AN INVESTIGATION INTO YOUNG CARERS IN SUTTON

A REPORT OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JULY 2011
COUNCILLOR WENDY MATHYS
CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUMMARY

The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee conducted an investigation into Young Carers in Sutton throughout June and July 2011.

Outside of the meeting evidence was gathered during visits to Riverside Community Association (with the assistance of Mr Dave Lunn) and Sutton Carers Centre.

The committee received verbal and written evidence within the Scrutiny meeting on 20th June 2011 from Dr Peter Simpson (Executive Head of Education, Learning and Intervention), Sally Goodman (Head of Commissioning, Training and Development), Rachael MacLeod and Nazanin Abolkheriyan (Sutton Carers Centre) and Abigail Lock (a former Young Carer).

Written evidence was also submitted based on work undertaken outside the meeting. This included a customer journey map for one current (but slightly older) Young Carer in Sutton, some external learning examples, and a written report analysing the findings from a survey of all Sutton schools undertaken in May 2011.

This investigation has identified four main recommendations to help improve services for Young Carers.¹

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE

A) To support the development of a separate strategy for Young Carers in Sutton, to give them their own identity, and for this to have clear outcomes and measurable targets. In particular for this to include:
   a. Identifying the possibility of developing a central London Borough of Sutton register of Young Carers to assess and monitor their needs, and to promote registration of all known Young Carers on this from all schools and/or organisations and agencies including social services, youth clubs etc (see paragraph 22);
   b. Exploring the use of mobile technology to communicate with a register of Young Carers (see paragraph 17);

¹ This investigation originally defined Young Carers as those young people performing caring duties up to and including age 16. However during the course of this investigation alternative definitions of Young Carers have been identified, covering up to and including young people aged 25. This report and all recommendations contained within can be and are applicable for Young Carers aged up to and including 25.
c. Undertaking outreach work to all London Borough of Sutton partners to raise the profile of Young Carers and increase referrals from them; (see paragraph 14)
d. Categorisation of Young Carers as having low, medium or high level needs and to identify appropriate activities to meet each (see paragraph 16);
e. Exploring further joint-working with neighbouring boroughs, especially to benefit those Young Carers living near borough boundaries to enable easy access to support services;
f. Clear identification of separate funding streams for Young Carers; and
g. Clear prioritisation of future activities to support and target Young Carers to enable fund raising to be more specifically targeted for particular projects.

B) To explore the desirability of a joint-assessment of Young Carer’s needs where appropriate between Adult Social Services and Children’s Services given that most Young Carers are identified initially through Adult Social Services (see paragraph 22).

C) To ensure through the Children’s Commissioning Unit that information on Young Carers is provided by the Carer’s Centre on a six monthly basis to enable an appropriate and up-to-date picture of Young Carer’s Services to be developed within the council (see paragraph 6).

D) To ensure that the national Carer’s Centre school toolkit is specifically tailored for Sutton, including Academy Schools, and sent to all primary and secondary schools within the next 6 months (see paragraph 19).

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

E) For the relevant Senior Officer to report back to the Committee in November about the feasibility of expanding the use of Children’s/Youth Centres across the borough to support Young Carers service (see paragraph 23).

F) That officers should consider, and report back to this committee in March 2012, as to whether services for Young Carers should in any way overlap with provision for general emotional support which is being considered by this committee in the next few months.

G) For this report to be forwarded to the Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, Head of Special Educational Needs and the Head of Pastoral Care (if another person) in each Sutton School.

H) To receive back in November a written information item of needs mapped by the Carer’s Centre (see paragraph 15).
I) To note the Committee’s support for the urgent development of a new website for Young Carers.

J) For the Young Carers Champion to explore how better links could be maintained with universities to support Young Carers in their transition to higher education.

K) For the committee to continue developing the role of the Young Carers Champion, and for this role to act as a link between the Young Carers’ Project and Councillors.

FINDINGS

Background

1. Young Carers are children and young people who provide, or intend to provide, care, assistance or support to another family member who is disabled, physically or mentally ill, or has a substance misuse problem. This includes the provision of care and support and taking on a level of responsibility which is normally associated with an adult. The care they provide could be personal, practical and/or emotional.

2. The reasons for undertaking this investigation were three-fold. Firstly due to the pressure facing many authorities to meet budget cuts there has been increasing national concern and media attention around the services available for Young Carers. Secondly Sutton’s Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee has a Young Carer’s Champion, and this investigation offered an excellent opportunity to identify and develop the remit of this role. Thirdly Sutton Council also has a new officer with responsibility for Young Carers who is looking to review and refresh the support provided by the council; this investigation offered an ideal opportunity to recommend certain aspects of work for inclusion within the following twelve months.

3. The aims of the investigation were therefore for the Committee to:

   a. Gain a better understanding of the national and local picture with regards to Young Carers up to and including age 16, including what specific needs these individuals may have;
   b. Understand the current services and support available for Young Carers;
   c. Recommend ways in which to enhance or improve local services to identify more Young Carers, ensure the services offered enable Young Carers to lead fulfilling lives, and ensure maximum value for money is obtained from council resources allocated in this area;

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2 Independent (16 November 2010) ‘Study Identifies Hidden Army of Young Carers’
d. Recommend changes or improvements to the way Sutton measures outcomes for Young Carers; and

e. Develop the role of the Young Carers’ Champion.

**The National and Local Pictures**

4. The 2001 census previously identified there were 175,000 Young Carers in the UK helping to care for a sick or disabled member of the family. However a recent survey by the BBC of 4,029 school children identified this figure could be nearer to an estimated 700,000. The average age of a young carer is 12 however children as young as 3 years old are taking on this responsibility.

5. Sutton Carers Centre estimates that there is a total 16,000 – 18,000 carers (Adult and Young) living in the borough of Sutton, of which 2500 are Young Carers. The Centre has 340 registered Young Carers aged 8 – 25, suggesting that a maximum 20% of Young Carers are known to the council and its partners.

6. The investigation identified there is little data readily available within the authority on the exact profile of Young Carers in Sutton either as to their ages, the extent of their caring roles (for example high, medium or low), and the impact on their daily lives, nor as to which family member they might be responsible for. Where information is recorded it is buried in case notes or files and is therefore difficult to access and collate. Sutton Carers Centre (Young Carers Project) is one major source of data on Young Carers and their families; previously information has not been regularly shared.

7. To develop existing information on Sutton’s Young Carers, this investigation undertook a survey of all primary and secondary schools. The aim was to identify the numbers of known Young Carers and the support offered to them via schools. A total 11 schools (out of 57) responded to the survey and across these schools 60 Young Carers under the age of 16 were identified or known. Extrapolating this to all schools could mean around 310 Young Carers.

8. Nearly all schools said they felt the number of Young Carers is significantly under-reported due to issues such as preference for anonymity, fear of stigmatisation or lack of knowledge about what a young carer is.

9. The majority of Young Carers identified by the survey (50%) were aged 11 – 14 and 43% had a long term physical/learning difficulty or health issue. Schools identified that their Young Carers had particular educational difficulties with attendance issues and lateness. Other issues faced by the young person include low self esteem, depression,

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3 BBC (16 November 2010) Young Carers Are Four Time the Official UK Number
isolation and a general burden of responsibility that their peers do not have.

10. The investigation received written evidence from two Young Carers in Sutton, which gave an insight into the complexities of life for Young Carers living in the borough:
   a. Time is often not the individual’s own as they wait for and deal with medical staff throughout each day, adjust daily routines to suit the person they care for, lose out on ‘normal’ childhood activities such as seeing friends, and face extreme difficulties in even leaving the house;
   b. The loss of the ‘home’ as the house becomes more like a clinical setting and suffers from wear and tear;
   c. Judgement and expectation from others;
   d. School working is impacted upon, for example through tiredness;
   e. Emotional wellbeing suffers due to isolation and feelings of dependency and guilt; and
   f. Being subjected to financial strain from a young age.

### Services and Support for Young Carers in Sutton

11. A Young Carers’ project was launched in Sutton in April 1996. Historically services for Young Carers were commissioned and overseen by ASSH, but as from 2011 the responsibility for this service will be within the remit of the Children’s Commissioning Unit within CYPLS.

12. Services in Sutton for Young Carers under the age of 25 are currently commissioned from the Sutton Carer’s Centre. The Council pays Sutton Carers Centre £42,590 through the LAA Based Grant (formerly Carers Grant). In 2010/11 an additional amount of £20,000 was provided from the Children’s Fund.

13. The Sutton Carers Centre’s work is to provide advice, information, support and time out to unpaid Adult and Young Carers. The Centre is the only carer-specific organisation locally and in addition to developing its own services, aims to enable all organisations to develop carer-friendly practices and services. The aims of the Young Carers’ Service are to promote identification of Young Carers, assess Young Carers’ needs, establish and maintain services for Young Carers and their families, develop a range of support activities and short-term breaks/time out, and promote awareness of Young Carers’ issues.

14. Sutton Carers Centre receives approximately 60 – 80 Young Carer referrals during the year, of which around 75% become active users of the service and 25% decide not to engage. The Service Manager assesses all referrals by meeting them in the centre or through a home
visit. The majority of referrals are received internally from the Adult Carers’ teams.

15. 53% of the Young Carers registered with Sutton Carers Centre are aged 13 – 18, and 87% are of the ethnic group ‘white’ and ‘white other’. 60% are currently female and the most common geographical areas are Sutton, Wallington and Carshalton. The Committee heard that this geographical concentration usually correlates with areas of deprivation, and not just the location of Sutton Carers Centre. The Centre has agreed to undertake more analysis on individual cases to map need. The Committee received additional evidence suggesting that the council could offer support for outreach activities using existing Children’s and Youth Centres.

16. As the population of Sutton is predicted to continue growing over the next 10 years this will impact on demand for Young Carers’ services in the borough. The Committee received evidence that suggests Sutton Carers Centre is currently cautious about undertaking new activities which might identify more Young Carers which they could not accommodate. Currently services for Young Carers at the Centre are universal and are not currently targeted; one recommendation in the future could be to target resources at Young Carers who have higher risk needs.

17. Sutton Carers Centre provides around 30 activities for Young Carers per year, and each week between 15-20 Young Carers engage in regular activities such as homework clubs and peer support groups. Other direct provision includes trips and outings. One area that could be further explored and which could be less resource intensive is non-face-to-face service provision, for example using regular communications such as text-messaging and having regular ‘phone-in’ evenings to support Young Carers remotely.

18. In January 2011 Sutton’s Children’s Commissioning Unit began to undertake a programme of work around Young Carers which is currently ongoing. Once completed this will include:
   a. An assessment of need for Young Carers to inform future commissioning arrangements;
   b. The development of a Young Carers Strategy with partners;
   c. Developing an outcome-based service;
   d. Updating the website;
   e. Improving data collection from other services in contact with Young Carers and their families; and
   f. Raising awareness about Young Carers across all who work with children, young people and their families in Sutton.

19. Sutton has a Young Carers Champion (YCC) whose role is primarily to promote and raise awareness of Young Carer activities and needs at multiple levels. The YCC raises awareness at the council level and seeks out opportunities including funding and linking with other areas of
work. The YCC role has been undertaken by the current member over the past year, during which time the YCC has spent time getting to understand work and activities the Young Carer team offer and has met with Young Carers at a range of workshops, activities and social events. Last year Young Carers at the Carers Centre was the Mayor’s Charity of the year and much successful fund raising took place, providing funds for the centre with stretched resources.

**Identifying Areas for Change**

20. Sutton Carers Centre undertook a seven week ‘Schools Project’ pilot in June 2009 following securing national funding. This enabled two new leaflets to be developed (one for Young Carers and one for professionals) and distributed to six schools of focus in central Sutton via key contacts, and a series of presentations were provided to school staff. Referrals to the Centre rose instantly, highlighting the importance of schools in identifying Young Carers.

21. Ofsted recommends that there should be an emphasis on schools working collaboratively with other services to meet children and young peoples’ additional needs as early as possible. The school survey identified schools provide a wide range of support and help for Young Carers:
   a. Allowance for homework or punctuality;
   b. Additional emotion support for example through a mentor or nurture group;
   c. The presence of social workers;
   d. Building and maintaining links with outside agencies;
   e. Holding meetings and maintaining good communications with parents;
   f. Homework clubs within the day;
   g. Monitoring by relevant tutors and discussions with the young carer; and
   h. Specific clubs, groups and opportunities such as a Young Carer’s space at lunch times, homework clubs after school and holiday clubs offered at reduced prices.

22. Schools were also asked to highlight any additional observations they had in terms of reviewing support for Young Carers. One school identified there appears to be a lack of clarity around the process to register Young Carers within the local authority. Another school also suggested that a central register for recording Young Carers would help to assess and monitor their needs.

23. Sutton Carers Centre identified that adult services are sometimes the first to become aware that a young person is a young carer, or is at risk of becoming one. A joint assessment of the young person’s needs should be offered with children’s services, and the two areas should work jointly to meet those needs.
24. Sutton Carers Centre distributes leaflets and posters to schools and children’s local information centres. An email with information for professionals ‘A resource for Schools’ was recently sent to all primary and secondary schools, which highlighted information available on the Carer's Website.

25. The Committee received a summary of external learning for identifying and supporting Young Carers in other areas. Hertfordshire provided a range of communications to inform school staff about Young Carers, advise parents about young carer developments, support Young Carers via clubs and drop-in sessions and educate other young people during assemblies. Harrogate and Craven Young Carers Service developed a successfully mentoring programme for Young Carers in schools. Brent has developed a Young Carers Policy for schools to alter as appropriate and adopt; this confirms the services and support the school will provide to individuals.