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Carers' Voice Annual Review 2019

2019 was a significant year for Carers' Voice as we steadily developed our role to strength as an effective group of voices for promoting the needs of all carers across Northamptonshire. Whilst for personal reasons we said 'goodbye' to some experienced carers and their skills, we welcomed others. We also grew the wider membership who responded to our surveys on the quality and breadth of support they receive in the county for their caring roles.

Working closely with both Connected Together CIC (Healthwatch Northamptonshire) and Northamptonshire Carers, we were able to conduct an informative survey of our carers into the impact that the 2019 changes to Council and Health funding of carers support services delivered. We were then able to put these concerns publicly to the Northamptonshire County Council's Scrutiny Committee and privately to senior officers. We also used these results and our own experiences as carers to influence the content of the County's Carers Support Strategy for 2019-2022.

Elsewhere, we have been involved in visiting many carer communities and events around the county and therefore provide our role of representing the actual needs of carers by informing those who deliver services. We have also strengthened our links with Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) who deliver much of the National Health Service (NHS) mental and community healthcare services in Northamptonshire. Alongside, members attended consultations such as The Proposed Changes to the Council's Fair Contribution Policy, and raised concerns about the new contracting arrangements for the provision of services to those with learning disabilities. Members also reported back to our meetings on matters such as Social Prescribing, the new mental health Crisis House, Wellbeing Board agendas, Carer Partnership concerns, mental health crisis management, along with members sharing general information about new initiatives, such as the NHFT Common-sense Confidentiality leaflet and their new training material, Recovery College.

It was agreed that we can strengthen the professional support we receive going forwards and now have pleasure in announcing a new Carers' Voice Co-Ordinator. This will enhance the group's activities in listening, influencing and signposting at provision where there are matters arising. As always, we welcome carers, both current and experienced along with past carers, to join our group and to help us promote the needs of carers upon whom the National Health Service and County Education and Social Services depend to have their statutory responsibilities delivered.

At the end of the year, we said 'farewell' to Ann Leask who had chaired Carers' Voice for more years than the current membership could remember. She came to the group

when we were going through a very difficult period with low and dwindling membership and struggling to maintain a sense of purpose and direction. However, under Ann's steady and patient leadership we have established a clear working relationship with both Healthwatch and Northamptonshire Carers and are witnessing a steady increase in our membership especially with those carers with a wide range of caring duties and experiences. This diversity is important as it gives our voice greater strength and credibility when lobbying with fund raisers and service providers.

Ann's prior experience within Northamptonshire Council's Social Care Financing team proved invaluable in helping us to understand what types of support for carers and those they cared for should be made available from the council as part of their statutory processes and how they might be accessed. Also, where and how Carers' Voice should be lobbying to get legal entitlements for carers properly recognised and delivered. Her knowledge and expertise will be greatly missed.

We wish Ann well for the future, where we know she will be devoting more time to the support of her husband and to her own needs. Thank you, Ann. Vicky Doyle will be our acting Chair for the time being.

This year, we hope to have some useful 'hints and tips' on our webpages with some useful content for our members. We welcome new members so look out for our Co-Ordinator who will be visiting carer services and venues around the county. Please come along to our meetings which are currently held on the second Thursday of each month at the Queen Eleanor pub off the A45 between 10:30 and 12:30, but check our webpages first to ensure the venue has not changed. Alternatively, do drop us a line with your concerns, any useful hints and tips and any other items you would like to bring to our attention.

All the best for 2020!

