

Caring for our carers

Service standards for supporting informal carers in Havering

This is a guide for service providers who support informal carers in the London Borough of Havering. It lays out the council's expectations, and provides detailed steps for making sure organisations provide the best support possible.

The following eight principles, developed through interviews with local carers and service providers, should guide your organisation as you develop user-centred services. Select any of the principles below to see more, including examples and tips for putting the principles into practice.

As part of these service standards, we've also included the council's commitment to supporting service providers. Truly user-centred services are only possible when we work together, and Havering Council is committed to better collaboration providers and carers.



Principle 1

Offer services with clear, easy-to-understand benefits

Principle 2

Help carers meet people to share their experiences with

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Reassure carers that their loved ones are looked after

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Be there for your carers

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Our commitment

Principle 1

Offer services with clear, easy-to-understand benefits

No matter what type of service you provide, odds are you want to help as many people as possible. But in an attempt to be welcoming, organisations often create generic programmes -- and that can actually prevent people from getting involved.

Make sure every programme you offer has a specific, easy-to-understand purpose.



I hadn't been to a hairdressers in six years.

Rachel – carer for her 14 year old son living with autism

Putting principles into practice

- Make sure each of your offerings has a clear objective, explained to carers in simple language.
- Don't fall back on generic terms like "provide support" or "improve wellbeing." Instead, be specific about what each of your programmes provides.
- There's a difference between describing activities and describing their benefits -- and both are important. Good service descriptions both explain what's on offer and why someone should participate.

Example

- X Knitting Club Our knitting club meets on Thursdays. All are welcome!
- ✓ Knitting Club Research shows that crafts like knitting can act as a "natural anti-depressant." Whether you're an expert knitter or just interested in learning, our Thursday knitting club can help you improve your skills and meet other local carers.

Principle 2

Help carers meet people to share their experiences with

For many carers, the biggest benefit they receive from service offerings is the chance to meet others who share their experiences. However, there are lots of different ways people provide care -- and someone who looks after a child with disabilities may not have much in common with someone who cares for a partner with dementia.

Services that are marketed for “everyone,” then, may not appeal to some carers, because they worry they won’t feel understood. Don’t try to be all things to all people; whenever possible, offer services designed for carers in similar situations.



It’s nice to know there will be people in the same boat. If you were alone, you wouldn’t feel alone.

Angela – carer for her son with autism

Putting principles into practice

- Design services and activities with a target audience in mind. This might mean putting on more activities for smaller groups, but ultimately will ensure more carers feel welcome and supported in the right ways.
- Make sure people attending your events are given the chance to get to know each other -- for example, by scheduling tea breaks or chats after sessions.
- Encourage service users to become friends and meet up outside the events you have on offer. Support this by sharing (with permission) contact details or by creating special groups on social media where people can chat.

Example

- X Mental Health Bowling Club Anyone caring for someone with mental health issues is welcome to join.
- ✓ Bowling Club for Parents of Adult Children with Autism Are you caring for an adult child living with autism? Come to our bowling club and meet other local parents who are dealing with the same issue.

Principle 3

Reassure carers that their loved ones are looked after

Time away from caring duties is essential for any carer, but finding someone trustworthy to take on those duties can be difficult.

When you offer carer-only events, make sure to clearly communicate that people being cared for will be safe and well, close by or with someone trusted.



A friend looked after Eva at times, and that was great because I trusted her, I wasn't worried about leaving her here.

Linda – carer for her 8 year old daughter with complex needs

Putting principles into practice

- If you can, utilise trained volunteers or professional carers during carer-only events. If that's not possible, design your services so that those who are cared-for can either join in or be close by their carers.
- Be explicit in your marketing materials that both carers and the people they care for are welcome to attend your services, as well as what structures you have in place for supporting people in need of care.

Example

- X Carers' Spa Day Come soak your toes in our day spa for carers. Manicures, pedicures, and chair massages will be on offer.
- ✓ Carers' Spa Day Come soak your toes in our day spa for carers. Manicures, pedicures, and chair massages will be on offer, and trained professionals will be on hand to support your loved one while you relax.

Principle 4

Be there for your carers

Becoming a carer can drastically change someone's reality. Caring comes with many unknowns, and people often need help -- help navigating the benefits system, help understanding a diagnosis, or even just help with emotional support.

You won't be able to solve carers' every need, but you should be able to point carers in the right direction -- including referring them to other resources in the community.



They know more about how to navigate the system than me. I know that I can always stay a little longer and if I have a question, they are always happy to help me.

Linda – carer for her 8 year old daughter with complex needs

Putting principles into practice

- Don't turn people away without providing support or signposting them to alternatives.
- Learn about other services and opportunities for support in the community. This could be local leisure facilities, for example, not just other carer-support providers.

Example

- X “Sorry, we don't offer any athletic activities. I'm sure there's something out there, though.”
- ✓ “We don't offer any athletic activities at the moment, but there's a nearby gym that has low-cost community classes each week. Here's their address -- if you tell them we've sent you, they'll know what to do.”

Principle 5

Know how you help solve problems

Our council budget is getting smaller, while at the same time more and more carers in Havering need our support. In order to serve as many people as we can, we need providers to be clear about what outcomes they're aiming to achieve, and how they intend to be successful.

Currently, there are three ways we support carers. We aim to:

- Support those people who could not manage without the council's support
- Support informal carers so that cared-for people can stay at home for as long as possible
- Prevent emergency situations for carers or the people for whom they care

Beyond these three paths, we must rely on the fantastic work that service providers do to support Havering's carers. And in order to support these service providers, we need to understand how the work they do makes an impact.



We don't have the money to spend on services which don't improve the carer's situation.

Rachel – carer for her 14 year old son living with autism

Putting principles into practice

- Make sure you have a clear problem in mind when you design your services.
- Set and maintain realistic metrics and KPIs so you can track your outcomes.
- Identify a plan for scaling your service, including how you could support more carers over time.
- If your organisation needs additional funding, consider asking clients if they would be willing to pay for services

Example

- X “We’re hoping to grow our service over the next few years, reaching as many local carers as possible.”
- ✓ “More people than ever are caring for an elderly parent. Over the next 18 months, we will increase the number of services we offer to carers of parents by 20%, and the total number of parent carers we serve by 33%.”

Principle 6

Help carers to better meet their own needs

The end goal of any service should be to empower carers to better manage their situations. As a result of your programmes, over time carers should find friends, build a support network, and become more able to help themselves.

Providers should keep in mind how their clients grow and develop over time. By encouraging carers to “progress” through your service, it’s likely that people will naturally find that they need you less -- freeing up new carers to access your offerings.



We want carers to cope better with their situation, so they can support others.

Council commissioning manager

Putting principles into practice

- Spot opportunities for carers to take on a more active role in delivering services. When appropriate, encourage them to lend a hand by, for example, setting up tables or becoming “buddies” for newer carers.
- Encourage carers to form their own social networks, ones that provide support outside of your service. Prompt them to share contact details, connect on social media, or plan their own independent events.
- Measure the “throughput” of your service, in order to understand when new carers attend your offerings and when they no longer need your support.

Example

- X “Amy’s been coming to our monthly dinners for ages now. I’m not sure what she’s getting out of the programme, to be honest!”
- ✓ “Amy’s been coming to our monthly dinners for a year now. She’s fantastic -- she helps us choose the menu and makes sure everything runs smoothly in the kitchen.”

Principle 7

Maintain a flexible, sustainable business model

With the introduction of the Care Act and personal budgets, the market for carer services is changing. In response, we recommend thinking creatively about how your service could become sustainable over time, using combinations of revenue streams. If you need assistance, the council employs business analysts and finance experts who will be happy to work with you to develop a business model that is fit for the future of social care.



In future we will not commission services anymore in the way we used to. The citizens will pay service providers directly.

Council commissioning manager

Putting principles into practice

- If appropriate, encourage experienced carers to run groups themselves, freeing up service providers' resources for other initiatives.
- Explore further sources of revenue. Options like corporate sponsorship, crowdfunding, or resource-sharing with other organisations might be right for your service.

Example

- X "Our service is 100% reliant on council funding."
- ✓ "Our service gets its funding from a variety of sources: community grants, donations, and the council."

Principle 8

Gather feedback and let your services evolve

Services shouldn't be static -- they should change and adapt according to your users' needs. But "gathering feedback" doesn't mean sending out long, complicated surveys. The best providers listen for clues from users and interpret them, using feedback to iterate their service.



Collecting feedback from carers needs to become more than a time-consuming exercise.

Service provider of a small charity

Putting principles into practice

- Involve your users in the process of creating new services, and actively seek their feedback to improve what you currently have on offer.
- Use a range of methods for finding out user need, not just questionnaires. Try focus groups, interviews, or simply observing how people interact with your services.
- Don't wait for someone to give you permission to iterate your service -- just try it out and evaluate the impact.

Example

- X "We sent our users a 50-question survey in January, and they said everything worked fine."
- ✓ "People weren't signing up for our book club, so we asked them why. A lot of them were too busy to attend on weeknights, so we moved the club to Sunday and brought trained volunteers on site to look after loved ones during the meeting."

Our commitment

We know that changing the way we commission could lead to significant changes to how services are designed and run. Some organisations already create services with service standards like these in mind -- others do not, and introducing new standards might impact those organisations' ways of working and even culture. Something to keep in mind, though, is that service providers are not alone on this journey. In order to create more user-centred services for carers we understand that we need to change too.

We will be transparent

- How can we make the commissioning process more transparent and less paperwork-heavy?
- How can we make it easier -- especially for small organisations -- to have a fair chance?

We will be clear about what we consider a “good” service

- The 8 principles defining a “good” service are a first step to making it clearer what “good” looks like.
- Could we launch an annual “User-Centred Service Award”, or reward best practise in a newsletter for service providers?

We will feedback regularly and constructively on how service providers are performing

- How could service providers help us to identify service gaps and tell us what carers need?
- Could service providers run the Carers' Forum?

We will be your partner

- Could we introduce “opening hours” when service providers can be sure to reach us?
- What about introducing service level agreements like: “We will answer your email within two days”?

We will support the transition to the new market

- How can we strike a balance between regular feedback and giving providers space and time to experiment?