PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 SEPTEMBER 2015

Community Information Network

Introduction

1. The Social & Community Service's Directorate aims to support and promote strong communities so that people live their lives as successfully, independently and safely as possible. We believe that people themselves, regardless of age or ability, are best placed to determine what help they need in order to lead successful lives.

2. A key element of this vision is supporting people in their communities to keep well by helping them to live at home and remain active in their community for as long as possible. Good information and advice are a key factor in this; we want people in Oxfordshire to know where they can access the right information and advice to help them make good choices about what help they or their family might need

Background

3. The Community Information Network (the Network) operates under contract to Oxfordshire County Council and is delivered by Age UK Oxfordshire. The contract runs from November 2013 to October 2018 and has a total value of £1.31m. There is an option to extend in aggregate for a further three years.

4. Its aim is to initially focus on people who are older, frail or vulnerable and to create easy access to a wide range of information and support that already exists. The organisation networks extensively with parish councils, police community support officers, libraries, the fire service, health service professionals, social group organisers, church groups and others.

5. It proactively refers people for support where appropriate by making direct contact with the agencies, statutory or voluntary, with follow-up; thus becoming a community resource.

6. The Community Networkers provides face-to-face contact with the aim of helping vulnerable people from falling in to difficultly by sorting out a problem before it becomes a crisis. In broad terms the outcomes identified for the Network are:

Target	Service User Outcome
Outcome 1 To reduce isolation by feeling supported by and being part of the local community	I feel confident and am able to take part in a range of community and social activities that are available in my locality
Outcome 2 To live as independently as possible	I have accurate, easy to understand information about care and support.
Outcome 3 To have choice and control over how I live my life	I have the information I need to make real choices and am able to speak to people face to face who know about social care and financial support and can make the support I need

What has the Community Information Network done so far?

7. The Network employs a team of 13 part-time Community Information Networkers supported by 149 volunteers and 1 Good Neighbour Scheme Co-ordinator. The activities it undertakes include
   - organising and attending community information events in village halls, community centres, at supermarkets etc to raise awareness of the Network
   - providing face-to-face independence and wellbeing information and advice
   - receiving referrals from organisations or people who are concerned about someone
   - supporting and setting up Good Neighbour Schemes
   - identifying gaps in support and working with others to find ways of filling those gaps

8. Since the beginning of the contract to end of August 2015 it is estimated that there have been a total of **52,307** contacts with people where they will have received some form of signposting/information about activities/support in their local community or will have been aware of the Network, and of these 1,117 have had face to face support of over 30 minutes duration

9. Furthermore the Network has identified approximately 2,740 'Community Links'. These are people that are given updated locality specific information from the Network to pass on to others. The 'Links' are typically people in community organisations, local councils, faith groups, social groups and clubs, community police support officers and others who are in touch with older and other vulnerable people.

10. The Network also supports and promotes Good Neighbour Schemes (across Oxfordshire there are 55 schemes that support approx. 5,500 people)

11. To promote the service, keep the public, professionals and local organisations informed and involved the Network:
    - Contributes to a quarterly newsletter sent out by Age UK Oxfordshire which has a distribution of approx. 40,000 per annum
    - Sends monthly emails to professionals - currently 1,100 on the list
    - Sends out a pack of local information to the Community Links 3 times a year
    - Organises Locality Partnership Meetings across 5 localities twice per year.
    - Has organised 32 information fairs to date and has organised 580 information events of its own
    - Has attended 1,400 events/talks organised by other organisations

12. It has also set up a dedicated Community Information Network web page to
    - Collate information about services, activities and opportunities available in each locality, first checking the information is accurate and up to date before publishing on the website.
    - Develop a directory of activities and services (launched in May 2015) which provides a search engine that:
      - Enables people to search for community activities by postcode, type of activity, cost and/or availability
      - Allows organisations to register the services they offer through the service
      - The directory has had 9,958 searches in the first 3 months since launch.
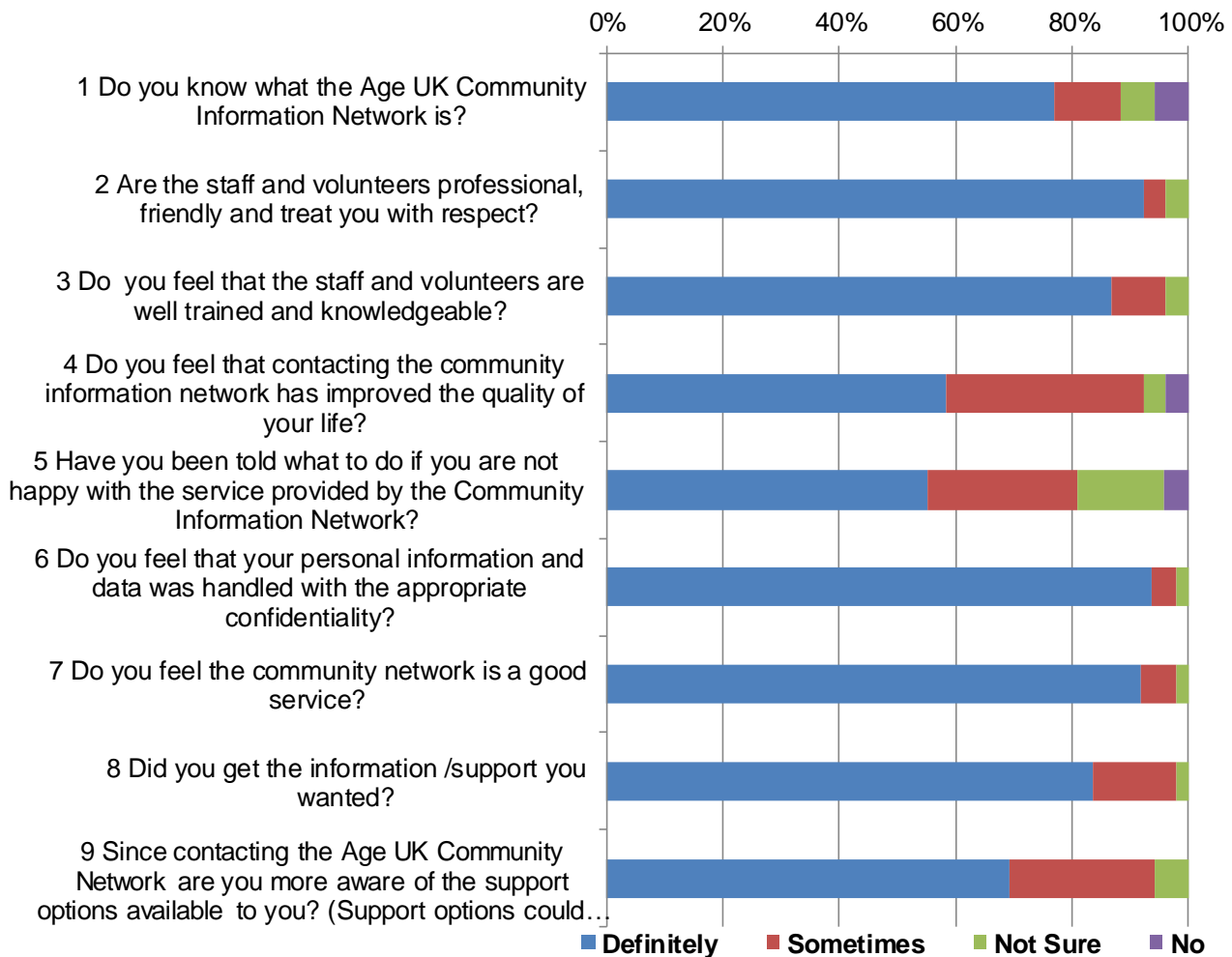
13. To support and report on direct involvement with service users the Network has developed a database which records all service user names and addresses, records identified needs and work undertaken to meet outcomes, and incorporates a system to record and analyse outcomes identified by service users who have had more in depth support

How the service is performing

14. The County Council reviewed the work of the Network between January and March 2015. This review involved visits to some of the services provided; feedback from 95 people using or connected to the organisation; feedback from 10 professionals involved outside of the organisation; holding interviews with 3 managers from within Age UK; and feedback from 11 staff and 12 volunteers.

15. Overall the feedback received was positive. This was also a view supported by customer satisfaction feedback the Network had gathered in the form of case studies and surveys.

Validating people's experiences and the outcomes achieved

16. The council wished to validate the experiences that people had when being supported by the Network; to do this it undertook its own user survey to judge the quality of support provided. 53 surveys were returned from people that had used the service. The questions asked and the results received are summarised overleaf.

Chart: Responses (0%–100%) to questions 1–9 with categories: Definitely, Sometimes, Not Sure, No

	Definitely	Sometimes	Not Sure	No

Questions:
1 Do you know what the Age UK Community Information Network is?
2 Are the staff and volunteers professional, friendly and treat you with respect?
3 Do you feel that the staff and volunteers are well trained and knowledgeable?
4 Do you feel that contacting the community information network has improved the quality of your life?
5 Have you been told what to do if you are not happy with the service provided by the Community Information Network?
6 Do you feel that your personal information and data was handled with the appropriate confidentiality?
7 Do you feel the community network is a good service?
8 Did you get the information /support you wanted?
9 Since contacting the Age UK Community Network are you more aware of the support options available to you? (Support options could…

17. The Network has reviewed this feedback alongside officers from the council and the areas that it is concentrating on for improvement are:
    Q 4 - has the service helped to improve the quality of your life?
    Q 5 - what you should do if not happy with the service you receive
    Q 9 - are you more aware of the support options available to you?

18. To help respond to the above, an action plan has been developed that identifies the following areas for improvement
    ● communication around the referral process,
    ● quality assurance and a complaints process
    ● staff and volunteer training.

19. Since this review took place the County Council has carried out a further monitoring exercise and has continued to receive quarterly performance figures. These generally indicate that the Network is working through this action plan and is meeting and in some areas exceeding its service targets.

Feedback from Professionals and partner organisations

20. The success of the Network clearly depends on how widely it is known and not just with people who use its services. It also needs to promote its service to professionals and partner organisations. Twice a year, partner networking events are held around the

county. These have proved to be very successful with the Network needing to revise the format each time to accommodate the number of partner organisations asking to attend and speak.

Conclusion

21. As stated earlier, good information and advice are key factors in allowing people to make informed choices about how they want to live their lives, and the support that they or their family might need to allow this to take place.

22. The Community Information Network has developed over its first two years to take a prominent position within the social care market; its work helps to support the promotion of user choice.

23. The contract we have in place allows the council the flexibility to tailor its outputs to meet its needs.

24. Members are requested to note the Network's actions to date and to comment on future areas for its development.

Case Studies

25. Alongside this report a set of case studies compiled by an independent consultant reviewing the work of the Community Information network are included. These capture the work of the network with individuals across Oxfordshire and provide a flavour of the impact on individuals