

When organisations miss opportunities to make every contact count

Finding information & support for the caring role



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Introduction

All organisations responsible for the health, wellbeing and care of each person they meet. They have the opportunity to impact peoples physical and mental health. With increased pressure on organisations to reduce costs, services can no longer focus on symptoms or single issues in isolation. There is a need for systemic change towards proactive prevention and this can only be achieved if organisations work in an integrated way.

Making Every Contact Count is a national initiative encouraging staff to help people to make healthier choices in order to achieve positive long term behaviour change. By providing information and signposting individuals to get the most out of the system in a timely fashion.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough was aware that carers were not always signposted to local services when visiting their GP. Volunteer signposters, called “Community Navigators” are being used in each surgery to support GPs in ensuring that people are accessing the wealth of community services that are available throughout the Borough.

Wokingham Borough Council asked Healthwatch to adapt “Supporting Carers: A Toolkit for GP practices” originally produced by Healthwatch Reading. The toolkit contained:

- The Wokingham picture
- A template carer identification poster for a GP surgery
- A template carer registration form
- Wokingham Outreach Carers Service
- A quick guide to local carer information, advice and support

We know that early intervention and support for carers is beneficial and can help relieve stress and worry. One resident told us:

“I care for my Mother and have been in contact with the GP and Wokingham Borough Council for various things but it was a year before I was signposted to the Wokingham Outreach Carers Service. We need to ensure carers are identified as early as possible and signposted to carers services that can help them in so many ways.”

Wokingham Outreach Carers Service provides a variety of support services to carers, they include, Information advice and support, access to carers groups, carers breaks, free training and support, information on benefits and carers grants and signposting to other organisations e.g. Crossroads Care who can for example provide respite services.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough adapted the toolkit and it was passed back to the council in April 2017 for approval. After several reminders we received confirmation from the council in September 2017 that they were ready to print and distribute the toolkit after making a few amendments.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough continues to hear from carers about missed opportunities to provide them with information and/or signposting about local carers services. These include, for example missed opportunities to provide information and signposting from GP surgeries and when receiving or enquiring about other services at Wokingham Borough Council.





What we did

GP Surgeries:

We decided to carry out a mystery shop of GP surgeries, Wokingham Hub and Wokingham Adult Services departments to see if the *Supporting Carers Toolkit* was on display and to see if there was any information relating to Wokingham Outreach Carers Service.

In spring 2018, 4 Healthwatch volunteers and a member of staff visited all 13 GP surgeries in the Borough.

We were looking to see if the *Supporting Carers Toolkit*, or any individual part of the toolkit, was on display at the surgery. This involved looking at

We visited the following GP surgeries:

- Brookside
- Burma Hills
- Chalfont
- Finchampsted
- Loddon Vale
- New Wokingham Road
- Park Side
- Swallowfield
- Twyford
- Wargrave
- Wilderness Road
- Winnersh
- Wokingham Medical Centre
- Woodley
- Woosehill

What we found

We didn't find any evidence of the *Supporting Carers Toolkit* at any surgery. With regard to any leaflet or posters relating to Wokingham Carers Outreach Service, we found a poster at only one surgery, New Wokingham Road.



We checked all GP surgery websites to see if they had any information about Wokingham Outreach Carers service. We found 5 surgeries web sites that did provide a link to Wokingham Outreach Carers service

GP SURGERY	LINK TO CARERS SERVICE	NOTES
Brookside/ Chalfont/ Winnersh	No	There is a link to now superseded Berkshire Carer service
Burma Hills	No	
Loddon Vale	Yes	
New Wokingham Rd	Yes	
Parkside	No	
Swallowfield	No	
Twyford	Yes	
Wargrave	No	Has link to Young Carers service
Wilderness Road	No	
Wokingham Medical Centre	Yes	
Woodley	No	There is a link to now superseded Berkshire Carer service
Woosehill	Yes	Link is very difficult to find - at bottom of Home web page



Wokingham Borough Council:

One of our volunteers called the Wokingham Social Services telephone number and asked if they could send information about local carers support services. A few days later he received an envelope from the council that contained various leaflets but it did not include any information about Wokingham Outreach Carers service.

Another of our volunteers then visited Wokingham Borough Council offices and asked the receptionist if they had any leaflets for Wokingham Outreach Carers service. The receptionist directed them to Adult Social Services hub on the ground floor near to the reception.

The volunteer told us, **“I didn't see any carers leaflets on the table in the hub. I was asked if I needed some help and I requested any leaflets useful for carers. This receptionist hadn't seen any either but she phoned the assessment office upstairs for help. I was told they had a Carers pack which she said would be useful. They remembered having some leaflets for carers from the outreach service but the staff in the office couldn't find them.”**

“A member of staff then came down with a Carers pack. When I got home I looked through the pack and found a leaflet from The Wokingham Outreach Carers service.”

We also checked the Wokingham Borough Council website for information about the Wokingham Outreach Carers service. After some time we eventually found the information under 'carers support'. It was the final listing on the second page of search results.

Healthwatch Observations

There is a wide range of information and services that aim to support carers. The key question is whether carers are being identified and signposted to these services.

A key issue for carers appears to be the point at which they are identified as a carer and take on this label.

What we hear is that people want information and support a lot earlier. Services and professionals need to be proactive in providing information.

Staff should receive training to enable them to understand customer information needs and ensure they make every contact count.

Recommendations:

That the *Supporting Carers Toolkit* is in all 13 Wokingham Borough GP surgeries and the poster is on display.

In light of the Accessible Information Standard, all organisations to consider how they are displaying information and how accessible it is.

Each organisation should have a central, easily identified information contact point. This would be staffed by people who are skilled in online searching to act as a conduit to more specialised and personally relevant information services.

All services to be able to jointly promote and signpost.