

# Care Assessments:

Survey of care home and sheltered scheme managers

March 2017





## Introduction

Between September and October 2016, Healthwatch Lambeth conducted a survey of sheltered scheme and care home managers about timeframes for residents receiving a care assessment, a review, or delivery of a care package from Lambeth Council.

The survey was part of a national Healthwatch investigation, in response to reported delays in other parts of the country.

## Methodology



We sent a postal survey (with online response option) to all of Lambeth's sheltered schemes, supported living schemes and care homes for older people and those with learning disabilities or mental health support needs (about 125 facilities in total). We followed up by phone where contact details were available, approaching about 50 sites. We also contacted three relevant voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) providing advice and advocacy support to these interest groups.

We received **29** responses, the majority by telephone. We heard from **12** sheltered or extra care scheme managers, **12** care homes or supported living schemes for people with learning disabilities or mental health needs, **three** care homes for older people and **one** VCO, Age UK Lambeth.

These services were delivered by **22** different provider organisations.

We also requested information from Lambeth Council regarding the number of assessments, reviews and care packages delivered in the last three years, along with wait times and information on related advocacy support.

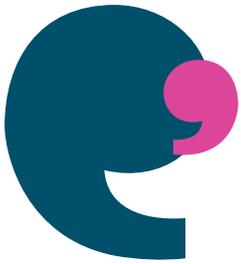
## Findings

### Care assessments and reviews: numbers and wait times

In the last three years, the number of people undergoing a social care assessment<sup>1</sup> in Lambeth dropped slightly from 3,940 in 2013/14 to 3,655 in 2015/16. However, overall requests and referrals for care support over the period rose steeply by 59% from 7,690 in 2013/14 to 12,255 in 2015/16. This was largely due to the Care Act 2014 requirement to assess anyone who may be in need of care and support (including unpaid carers and self-funders).

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<sup>1</sup> This does not include assessments for mental health or short-term needs such as rehabilitation after a hospital stay, equipment and aids or occupational therapy, or advice for people funding their own care, or safeguarding processes.



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People approaching Lambeth Council who did not receive an assessment were either screened for low level support or identified as ineligible.

Lambeth Council's figures for service users receiving long-term care has remained stable with 4,635 people receiving support in 2013/14 compared to 4,570 in 2015/16.

Lambeth Council informed us that the information on wait times for assessments and reviews was unavailable because its recording system is a 'real time' system. However, the Council aims to complete assessments within between four to six weeks of a request, depending on complexity. The Initial Contact service aims to respond to contacts and referrals to adult social care within 48 hours wherever possible. It prioritises requests depending on the level of risk faced by the individual, and some assessments begin within a day. Hospital discharge assessments are given particular priority. Assessment waiting lists are reviewed weekly. The Council's website states that a request for an assessment will be acknowledged in five working days and it aims to begin all assessments within 30 working days. However, it goes on to say a full explanation of a delay will only be given if a wait of more than 10 weeks is likely.

Assessments can also be paused while further information or alternative options are explored. People receiving a care package have a review after the first six weeks and then an annual review, triggered by the Council's information system. A team manager allocates the review to a relevant social worker or practitioner. Reviews can be face-to-face or by phone.

Anyone can request an assessment through the initial contact service either for themselves or for someone else. If someone else makes the request for someone who has capacity to make their own decisions, the Council will ask the individual whether they want to have an assessment.

### Care assessments and reviews: feedback

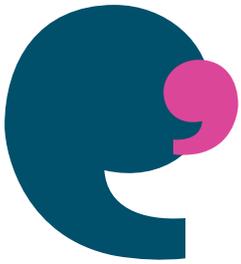
The results of our survey of managers would suggest that care assessment and review delays are **not** a significant problem for most Lambeth residents living in care environments.

However, about a third of surveyed managers (**8 of 28**) reported that they had witnessed residents experiencing these types of delays in the past 12 months. But only half of those managers (**4**) said the issue had affected more than one of their residents. Although in the minority, these reports were from across the various types of residential care services surveyed.



Examples of care assessment delays witnessed by managers included:

- slow liaison between the Council's brokerage and social work teams after a change in need is identified:



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*We're told to email brokerage who then forwarded the information to the relevant social work team. Brokerage is swift but it gets stuck when it's passed on. The onus is on us [domiciliary care managers] to follow up - we're prompted by new incidents."*

- a resident who moved into a care home as a temporary measure while he was reviewed, waited a full year for assessment.
- confusion over who should take the lead on an assessment for an individual with alcohol dependency problems in a sheltered scheme: A referral for an assessment had been made by the King's College Hospital substance misuse team after the resident was admitted into hospital for a related issue. The scheme warden, who was not aware of this initial referral, also made a referral to the Council but later discovered the details he provided had not been logged, although he was told the King's referral was on file. The Council informed the warden that they were going to refer the resident to its older people's team for assessment. However, the warden discovered the King's team were unaware of the plan and said the GP wasn't interested. *"No one seems to be listening."*

Another barrier to receiving assessments and reviews reported by Age UK Lambeth was the difficulty in identifying or contacting relevant social workers to request a review:



*"He wasn't happy with his care. He had been struggling for months. We helped him track down his social worker."*

The Age UK Lambeth advice team also described care assessment and review delays as a *"notorious"* issue for older people in the borough. However, this summation takes into account the experiences of those living in unsupported housing which was beyond the scope of our survey of scheme and home managers.

### Identifying a need for an assessment



Several managers told us that some of their residents needed an assessment or a review but this was not being recognised by social services.

One manager described a sheltered scheme resident with alcohol and drug addiction problems who, like the individual in the earlier example, was only assessed after being admitted into hospital. Only at this point was it acknowledged that his needs were not being met by the scheme, and he did not return.

Other sheltered scheme managers also told us that several of their residents were too frail for this type of accommodation and required assessment for a move to a more supportive environment such as extra care or a care home.



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*“They are alone for 10-12 hours. Some have difficulty and become distressed if they soil themselves. If there was a fire, there’s no way they could get out by themselves.”*

Another scheme manager told us that she relied on her previous professional experience in the social care field to know when to request a review for residents.

### Appropriate assessments

One manager (who otherwise did not report any other problems) highlighted the case of a resident whose family disagreed with the social worker’s assessment of their relative’s needs and felt she needed to be in a care home:



*“The care package has been increased slightly but you don’t need to go to university to see that something drastic needs to be done.”*

Another manager highlighted a client who needed two carers, one to engage him to manage his threatening behaviour caused by a mental health condition, another to do the necessary tasks:



*“The social worker didn’t understand this rationale. It had to go to the head of service.”*

Another respondent felt that residents who are seen as more independent than others *“don’t get holistic assessments”* and, as a result, don’t get the support they need, while those with higher needs tend to get a better service.

Meanwhile, one sheltered scheme manager felt that they should be consulted as part of the care assessment and review process, as well as for hospital discharge plans, because they could help other professionals understand whether the scheme could help to meet residents’ changing needs.

Age UK Lambeth also told us that the Council’s adult social care initial contact team seem to have an expectation that Age UK can carry out assessments, suggesting a misunderstanding about Age UK’s role.

### Mental capacity assessments and advocacy support

Two managers told us that they don’t carry out mental capacity assessments (MCAs) themselves but make a referral to a social worker instead, in accordance with their organisation’s policy. One manager described how the need for an MCA had passed by the time a referral was made to a social worker, so it didn’t take place. The manager was keen for their team to be able to carry out MCAs themselves - something the other service provider is already investigating.



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We did not receive any feedback on advocacy support for residents who have difficulty in being involved in decisions about their care. Lambeth Council reported that 699 people received advocacy support from its commissioned provider, the Independent Living and Carers Partnership, in 2015/16. Figures for the previous two years were not provided.

### Care package delays

A similar number of survey respondents (**7 of 28**) also told us they have witnessed residents experiencing delays in receiving care packages once they are agreed. One manager said the lag was typically between 4-5 weeks, while another described one resident who had been waiting for five months. In the meantime, the existing domiciliary carers covered the gap: *“We do what we have to do.”*

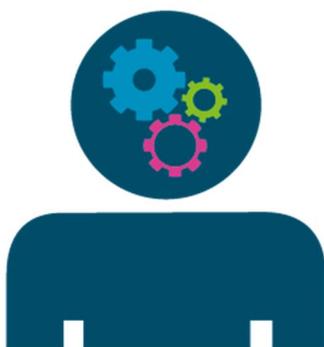


A care home manager described a similar situation involving a dispute between two local authorities about which one should take responsibility after a resident no longer qualified for NHS Continuing Healthcare. The home’s trustees agreed to lodge the resident in the meantime but warned he would have to go back to hospital if the situation was not resolved. It took 18 months to resolve and for the home to be reimbursed for the fees.

Another sheltered scheme manager described a resident waiting over six months for a shower to be installed, which then enabled him to wash himself without support.

A couple of managers highlighted delays due to confusion or disagreement about who should deliver care in unusual circumstances. One example involved occupational therapy provided by health services rather than social services. Another care package which had been brokered for an individual staying in a supported flat in the grounds of a care home was shelved because it was deemed unworkable with the welfare benefits and district nursing systems.

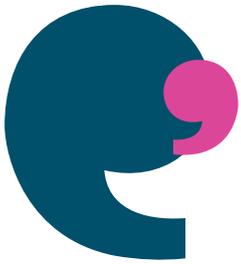
### Reflections



Although no widespread delays in carrying out assessments or delivering care packages were highlighted through our survey of care home and sheltered scheme managers, responses revealed a number of individuals living in supported accommodation who were in need of assessment or review.

This may suggest a need to better promote the assessment referral and review process to residents in supported accommodation, their families, staff and relevant signposting bodies to ensure everyone in need of care and support receives a prompt assessment. Scheme managers in particular may benefit from refreshers on identifying

changing needs amongst residents and encouragement to make referrals and mental capacity assessments (where appropriate).



## Healthwatch Lambeth Care Assessment Survey

It may also be helpful for the Council's initial contact team to receive a briefing on the scope of Age UK Lambeth's services and remit to avoid any future confusion.

In addition, we were surprised that data on wait times for assessments and care packages was unavailable. While this information may be monitored and reviewed on a case-by-case basis alongside risk levels in order to prioritise those in most need of assessment, given the rise in demand for support, we are concerned that there is no system-wide process for tracking wait times. We would encourage the Council to investigate the feasibility of doing so, in order to assess its performance against its six-week target and help manage the increasing demand, and also to guard against potential inequalities of access (for example, in terms of the nine protected characteristics).

Meanwhile, in the absence of this data, Healthwatch Lambeth is interested to explore whether assessment and care package delays are experienced by people living in unsupported accommodation and we will look to incorporate this question into our planned review of home care in the coming year. We also welcome the Council's invitation to gather feedback from individuals who have received an assessment, as a contribution to its quality check processes.

## About Healthwatch Lambeth

Healthwatch Lambeth is the independent health and social care champion for local people. We work to ensure your voice counts when it comes to shaping and improving services. We address inequalities in health and care, to help ensure everyone gets the services they need. We are a charity and membership body for Lambeth residents and voluntary organisations.

There are local Healthwatches across the country as well as a national body, Healthwatch England.



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