approach there are a number of ways and opportunities to provide information about Carers needs assessments to Carers that you may wish to consider or replicate, including:

- A public information leaflet about a Carers right to an assessment
- Information to be referred to by staff during a Carers needs assessment
- Explanatory text as part of a Carers needs self-assessment form
- Letters chasing-up Carers who have refused to have a Carers needs assessment
- Information events for Carers about Carers assessments and/or Carers rights
- Actively promoting Carers assessments through Carer focused newsletters, publications and networks

Carers UK have [information online](#) and a fact sheet outlining the purpose of a Carers assessment with some basic legal information. This is a good, plain English example of the type of information that could be contained within your local public information leaflet.

Information for staff about Carers assessments
The Welsh Assembly Government 'Practitioners guide to Carers' Assessment: Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000' is a clear resource on the legal framework of Carers and practical information to inform internal policies and guidance around Carers assessments. The topic based guide of questions in appendix 1 of this guidance also provides a useful range of questions which could be incorporated into a Carers assessment form or training material.

Most local authorities' Carers assessment policies and / or guidance reflect the content of the WAG 2001 practitioners guide with additional information to reflect changes under the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004.

SCIE’s more recent guide (2005) [Implementing the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004](#) provides a summary of research findings to help practitioners with undertaking a Carers assessment. This includes information on undertaking outcome based assessments and Carers assessments, and other tips gleamed from evaluating the practice from across England. A UK wide document, the research findings do concentrate on the English application of Carers assessments.

Using information from other sources in a Carers needs assessment
Since Carers assessments were first conceived and enshrined in legislation a number of changes have happened in Wales that have altered how social service interact with Carers. The introduction of Unified Assessment in Wales has meant that most local authorities now ask the majority of questions required of a Carers assessment, within domain 2 ‘The Carers Perspective’ which requires the following sub-domains to be covered:

- Physical difficulties in caring
- Psychological difficulties and pressures arising from caring role, including shock, grief, felt inadequacy
- Life constraints arising from caring role eg. Clash with employment, child care responsibilities, leisure activity
- Carer’s strengths, expectations, motivation and perception of her/his needs and user’s needs
- Carer registration – *details are recorded on the social services electronic database*
- Carer assessment – *details on if they were offered a Carers assessment, and when/if this was undertaken*

Neither the guidance nor legislation dictates that the information that makes up a Carers assessment has to come from one source or one document. In this way, you could consider using information already gathered about the Carer, their situation and views of the sustainability of the caring role from either UA or CPA domain 2 Carers Perspective.
Appendix A: Reference material

Carers UK has a variety of accessible information leaflets and summaries on all Carer related issues.

Joint Improvement Team based in Scotland has a variety of Carer focused research including the development of useful tools and evaluation models. These were developed with partners from across the UK.


SPRU have also research and collated further information in relation to both service user and Carer outcome focused assessment alongside tools and evaluations.


SCIE have also research and collated further information in relation to both service user and Carer outcome focused assessment amongst other areas such as involving service users.

Triangle Consulting, Outcomes star, 2009


Appendix B: Acknowledgements

The Pan Wales working group made up from members from the Carers Officer Learning and Improvement Network created this document. Individual members of the group were supported by their employers to attend to this task.

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Appendix C: Versions

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<th>Presentation to Pan Wales LIN and Steve Vaughan (Head of Partnership Office of the Director of Social Services Wales)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Version 2; 21 December 2010</td>
<td>Additional section “The Process of Assessing Carers Needs” (page 9) and Appendix B &amp; C (page 15)</td>
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