

Overview & Scrutiny

Care Work as a Career

Update Report of the Care Work as a Career Scrutiny Task Group

In February 2019, Council agreed the following Motion:

"Council acknowledges and respects the 15,000 Worcestershire residents who work in the care industry. Many more residents are dependent upon their care. Council asks the Cabinet Member Responsible to consider ways in which their work can be celebrated and encouraged and how more people can consider care work as a viable career option."

Council recognised that it was important to try to boost the self-worth of care workers and emphasise the importance of care workers' role. Council wished to break down the negative perception of care workers as being low paid, unskilled with limited career opportunities and promote care work as a career with justifiable rewards. They were informed that a recent survey of care workers indicated that whilst they were proud of their work and found it rewarding, they had concerns about a lack of support from employers and heavy workloads.

As a result of the concerns expressed by Council a Scrutiny Task Group led by Mrs E Tucker, Vice-Chairman of the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel was established with the following **terms of reference**:

- a. How the Council can promote and develop care work as a career
- b. How the existing care workforce can be better supported and celebrated

The **scope** of the Task Group's work was agreed as follows:

- What roles are classed as care work?
- What the Council can do to promote and develop care work as a career?
- How can the existing care workforce be better supported and celebrated?
- What are the issues with recruitment and retention of care? workers and how can the Council and partners improve this?
- How the Council liaises with education and training providers to develop skills and promote care work as a career?
- How agencies support care workers in particular those used by the Council?
- What has worked well elsewhere? For example, use of social media, creation of homecare co-operatives, links with education and training providers, value-based recruitment and saturation marketing, use of apprenticeships, establishment of a social work/carers academy

For the purposes of this Task Group's work, the role of 'Care Worker' has been specifically focused on those providing **direct care roles** in residential homes and on a domiciliary basis. Direct Care roles include roles such as such as Activities Worker, Care Worker, Personal Assistant, Rehabilitation Worker, Shared lives Carer and Advocacy worker.

As part of its review, the Scrutiny Task Group has gathered evidence from a variety of sources including Council employees from Adult Services, Learning and Development and Communications. In addition, it has met with a representative from an external care home and an external provider of domiciliary care as well as Unison (Trade Union). A meeting with Skills for Care and a visit to an educational establishment are scheduled for the week ahead.

Whilst the work of the Task Group is nearing completion, before that stage was reached, owing to the timings of the budgetary process, the Task Group wished to make the following recommendations for consideration in advance of the full report.

Recommendation 1: Promotion of Care Worker role.

The Task Group urges the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Adult Social Care to identify additional financial resources to facilitate a publicity campaign aimed at promoting the work of Care Workers and increasing public understanding of the crucial and valuable role that they carry out.

The primary objective of the Task Group was to seek ways to improve the recognition of the role of care workers, raise their professional-esteem and increase public understanding of the importance of the personal work that they do, and how this makes such a difference to people's lives. The Task Group has agreed that there should be a general package of measures introduced to support and celebrate the dedication, commitment and outstanding performance of care workers (where appropriate) and to raise the profile of the profession in general.

The Task Group felt there should be a specific publicity campaign to raise the profile of the profession and provide insight into the role that care workers carry out. With greater public understanding, it is anticipated that the public profile and respect for the Care Worker role would be enhanced and more people would be encouraged to work in the sector. People who use care services would also benefit from this initiative, as they would be receiving care from staff who felt much more valued and appreciated for the difficult role that they carry out. The Task Group was advised that an additional budget of c£15-16K would be required for the Communications Team to provide a dedicated member of staff to be allocated to this task for at least a 3-month period, with some capacity for ongoing and legacy work.

Recommendation 2: Apprenticeship Programme

The Task Group is aware that a Council-wide Apprenticeship Strategy is currently being developed and, as part of that process, the Task Group urges the CMR to support the development of a structured route for care worker apprentices to flow into adult social care. This would be of considerable benefit to social care teams by providing a regular source of newly qualified apprentices and would also help to make effective use of the Apprenticeship Levy.

The Task Group feels that the Council should lead from the front and become an exemplar of good practice among care worker employers in this area. With a structured route into social care and appropriate support and encouragement throughout their apprenticeship, it is hoped that more people would be attracted to work in the social care sector and take up opportunities for a fulfilling career in whichever role they chose.

In order to help create a clear career pathway into adult social care, the Task Group felt that an enhanced apprenticeship programme for care workers could be established. One format that could be considered is the idea of an 18-month rolling programme with

recruits gaining experience across different areas of adult care, and with new recruits starting on the programme every 6 months.

The Task Group was aware that a revised Apprenticeship Strategy was currently being prepared for approval by the Senior Leadership Team. In the meantime, the Task Group accept that they have more detailed Scrutiny to do on this task, but they wanted to ensure that their idea was given due consideration as part of the Budget Scrutiny process. They would also wish to see some additional monies, in the region of £6 -10K identified and set aside towards the start-up costs for an apprenticeship programme, if it was established, and any associated materials required for use in publicity campaigns and recruitment events.

The Task Group was still developing a full picture of the Council's role with respect to apprenticeship opportunities. They had learnt about the Council's responsibilities through its Employer Provider Status (delivering apprenticeship training directly to staff, rather than outsourcing to an external training provider) and the details of the Government's Apprenticeship Levy (AL) Scheme which was available to fund the training and assessment of apprentices. They had discovered that if the Council did not use all the available AL monies during a two-year period, the money was then returned to the Government. The Task Group wanted to ensure that this money was used in the most effective manner going forward and that recruitment to adult social care roles was boosted by regular availability of newly qualified apprentices.