

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 MAY 2018

YOUNG CARERS INTERIM DEEP DIVE REPORT

Report by Councillor Nick Carter, Deep dive lead member

Introduction

1. In January 2018 the Performance Scrutiny Committee discussed the recommendations of the Oxfordshire Health Inequalities Commission and raised concern that it only focused on support for older carers, and did not mention young carers. The Committee agreed to establish a deep dive to examine how the Council identifies and supports young carers to reduce the inequalities they face.
2. Councillor Nick Carter agreed to lead the deep dive with support from Councillors Emily Smith and Glynis Phillips. Officer support has been provided by the Young Carers Team Manager and Senior Practitioner, and a Senior Policy Officer.
3. This report presents the interim findings of the deep dive for review by the Performance Scrutiny Committee. Further deep dive activities and evidence gathering is proposed before any final recommendations are presented to the Committee for consideration.

Context

4. A core priority of the County Council is to ensure that every child in Oxfordshire has a good start in life and is protected from abuse and neglect. This includes supporting young carers to develop their skills and confidence, and the opportunities they need to achieve their full potential, the same as other children and young people.
5. The term 'young carer' refers to children and young people under 18 who provide regular or on-going care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled or misuses substances. A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care-giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child. This risks impacting on his or her emotional or physical well-being, or educational achievement and life chances, and can lead to a loss of self-esteem and confidence.
6. Some of the ways young people care for someone are:
 - staying in the house a lot to be there for the person,
 - non-attendance at school to be available to care,
 - helping the person to get up, wash or dress, use a toilet and other levels of intimate care,
 - taking an inappropriate level of responsibility for the medication of the cared-for person,
 - doing lots of the household chores like shopping, cleaning and cooking,
 - taking responsibility for the care of younger brothers and sisters,
 - providing emotional support.

7. Under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 the Council has legal duty to identify young carers up to the age of 25 and carry out assessments that consider the impact of the caring role on the child and whole family. However, finding those young people with a caring role can be difficult, as they are often isolated and hidden from view.

Background

8. On 4 January 2018 the Performance Scrutiny Committee reviewed the recommendations of the Oxfordshire Health Inequalities Commission and scrutinised the County Council's progress in taking these forward. Whilst the Commission highlighted the importance of supporting carers to maintain their health and wellbeing, it focused on the challenges faced by older carers and there were no specific recommendations for organisations focused on reducing inequalities faced by young carers.
9. The Committee agreed to establish a deep dive to investigate how the Council identifies and supports young carers to reduce the inequalities they face. Members of the deep dive chose to focus their initial lines of inquiry on:
 - How the Young Carers Service works in partnership (across service areas and with other organisations) to identify and support young carers;
 - Access to support for young carers;
 - Services currently offered to support young carers;
 - The profile and number of young carers worked with;
 - Reports of young carers' experiences and their views; and
 - Key challenges from officers' perspective
10. Councillors met with lead officers to explore these key lines of inquiry and a summary of the findings from this discussion are outlined below. Further information has been requested by the group to provide greater clarity on certain areas and a visit to the Young Carers Team is being planned.

Findings

Young Carers Team

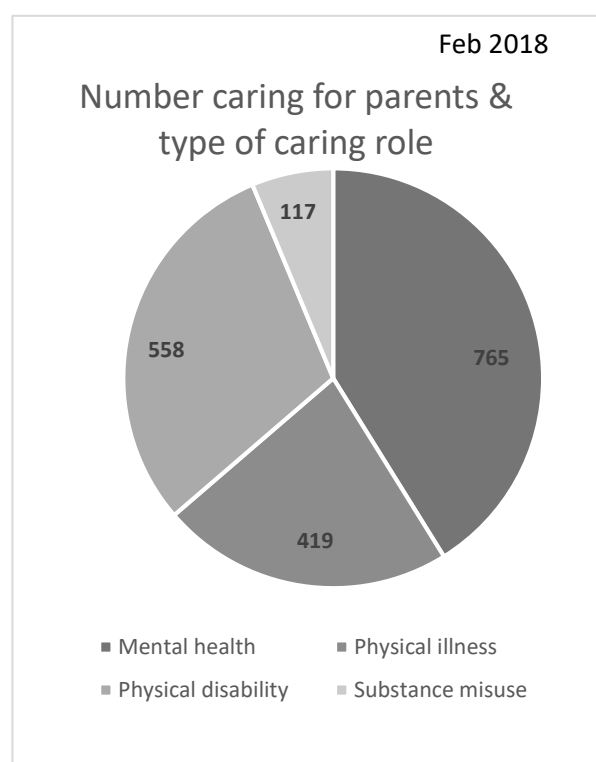
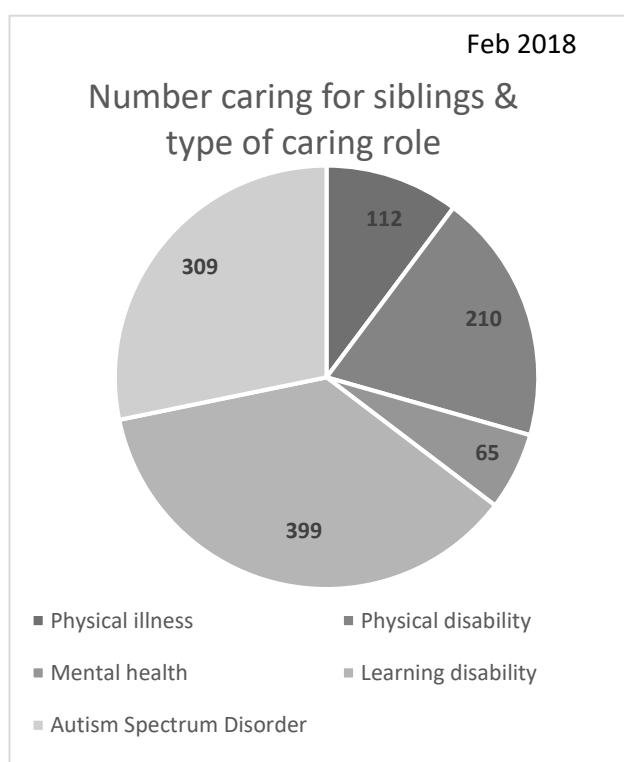
11. To understand the context in which support for young carers is provided, an overview of the Young Carers Team was provided.
12. The County Council has had a Young Carers Team since 2010 and a Young Carers Strategy since 2008. Until 2017 the assessment and support functions were undertaken by two separate organisations: a voluntary sector organisation undertook assessments and an in-house team delivered direct support.
13. The assessment and support functions have now been brought together under a single County Council team of 13 staff, including specialist workers and social work qualified staff. The service is currently in the process of being aligned with mainstream children's services and will be brought under the Family Solutions Service.

The profile of young carers in Oxfordshire

14. The number of young carers known to the Young Carers Service continues to grow each year and there are now over 2,900 identified young carers in Oxfordshire. Between November 2017 and February 2018 alone an additional 374 young carers were identified – a 12.8% increase.

Total young carers identified – Feb 2018 (by Hub)		2,914 (100%)
Banbury	15.4%	North area total 24.9%
Bicester	9.5%	
East Oxford	11.3%	City area total 22.3%
Littlemore	11.0%	
Southeast Oxfordshire	17.3%	South area total 34.2%
Southwest Oxfordshire	16.9%	
West Oxfordshire	14.9%	West area total 14.9%
Unknown	3.8%	

15. Of the young carers identified, the team has seen a significant increase in the number of young people caring for more than one person (19%). Their caring responsibilities range from caring for a parent with drug and alcohol problems, to caring for a severely disabled sibling. The most common caring responsibility is supporting parents with mental ill-health. The youngest carer referred to the Team was just 3 years old.



Cross-service / agency working

16. The Young Carers Service works in partnership with health partners, schools, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and with voluntary sector providers. There is a

well-developed Young Carers School Standards Awards Project that runs alongside the national scheme, which was recently highlighted by the Local Government Association as an effective way of meeting the health and wellbeing needs of young carers in spite of widespread budget cuts and increasing demand for children's services¹.

17. There are particularly well-established links with the School Health Nursing Service, as school health nurses are well placed to identify young carers and the wider impacts of a child's caring role. Officers explained that the Young Carers Team has regular contact with nurses making referrals, or following a referral, to ascertain whether a child is known to them. It was therefore, surprising to learn that there is poor take-up of the Young Carers Service training offer for School Health Nurses and that only some have received training from the Department of Health on young carers.
18. Officers also highlighted the good model used with Adult Social Care, whereby dependent children are identified through an adult carers' assessment. The Adult Social and Healthcare Team works closely with Carers Oxfordshire to facilitate carers assessments for any person over the age of 18. However, despite having an effective method of identification, when a young carer is identified as part of an adult social care assessment the case is not automatically prioritised. There was a clear desire among officers to review the system of 'flagging' cases to ensure a whole family approach is truly embedded.
19. Whilst good links across services exist, there remain a number of issues that can delay effective identification. The threshold of needs matrix² used by agencies to communicate their concern about a child signposts to the young carers assessments, but officers indicated it was not easy to record young carers on the referral forms used across children's services. Assurances were given that the assessment process for Children in Need is being reviewed to ensure young carers can be identified through this process.
20. Officers also emphasised the risks posed by children's social care and adult social care using different recording systems. For young adult carers in particular there is a risk that information can be caught between two systems that are not compatible with one another. It is hoped that the transition of children's service to the same case management system used by adult social care later in 2018 will create more opportunities to join up on these cases.

Referrals

21. Despite some of the obstacles faced by service areas identifying, recording and referring young people for a carers assessment, the number of referrals to the Young Carers Team has been increasing. When councillors met with officers there were around 200 active cases and 91 children awaiting assessment. In 2017 a total of 377 referrals were made to the team – a 9% increase on the previous year – with a

¹ Local Government Association & Bright Futures, 'Meeting the Health and Wellbeing Needs of Young Carers', Jan 2018. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/meeting-health-and-wellbeing-needs-young-carers>

² Oxfordshire Threshold of Needs Matrix can be found online at: <https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/threshold-needs-matrix>

significant majority being new referrals. A large proportion of these referrals came from the north and south of the county.

Total young carer referrals 2017	379 (100%)
City area	16.1%
North area	30.6%
West area	19.5%
South area	33.8%

22. Officers shared the simple allocation checklist used by the Young Carers Team internally to triage and prioritise cases. This includes an appraisal of whether the cared for person is a single parent of the child, if the cared for person is terminally ill, whether the young person cares for a number of people and if the family is known or open to other early help or children’s services. In 2017 a total of 97 Young Carers assessments were completed following referral to the team, although more than 130 were still open for assessment. 79 of these young people received support after their assessment.

Support ‘offer’ for young carers

23. The Young Carers Service works with children aged 4 to 18 and young adult carers aged 19 to 25. The team’s core offer is being reviewed, but the type of support currently provided by the team includes:

- a. Liaison with schools and other professionals involved with a child and their family;
- b. Referrals for and/or liaison with services providing support to the ‘cared for’ person;
- c. Signposting to other support activities and organisations; and
- d. Short term specialist provision focused on building emotional resilience and getting child’s voice heard (typically 1:1 sessions).

24. Young adult carers receive a mixture of support from the Young Carers Team and Carers Oxfordshire. Support for people whose caring role continues after the age of 25 is then provided by Adult Services in partnership with Carers Oxfordshire. If a young carer moves out of Oxfordshire or their caring responsibilities cease, support from the team ends.

25. Officers emphasised the broader role of the service in equipping professionals across other settings to support young carers more informally. Not all young carers need input from the County Council and there are other organisations working with young people who have caring responsibilities, such as the voluntary organisation ‘Be Free Young Carers’ in South Oxfordshire, which offers respite trips, activities, training and emotional support.

26. It was also acknowledged that, alongside delivering support, a core focus of the Young Carers Team is on reducing young carers’ caring responsibilities. The team manager shared an ambition for the team to develop and deliver more outcome-focused therapeutic interventions, as targeted group work is no longer a core offer of the Early Intervention Service. A business case has been developed, based on a model of resilience building and understanding risk, but funding for this is yet to be secured.

Next steps

27. Following the initial discussion with officers and a review of further information and data, the deep dive group has identified a number of key areas it wishes to explore further. More information has been requested on:
- a. The impact of the team since 2010.
 - b. The use of information gathered on young carers.
 - c. The criteria used to identify eligibility for support from the team.
 - d. The links with Child Drug Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation.
 - e. The team's plans to deliver interventions focused on resilience-building.
28. As part of this evidence gathering the proposal is to arrange a visit for the group to observe how the Young Carers Team operates and for the group to attend a young carers professionals networking meeting and Young Carers Forum.
29. Based on the initial findings, the deep dive group has considers that recommendations could be developed in the following key areas:
- Awareness building – councillors knowing how they can help to identify young carers in their division.
 - The join up between children's and adults' case management systems.
 - Key performance indicators for the Young Carers Service.
 - The intelligent sharing of information between service areas and agencies.
 - The take up of the young carers training offer by School Health Nurses.
 - Referral and assessment forms including questions about young carers.
30. Pressures on capacity in the Young Carers team and the timing of some of the key meetings, have meant that the deep dive group is unable to report with final recommendations to Performance Scrutiny Committee at this stage. To incorporate the findings from the group's further activities, the proposal is to extend the deep dive and report with final recommendations in July to the Committee.

Recommendation

31. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
- a) **review and consider the interim findings of the deep dive into how the Council identifies and supports young carers to reduce the inequalities they face.**
 - b) **consider the next steps and suggest any further lines of inquiry for the deep dive.**
 - c) **agree to receive final recommendations from the deep dive at the July Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting.**

Councillor Nick Carter

Lead member – Performance Scrutiny Committee Young Carers Deep Dive

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May 2018