



Carers' Voice Annual Review 2018

Welcome to Carers' Voice Annual Review 2018, and a special welcome to all our new members who joined us during the year and thank you for your contributions. We would like to update you on what was accomplished during the year and provide you with a glimpse of some of our activities. Firstly, we would like to thank our partners Healthwatch Northamptonshire and Northamptonshire Carers for their input and support. We were able to secure funding for an assistant working with Healthwatch to attend our monthly meetings and take minutes; update our Facebook page; publish material online on our webpage and work with Healthwatch, passing on relevant information to our group. Last year our assistant helped to develop a new promotional leaflet alongside the launch and retrieved online analytics and updates for our 2018 Impact Survey.

The Chair continues to attend and organise our meetings and produce our agendas, always following up our questions. There was also involvement in securing funding to enable Carers' Voice to continue and we are pleased to announce we have funding for 2019 in place. The Chair has also attended the Local Engagement Group run by the Nene Clinical Commissioning Group on our behalf, raising many concerns. In her free time, our Chair has been a wonderful source of signposting and support to Carers with regards to benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and charging for residential care and continuing healthcare. Her wealth of knowledge extends to completing forms, which some Carers may find difficult.

Some issues raised at meetings during 2018 include how the Carer Assessments are done and who reads them; looking at the format and how Northamptonshire Carers work with our local authority. Members also raised concerns over the brokerage scheme and the right of individuals to 'choose' their accommodation; new data protection rules; the backlog of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) orders and issues raised at Scrutiny Committees. Some members were able to attend a variety of consultations including the Disability Related Expenditure and Fair charge changes, the proposed Unitary Authorities and the pre-payment card proposals and the new rates for Personal Assistants. All communications and involvement were reported back to the group during our monthly meetings. We learnt that members can be registered for alerts via email with Northamptonshire County Council for all forthcoming consultations and there are also opportunities for members to sign up to Citizen Assemblies, which parliament undertakes from time to time, such as in 2018 on the topic of social care funding and the forthcoming Green Paper.

Carers' Voice members are varied and have a diverse range of care duties and concerns. Some of our members have a little more time on their hands so can get further involved, for example, with local care support groups, mental health teams and attending a variety of advisory panels or are directly involved with

Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT), with one member involved in the Carer Awareness Training of staff.

Due to our range of experiences we can network together, supporting one another and taking any challenges further; our voices being stronger together. When those members attend outside meetings, panels, boards, Carer groups etc., they take the comments and concerns received to our regular Carers' Voice monthly meetings and present them to members for discussion. Often these topics lead to further investigation and can affect change in practice. We try to raise awareness of Carers such as during Carers Week, Carers' Rights Day and on other occasions to reach our communities - attending Carer's Cafes, distributing leaflets and petitioning those involved with a variety of services.

A regular member of our group since 2003 is delighted with the increased growth in the membership during 2018 and the increased vigour with which members have pursued the understanding of the challenges facing Carers in Northamptonshire. Working alongside the Northamptonshire Carers' Director, this member has helped Northamptonshire County Council and Nene and Corby Clinical Commissioning Groups over the past fifteen years to fund and support some of the best Carer support services in England, sustaining most of the services during the significant recent cuts to funding where possible now and into the near future. Representing many Northamptonshire Carers on the County Council's Adult Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, this member is a representative for Carers on the Collaborative Stakeholder Forum that exists to inform the county's Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Alongside these activities, our member has worked for many years at a national level with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to improve hospital mental health services across the country and we have benefitted from some of this work within our own NHFT. He has also been involved with the Thematic Partnership for Carers, which coordinate the county's providers of support to Carers. These groups help what is done to support voluntary Carers in our county. We also have a member who has been participant as a Carer representative on health boards within our county, actively participating in programmes and interviews, including that of Healthwatch Northamptonshire, to ensure Carers' Voice is considered in all board discussions.

Carers' Voice successfully launched their 2018 Impact Survey to gauge the impact on Carers of the austerity cuts and special measures in place by our local government. Many responses came back to us and Healthwatch has written a report on the findings. The predominant themes were concerns over the health of Carers and their loved ones. We hope to follow this survey with another later this year.

Some of our concerns for the forthcoming year are the local authority decision to collapse the Scrutiny Committee, removing our members involvement and expertise together with Healthwatch representatives away from the scrutiny of Adult health and social care services in the county. The decision to split the future management of social care across two Councils within the proposed two unitary authorities poses risks which our Carers' Voice members will be monitoring closely.

There are approximately 70,000 informal non-professional carers within our county who successfully deliver a provision of health and social care services and without them the statutory services would be overwhelmed. Carers' Voice has an essential role to ensure the needs of the carers are understood and heard by the wider community and services. Carer needs must be met in order to enable them to continue to provide essential care support. We also want to reach out to diverse care communities within our borders so that they can have their voices heard and are able to engage and be supported. We would invite members from these communities to grow our multi-cultural approach to the group and to further our 'voice'. Our group is fortunate to have members being trained as Carer Champion volunteers working in association with Connecting Carers to be a friendly face for Carers in the local communities; to build relationships, raise awareness, identify and support and refer Carers and help to run some of the groups and cafes and reaching out to the rural areas. We are hoping to produce an extensive data base with further links in 2019. We thank all our members for their continued support and welcome new members.

With warm wishes, Carers' Voice