

## **Transcript of Developing a Carers' Strategy: experience from Essex and Suffolk**

Rebecca Smith, Commissioning Manager, Children & Families Commissioning, Essex County Council: This is our All-age Carers' Strategy, launched in May this year. It runs from 2022 to 2026.

Rob Forder, Carers Development Manager, Suffolk County Council: We launched the strategy November 2022. We started with a three-year strategy, but when we asked carers, they thought it was too short, so that has increased to five years. We have 98,000 carers in Suffolk predicted over next 20 years. One in three residents over 65 will be caring compared to one in four in England.

RS: There are over 150,000 carers in Essex but we know that number is likely to be significantly more once we get the data from the most recent census. Around 30% are likely to be providing over 100 hours of care per week. From surveys done every two years of adult carers in England, carers in Essex report lower satisfaction than in other areas with the support they receive. We also know that many people don't identify as carers, so aren't accessing the support they'd be able to.

Quality of life and social contact, that has been getting better for carers over the past couple of years, but [with regards to] actual satisfaction with social care and access to information, carers in Essex are telling us that that's getting worse. We need a systematic approach to working with partners across the system to support carers and provide that support early on, to stop people getting into crisis.

RF: What Adult and Community Services in Suffolk had beforehand was their two-page text document as a Carers' Strategy. Funding for the strategy and the post came from public health and that is a result of Covid, and the recognition that carers need to be supported.

RS: In the development of the Strategy we did a range of focus groups, one to one interviews and surveys. Key themes that were coming up, some carers finding aspects of their role enjoyable, and others finding that there was nothing that they enjoyed about it at all. The impact the pandemic - some carers saying that support networks around them dwindled during that time.

Getting a break from caring, that was seen as something that was really, really, important but also really challenging. Carers' assessments came through as a real issue with some carers telling us that they had a carers' assessment but hadn't even realised it had been done. Getting a balance between caring for someone and also keeping your house nice, having some free time, and having a work life as well. Another really strong thing that came through was about the importance of relationships with other carers and peer support, networks of support around you as a carer.

We took all of this research and all of the things that we were told in the interviews and focus groups, and we used this to develop six commitments to carers, which is what the strategy is based around. These are the six commitments and details about how we hope to achieve them for carers (refers to screen).

Alongside those six commitments we developed a carers' outcomes framework so this is included in the strategy as well. These are the outcomes that we will be striving to achieve for carers in everything that we do. Support services that we commission for carers will be commissioned around these outcomes and working to achieve these outcomes for carers. These were these were the important things that were coming through from that research that we did.

RF: To do coproduction properly and to get all the process done and everything else, took twice that time (refers to chart on screen). We contacted stakeholders and people who are keen to be involved, which is health, social care, carers themselves, voluntary sector.

We had focus groups made up of carers, we developed carers surveys - they designed the questions, not us. From that we did a draft strategy in May and June time, that then went to formal consultation (there were lots of drafts of the strategy) then the draft graphic design, it then went to sign off, it was published in November. And we're now at that stage where we're doing the action plan and the whole process starts again.

Focus groups: we wanted them to involve carers and partners. We used the 'Signs of Safety' approach. Three questions: what's working well, what are you worried about, and what needs to happen. These are some of the results of these questions (refers to screen).

How did we do the research? Partners again, the same partners, websites and research from carers UK, carers trust, other organisations, Healthwatch as well. There was more online than face to face, partly because we wanted to reach all people across Suffolk and not many groups were happening.

We noticed there's no young carers. No young carers signed up to digital surveys. No young carers engaged in anything. So we went to Suffolk family carers, one of the local carer organisations, and asked them to help. They rewrote the young carers survey again with young carers, but approached it differently. They went into schools and local groups and met young carers that way.

We had an eight-week consultation: here's an example of what we sent out, just one page. The Carer Strategy formal consultation page. We asked Suffolk Family Carers to advertise it. We also put it to Healthwatch and other organisations as well, and then Suffolk Family Carers again went out to young carers. And again these surveys, following the initial surveys into the consultation, were written by young carers and adult carer and professionals as well, so coproduced again.

The first five questions were 'Do you agree with the five priorities?' The way we came up with five priorities - we had a lot more than that to start with - but during the consultation and pre-consultation discussions carers and other professionals watered it down to five priorities.

They all agreed that they were correct, and each one has their own page in the Strategy. So, what are you worried about, and what needs to happen? So 'what needs to happen' is not an action plan. Speaking to other local authorities in other places, we didn't include the

action plan in the strategy for various reasons. One [was] because if we put it in the Strategy, it would be more difficult to change, as well, and if we completed it in six months where do you go from there? So the action plan will follow later. This is what carers and others said they think should happen following the Strategy (refers to screen), the action plan will come next.

RS: There's an awful lot we want to do. Those are six really big commitments (refers to screen) in that Strategy. We spent time over the past six months developing an action plan for each of those commitments and thinking about what we can do now, and what's going to take slightly longer.

We've identified first steps in achieving those commitments. Carers' assessments and reviews, we're doing a review of our carers' assessment process to look at the practice that social workers are using and looking at the carer experience. We're going to be looking at a trusted assessor model, looking at other ways for carers getting an assessment that's not necessarily through social care, because not everyone needs or wants a statutory social care assessment.

Developing a toolkit that could be used by a range of people that would enable them to identify and signpost some of the support that might be available. We've been doing some work off the back of the Strategy to look at the range of different times of change that carers might experience and what kind of support would have helped at those times and peer support has been identified as a really strong support mechanism for someone going through a time of change.

Information advice and guidance: we're looking at all of the different places that carers can get information, how we can improve that so things like our own council website, the websites of other organisations that carers might go to, how we could provide some information differently.

We've been reaching out to a range of different carers to work with us on some of these projects that I've mentioned and we're looking at different ways to listen to what carers are telling us and embed that into work that we're doing. We're also looking at recruiting council officers who have lived experience of caring.

Finally, at the moment we're redesigning what our carers support offer looks like, and we're going to be re-commissioning our carer support offer, and that will be really tied to those commitments and outcomes from the Strategy.

RF: We've actually got our first steering group for the action plan next week and then they'll be the five subgroups from that for the priorities. Then there will be six monthly reports to the steering group to make sure everything is on track.