AN INVESTIGATION INTO YOUNG CARERS IN SUTTON

A REPORT OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JULY 2011
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CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUMMARY

The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee conducted an investigation into young carers in Sutton to include their profile, needs and services. The investigation commenced in April 2011 and the draft report was agreed November 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 (Chief Executive and Young Carers Service Manager respectively at 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 welcome 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.

B) To develop the effective use of a Sutton register of young carers to inform the understanding of local needs and appropriate service provision (see paragraph 22).

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) To explore the use of mobile technology to communicate with a register of young carers (see paragraph 17).

D) To undertake a promotional campaign to raise the profile of young carers and increase referrals from them. As part of this to promote the national good practice toolkits on young carers to schools, youth clubs and faith groups.

E) To assess young carers (using the child concern framework) and ensure resources are targeted appropriately to levels of need (see paragraph 16).

F) To explore work with young carers across the borough to ensure fair and easy access to local support and services.

G) To ensure improved commissioning of support for young carers with clear outcomes.

H) Through the commissioning and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) processes, ensure any provider of young carers’ services provides regular (six monthly) information on young carers to enable an appropriate and up-to-date picture of young carers to be developed within the council (see paragraph 6).

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

I) For the relevant Senior Officer to explore the possibility of using a range of council buildings to improve access to young carers’ services (see paragraph 23).

J) To review these recommendations later in the year in light of the subsequent findings of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing investigation.

K) 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.

L) To receive back in January a written information item of young carers’ needs mapped by the current provider to identify any current gaps in order to inform future work (see paragraph 15).

M) To note the Committee’s support for the urgent development of a new website for young carers, developed with young people by the relevant provider.
N) For the Young Carers Champion to look into the feasibility of working with universities and further education colleges to offer more support for young carers from the London Borough of Sutton.

O) 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’ provider and Sutton communities.

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 may include 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\(^2\). 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 commissioning of 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;
   d. Recommend changes or improvements to the way Sutton measures outcomes for young carers; and
   e. Develop the role of the Young Carers’ Champion.

\(^2\) \textit{Independent} (16 November 2010) ‘Study Identifies Hidden Army of Young Carers’
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\(^3\). 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 may be young carers. In June the Centre had 340 registered young carers aged 8 – 25 (now 370), suggesting that a maximum 15% of young carers are receiving direct support from 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 Service) holds this information on the young carers they support and thus is one major source of data on young carers and their families; previously information has not been regularly requested or 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 of school age; given that we estimate there are 2500 young carers in Sutton, this may mean a significant number are not identified as young carers by the schools.

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,
isolation and a general burden of responsibility that their peers do not have.

10. The investigation received written evidence from two former 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 Adult Social Services and Housing, but as from 2011/12 the responsibility for this service will be within the remit of the Children’s Commissioning Unit within Children, Young People and Learning Services.

12. Services in Sutton for young carers under the age of 25 are currently commissioned from Sutton Carer’s Centre. The Council pays Sutton Carers Centre £42,590 for this service through the LAA Based Grant (formerly Carers Grant). In 2010/11 an additional amount of £20,000 was provided from the Children’s Fund. Sutton Carers Centre also raises additional funds from external sources and benefits from the support of a large team of volunteers.

13. 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 generated 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, with 46% coming from northern wards, followed by 20% from eastern wards, 18% from western wards and 13% from southern wards. Currently 10% of young carers who receive services are from outside Sutton, although their families will be living or working in Sutton. 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 Young Carers Service is currently over capacity and that they are cautious about undertaking new activities which might identify more young carers, at all levels of need, which they could not accommodate. Currently services for young carers at the Centre are universal. One recommendation in the future could be to target more resources at young carers who have higher risk needs, identified using the child concern framework.

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, outings, specialist services such as one-to-one and family therapeutic work, and income maximisation. 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. This may be particularly suitable for young people on the lower scale of the child concern framework.

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. Continuing to develop and monitor an outcome-based service;
   d. Updating websites for young carers in Sutton;
   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 Carers’ Service offers and has met with young carers at a range of workshops, activities and social events. Last year Sutton 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 that 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. Sutton Carers Centre has a register and recently-developed database system (funded by Adult Social Services and the Mayor’s Charity donations) for recording this information but that is limited to the young carers directly supported by them.

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 online.

25. The Committee received a summary of external learning for identifying and supporting young carers in other areas. Hertfordshire provide 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.
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