Burden on carers

Why is it a priority?

A carer is a person of any age, who provides unpaid support to a partner, child, relative or friend who could not manage to live independently or whose health or wellbeing would deteriorate without this help. Nationally the number of carers is increasing.

There is a clear correlation between caring and poor health that is proportional to the duration and intensity of the caring role, with those providing high levels of care twice as likely to have poor health outcomes as non-carers. Providing high levels of care is associated with a 23% higher risk of stroke, and 40% of carers have significant distress and depression levels (which in turn is a major risk factor for stroke).

There are estimated to be over 22,000 carers in Greenwich (9% of population), over a quarter of whom provide a minimum of 50 hours care a week. Fewer than 1200 carers (just 4% of the estimated total) receive a Carers Assessment which can result in a service, information or advice, and only an estimated 10% of carers are recognised by their GP.

What could make a difference at a local level?

The national carers’ strategy — Recognised, Valued and Supported (2010) outlines priorities for the identification and recognition of carers (by Social Care, Primary Care and other services); addressing barriers to employment; and supporting carers to stay healthy.

Increasing the number of carers with a Carers Assessment, in particular focussing on those giving 50 plus hours care a week, would help those carers most at risk of serious physical and mental health problems due to their caring role, and contribute to reduced mortality.

Increased recognition on the part of GPs (for instance through asking for and recording carer status) would contribute to supporting carers to stay healthy in particular through screening for depression and hypertension, signposting to services, and to help planning for emergencies.

Research shows that effective support to carers goes beyond a single intervention and encompasses good quality mainstream services and sensitive and carer-aware professional practice.

With only half of carers in paid employment, carers who want to work should be supported to do so, including through the provision of flexible working practices, respite services, and employment support.
What are the opportunities for improvement in Greenwich?

Continued utilisation of the Carers Development Fund to commission services including 121 support, peer support groups and respite services

Expanding the capacity of Social Care to carry out Carers Assessments and use of the Community Directory to signpost to healthy living services and mental wellbeing services

Through implementation of MECC in the NHS, and MEOC at RBG, better signposting of carers to support services, and right to a Carers Assessment

GPs more systematically identifying carers through registration process, NHS Health Checks and by engaging with patients on chronic disease registers

NHS providers develop Carers Plans, which set out actions to support carers when those they care for are in hospital, and emergency plans if the carer is unable to care