Social Care Toolkit

To help local Healthwatch find out to what extent delays in social care assessments, package arrangements and reviews are a concern for local people

July 2016
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1 Introduction from Healthwatch England

Two local Healthwatch have raised concerns with us that older and vulnerable people are experiencing delays for their social care assessments, package arrangements and reviews which are provided by their local authorities.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire told us that older people are waiting increasingly long times for their social care assessments, and for their care packages to be arranged. They heard that waiting times vary hugely across the county, with some people waiting up to 47 weeks for an assessment.

Meanwhile, Healthwatch Isle of Wight reported long delays in adult social care plan reviews resulting in a ‘quantity not quality’ approach. They contacted their local authority to request details of the scale of the problem and found that some reviews were taking longer than 12 months to be completed.

Thanks to the work of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire, the local authority has recruited new staff to carry out social care assessments, which has helped reduce waiting times. Meanwhile, the new Isle of Wight Director of Adult Services has developed a robust plan to clear the backlog of care reviews.

What we did

We shared the evidence about delays provided by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Healthwatch Isle of Wight with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and made the case for change in our Discharge Special Inquiry briefing on older people, released in January 2015.

We then organised a meeting with the Department of Health to find a way to tackle the issues. As a result, the Department of Health shared local Healthwatch insights with the LGA Towards Excellence Adult Social Care (TEASC) team to bring external expertise and support to the two local areas.

However, in order to identify any need for further action to be taken, we need to know whether other areas are also experiencing similar problems.

What we want to do next

We need your help to find out how widespread the issue is. Currently, there is no data collected around delays in social care assessments or reviews.
For those local Healthwatch which have already done some work on social care, this is an excellent opportunity to build on your findings. If you are in the early stages of planning how to take forward your work on social care, we hope this toolkit will help you inform your thinking.

What is in this resource pack?

We have created a toolkit to help you gather evidence. It includes:

- Two case studies provided by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Healthwatch Isle of Wight.
- Four template letters to help you gather information from a range of local stakeholders.

An online survey will be sent to you on 1 October to find out what evidence you have collected.

By the end of February 2017, we will have reviewed the evidence you submit and identified any trends.

Please note that we will only take this issue forward if we get sufficient responses.
2 Case study 1: Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

Sandie Smith, Chief Executive Officer, shares Healthwatch Cambridgeshire’s experience.

A local sheltered housing manager contacted Healthwatch Cambridgeshire to tell us that they were concerned that their residents were waiting increasingly long times for their social care assessments.

We then contacted the council to ask:

• How many people were still waiting for a care package?
• How long they had been waiting?
• For reassurance that nobody was going without care

The council told us that assessments are prioritised according to levels of need and that they made sure people were not left without care. We were told that people with the greatest need are assessed first but that there can be long waits before assessments take place.

The longest that someone had waited as of October 2013 was 47 weeks.

We saw this as unacceptable and informed our local Overview and Scrutiny Committee and escalated the issue to Healthwatch England.

We have been monitoring the situation since then. Significant steps have now been taken to tackle the problem, including hiring extra staff to help process assessments. In March 2016, Cambridgeshire County Council told us that they had seen a huge reduction in the number of people waiting for a social care assessment, and that the length of time they have to wait had reduced from 47 to 11 weeks.

We are pleased that waiting times are now shorter for most people, and that fewer people are waiting for an assessment, but 11 weeks is still a long time.

We understand the council is under huge financial pressure, but we will continue to monitor the situation and ask for regular updates on care assessment waiting times, and challenge them as needed.

Find out more about Healthwatch Cambridgeshire’s story.
3 Case study 2: Healthwatch Isle of Wight

Joanna Smith, Manager, shares how Healthwatch Isle of Wight tackled this issue.

In 2014 we were contacted by several registered care home managers who were concerned that some vulnerable people were not receiving regular care reviews. They said that when they did happen, they were sometimes given less than 24 hours’ notice which often meant that family members were unable to attend. They felt that a ‘quantity not quality’ approach was reducing the effectiveness of the reviews and not giving vulnerable people the opportunity to comment on the services they receive.

We contacted the local authority to ask for details of the scale of the problem. We discovered that it was worryingly widespread, with some reviews taking longer than 12 months to complete.

The Guidance from the Care Act 2014 states that:

People’s care plans must be kept under review and local authorities should establish systems to do this. The reviews should be person-centred and seen as a positive opportunity to take stock of outcomes and to consider if the plan is enabling the person to meet their needs and achieve their aspirations. It is expected that authorities should conduct the review no later than every 12 months with an initial ‘light touch’ review after six-eight weeks.

We raised the issue at the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Sub Committee and escalated it to Healthwatch England.

We monitored the situation carefully over the next 12 months. We asked for assurance from the Director of Adult Services that a plan would be implemented to ensure that care reviews would be conducted within a 12 month period and that people would be given appropriate notice of their review.

Despite little progress to date, we are now delighted that the new Director of Adult Services has developed a robust plan to clear the backlog of care reviews. We have been assured that anybody who was still waiting for a review will have received it by the end of June 2016.
We will continue to scrutinise the data provided by the local authority and to gather feedback from care home residents and managers about their experiences. Monthly meetings with the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Director of Adult Services will help ensure that they are held to account.

People who live in care and nursing homes are some of the most vulnerable in our society and it is essential that all vulnerable people, their family and friends, are given the opportunity to reflect on the care they receive.
4 What you can do in your area

This toolkit is based on the two case studies provided above. Sandie Smith provided a very helpful list of top tips which we slightly adjusted to reflect the evidence provided by Healthwatch Isle of Wight.

Here are some steps you can take to find out what is happening in your area:

- Speak to sheltered housing providers and/or care homes in your area and ask them to find out about people’s experiences, using the 1st template letter.
- Speak to voluntary organisations working with older people and carers, using the 2nd template letter.
- Ask the Director responsible for Older People’s Services for your local authority how long people wait for assessments, package arrangements and reviews, and how they assess people’s immediate needs, using the 3rd (or 4th) template letter. Ask for relevant data for the past year to help you identify any trends.
- Ask your local authority about the advocacy support available for those currently awaiting a care assessment or review. Under the Care Act 2014, people with additional needs such as learning disabilities or dementia are entitled to this support.
- Send Healthwatch England a summary of the local position. An online survey will be sent to you on 1 October.
- Be persistent!

Note: we have produced two template letters for you to use when contacting your local authority. Just pick the one that feels right for you.

- The ‘warm contact’ letter: use this letter where you already have an established relationship with your local authority.
- The Freedom of Information request: use this letter where you don’t have an established relationship with your local authority, or if you want to check how responsive they are to a formal request from you.

When sending the letters, we would advise you to send the annex tables separately.
Important things to check:

Remember that legislation requires local Healthwatch to make sure the right person is requesting the information and that you will actually use the data you collect.

Before you send the letters out you should check:

- Your local Healthwatch has published its governance documents.
- That you have the authority to sign off to request this information on behalf of your local Healthwatch.
- That you know what you want to do with the information you are requesting.
Dear XX,

Healthwatch query regarding older people’s social care assessments, reviews and waiting times

I am writing to you with regards to the social care and support available for your residents.

As you will be aware, local authorities have a duty to carry out social care assessments when they become aware that an individual may be in need of support. Once the needs of the individual and eligibility for care have been established, the local authority is obliged to provide comprehensive information and advice to the individual, their carers and any third party related to their care. With due consideration of all options available, a support and financial plan should be drawn up in cooperation with social services, in order to meet the needs of the person and ensure continued wellbeing and independence.

A number of local Healthwatch have heard of several occasions where these standards have not been met. A local sheltered housing manager contacted Healthwatch Cambridgeshire to tell them that they were concerned about their residents waiting increasingly long times for their social care assessments as well as for their care packages to be arranged. Meanwhile, Healthwatch Isle of Wight
reported that patients had faced long delays in adult social care plan reviews taking place, with local authorities arranging shortened reviews with little notice, resulting in a ‘quantity not quality’ approach that failed to assess the full needs of those reviewed.

Healthwatch England - the national consumer champion in health and social care - is gathering information about people’s experiences of social care assessments and reviews, as well as waiting times, from across the country. This will be used to establish whether this is a national issue, and how it can be addressed.

To this end, we would be very interested to learn more about your residents’ experiences of social care assessments. We have provided a table below to make it easier for you to provide this feedback and help us with this project.

If this information contains confidential or personally identifiable details, could I ask that you anonymise the data before returning it to me?

Could you send your response to [need to specify the format, i.e. by email to emailaddress@localhealthwatch.co.uk or in writing to local Healthwatch, 123 your community street, our city AB1 2CD]?

Many thanks in advance for your assistance with this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or require any further information.

With kind regards,

[Signature]
ANNEX - please complete the table below and send it to [your email address]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your experience, over the past 12 months have you witnessed residents experiencing delays in receiving:</th>
<th>A social care assessment:</th>
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<tr>
<td>A) a social care assessment (Yes/No)</td>
<td>A care package:</td>
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<tr>
<td>B) a care package (Yes/No)</td>
<td>A care review:</td>
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<tr>
<td>C) a care review (Yes/No)</td>
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If you responded 'Yes' to any of the three areas above, please can you provide some examples (if known please include the time that they waited, and any impacts of that wait)

Are there any other comments / information that you think would help us in this area?
Dear XX,

Healthwatch query regarding older people’s social care assessments, reviews and waiting times

I am writing to you with regards to the social care and support available from social services for people living in [name of your local area].

As you will be aware, local authorities have a duty to carry out social care assessments where they become aware that an individual may be in need of support. Once the needs of the individual and eligibility for care have been established, the local authority is obliged to provide comprehensive information and advice to the individual, their carers and any third party related to their care.

With due consideration of all options available, a support and financial plan should be drawn up in cooperation with social services, in order to meet the needs of the person and ensure continued wellbeing and independence.

However, a number of local Healthwatch have heard of several occasions where these standards have not been met. A local sheltered housing manager contacted Healthwatch Cambridgeshire to tell them that they were concerned about their residents waiting increasingly long times for their social care assessments as well as
for their care packages to be arranged. Meanwhile, Healthwatch Isle of Wight reported that patients had faced long delays in adult social care plan reviews taking place, with local authorities arranging shortened reviews with little notice, resulting in a 'quantity not quality' approach that failed to assess the full needs of those reviewed.

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Are there any other comments / information that you think would help us in this area?
7 Template 'warm contact' letter to local authorities

The following letter template is for where you have an established relationship with your local authority.

Name
Healthwatch X
Address and postcode
Telephone and email

Name of the Director responsible for Older People's Services at your local authority
Address and postcode
Telephone and email

Date

Dear XX,

Healthwatch query regarding older people’s social care assessments, reviews and waiting times

I am writing to you with regards to the social care and support available from social services for people living in [name of your local area].

A number of local Healthwatch have heard concerns from a number of areas that older people are facing delays in their social care assessments, care packages and reviews, with expected standards not being met.

Healthwatch England - the national consumer champion in health and social care - is gathering information about people’s experiences of social care assessments and reviews, as well as waiting times, from across the country. This will be used to establish whether this is a national issue, and how it can be addressed.

Please find below four tables that you can fill in to provide us with the information we need. If available, please provide data for the past three years.
If this information contains confidential or personally identifiable details, could I ask that you anonymise the data before returning it to me?

If you do not collect this information or have incomplete data could you let me know as soon as possible?

Could you send your response to [need to specify the format, i.e. by email to emailaddress@localhealthwatch.co.uk or in writing to local Healthwatch, 123 your community street, our city AB1 2CD]?

Many thanks in advance for your assistance with this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or require further information.

With kind regards,

[Signature]
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<td>Total number of people who underwent a social care assessment in your area</td>
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<td>Number of people referred for Care Act advocacy</td>
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<td>Standard advocacy provision in terms of hours of support</td>
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8 Template Freedom of Information request to local authorities

The following letter template is for requesting information using the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

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Healthwatch X
Address and postcode
Telephone and email

Name of the Director responsible for Older People’s Services at your local authority
Address and postcode
Telephone and email

Date

Dear XX,

Healthwatch query regarding older people’s social care assessments, reviews and waiting times

I am writing to you with regards to the social care and support available from social services for people living in [name of your local area].

A number of local Healthwatch have heard concerns from a number of areas that older people are facing delays in their social care assessments, care packages and reviews, with expected standards not being met.

Healthwatch England - the national consumer champion in health and social care - is gathering information about people’s experiences of social care assessments and reviews, as well as waiting times, from across the country. This will be used to establish whether this is a national issue, and how it can be addressed.

Please find below four tables that you can fill in to provide us with the information we need. If available, please provide data for the past three years.
If this information contains confidential or personally identifiable details, could I ask that you anonymise the data before returning it to me?

If you do not collect this information or have incomplete data could you let me know as soon as possible?

We are requesting this information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and ask that you reply to this request within 20 working days of receipt. Could you send your response to [need to specify the format, i.e. by email to emailaddress@localhealthwatch.co.uk or in writing to local Healthwatch, 123 your community street, our city AB1 2CD]?

Many thanks in advance for your assistance with this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or require further information.

With kind regards,

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9 How Healthwatch England will gather your feedback

On 1 October, we will send you a link to an online survey to gather your feedback.

If you have multiple responses to your enquiries from providers and local authorities, we will ask you to send those to us by email at that stage.

In the meantime, should you have any questions, please email Joshua.Edwards@healthwatch.co.uk, Public Affairs Officer or Jacob.Lant@healthwatch.co.uk, Head of Policy and Partnerships, at Healthwatch England.
This toolkit was produced by Zoe Mulliez, Policy Advisor at Healthwatch England, with the support of Josh Edwards, Public Affairs Officer and Vanessa Todman, Quality Manager.

Thank you to Sandie Smith at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Joanna Smith at Healthwatch Isle of Wight for sharing their work, insight and findings.

Please contact us if you would like this document in another language or format, for example in large print, in Braille or on CD.