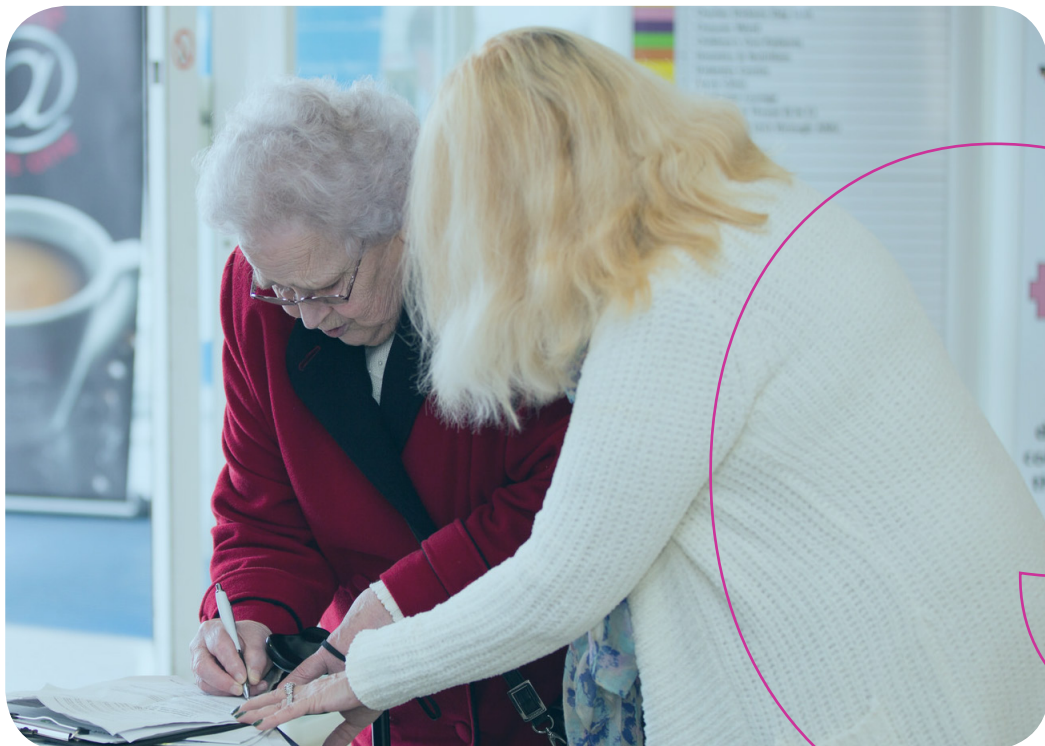


# Liverpool Care Matters

**healthwatch**  
Liverpool

## **Carers Voucher Scheme Report Summary September 2018**



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## Introduction

### Background to the Carers Voucher Scheme

The Carers Voucher Scheme is provided by Liverpool City Council as a service to carers to give them a break from their caring role.

Caring for someone can be a positive and fulfilling experience, however it can also be stressful and tiring. Evidence shows that regular breaks are important for carers to maintain their own health and wellbeing, and to help them continue in their caring role.

Getting regular breaks can be difficult without support as carers are sometimes unable to leave the person they care for alone for any length of time. The cared for person may have a health condition which means they would be unsafe on their own or being on their own may have a negative impact on their wellbeing, for example, due to anxiety.

The scheme involves the carer using vouchers provided by Liverpool City Council to “purchase” replacement care hours from a list of approved provider care agencies. A care worker from the agency visits the cared for person at home for pre-booked appointments to sit with them to ensure their safety and wellbeing whilst the carer has a break.

### Background to this review

The Carers Voucher Scheme has been running in Liverpool since 2002 and was last formally reviewed in 2006. It has therefore been 12 years since the scheme was last reviewed.

Healthwatch Liverpool was approached by Liverpool City Council in April 2018 to carry out a review of the Carers Voucher Scheme. The Council were aware that it had been some time since the last review and were also aware that some carers were referred to the scheme and either never used it or only used it a handful of times before stopping. The Council were keen to find out the reasons for this and if the scheme was still meeting the needs of carers in Liverpool.

## Engagement

Our engagement period for this review ran from June to August 2018. During this time we carried out the following:

### 1. Carers who are registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme

Surveys were sent out by Liverpool City Council on our behalf on 13 June 2018 to 663 people who were registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme at that time. We included a freepost envelope for surveys to be posted back to the Healthwatch Liverpool office.

Healthwatch Liverpool attended the annual Carers Week event in Williamson Square on 14 June 2018 where we had an information stand. Copies of the survey were available and our staff spoke to carers to see if they were registered with the scheme and if they had received and completed the survey.

An online version of the survey was promoted through our social media. This included a paid-for Facebook promotion. It was also promoted via social media by Liverpool City Council and Local Solutions Carers Centre.

### 2. Carers who are not registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme

We chose to include carers who are not registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme as this makes up the majority of carers in Liverpool. We were keen to find out about their experiences, particularly whether or not they are able to get breaks from their caring role and, if so, how they did this.

We worked closely with the Local Solutions Carers Centre to engage with carers who are not registered with the scheme. We provided a large number of paper surveys which the Carers Centre staff could give to carers.

As mentioned above, we also attended the Carers Week event to reach carers and the online survey was promoted through social media by ourselves, Liverpool City Council and Local Solutions Carers Centre.

One of our staff attended the Carers Forum meeting at the Local Solutions Carers Centre on 8 August 2018 to promote the engagement.

### 3. Staff who work with carers in Liverpool

Staff from Liverpool City Council, Local Solutions Carers Centre and Barnardo's who work with carers can refer into the scheme and we wanted to hear their thoughts.

We attended a number of staff team meetings during the engagement period to explain the review and encourage staff to complete the surveys. The meetings covered both Liverpool City Council staff and Local Solutions Carers Centre staff. The member of staff at Barnardo's who works with young adult carers in Liverpool was spoken to over the telephone to explain the review.

The survey was promoted by emails sent to team managers within Liverpool City Council with a request to cascade the information to their staff. Emails were sent by us and the Commissioning Team within Liverpool City Council.

The survey was also promoted via the Liverpool City Council staff intranet.

#### 4. Provider care agencies

We were keen to engage with the provider care agencies who accept carers vouchers to hear their views on the scheme.

Provider care agencies were requested to attend a meeting on 17 July 2018 where we explained the review and encouraged those attending to complete the surveys and cascade the request to their staff.

The Commissioning Team within Liverpool City Council sent emails both before and after this meeting to the provider care agencies to encourage engagement.

## Responses

The response rate is measured by the number of surveys completed. The numbers for each of the four strands of engagement are as follows:

### 1. Carers who are registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme



The total number of surveys posted out was 663 so this represents a response rate of 28%.

### 2. Carers who are not registered with the Carers Voucher Scheme



### 3. Staff who work with carers in Liverpool



### 4. Provider care agencies



Responses were received from 11 different providers. 10 were provider care agencies who accept the vouchers. One was from a provider who is not part of the scheme but has an interest in it.

## Analysis of responses

The response rate for carers who are registered with the voucher scheme has been good at 28%.

The response rates for the other three strands of engagement have been low.

The responses have been collated and analysed using thematic analysis techniques. Despite the low response rates in some areas, there are clear themes which have been identified, many of which link across the different strands of engagement.

# Key findings

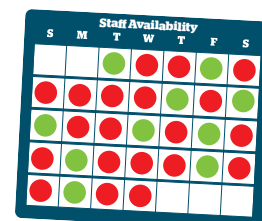
Based upon the responses of those who completed the surveys, the key findings for each of the four strands of engagement are as follows:

## Carers who have been referred to the voucher scheme



- **Carers who use the scheme regularly report high levels of satisfaction**

- **The main issue with the scheme is a lack of capacity with the provider care agencies**



- **Carers have also highlighted a lack of communication from provider care agencies as a concern**

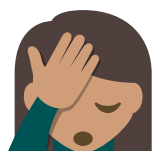
- **Some carers would like the scheme to be made more flexible to encompass some care tasks such as toileting and medication prompts**



In addition:

- The scheme allows carers to do tasks and take part in activities including attending medical appointments, shopping, and seeing friends and family.
- The scheme gives carers time for themselves and peace of mind knowing that the cared for person is safe.
- A lot of carers report having difficulties with finding a care agency that has availability for visits.
- Carers have also highlighted a lack of communication from provider care agencies as a concern.
- Some carers have reported that provider care agencies don't respond to requests and don't advise them if a pre-arranged appointment is no longer possible.
- Some carers would also like the scheme to cover taking the cared for person out.
- Some carers feel that the vouchers don't give them enough of a break and they would benefit from more time for themselves.

## Carers who have not been referred to the voucher scheme



- **The majority of carers are not able to get regular breaks from their caring role**

- **This has an impact on their health and wellbeing. They struggle to have a life outside caring and experience tiredness**



- **Awareness of the Carers Voucher Scheme is low as the majority of carers haven't heard of the scheme**

## Staff who work with carers



- **Staff appear to have a good insight into the scheme as their responses match closely with what carers say about the scheme.**



- **Staff say that the scheme enables carers to do tasks and take part in activities. They also say that it gives carers a break from caring and peace of mind.**



- **Staff feel that the main issue with the scheme is a lack of capacity with the provider care agencies.**

- **Some staff have also suggested that the scheme could be extended to encompass care tasks and taking the cared for person out.**



In addition:

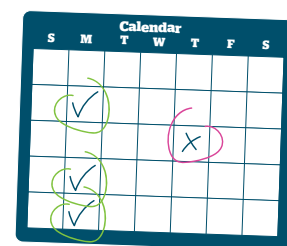
- Some staff feel that the referral process for the scheme could be streamlined. A rapid access pathway for those being discharged from hospital has also been suggested.
- One member of staff has suggested that an option for electronic vouchers and bookings would be beneficial for some, particularly younger carers, in addition to the paper vouchers.

## Provider care agencies



- **Provider care agencies feel that the scheme gives carers a break, flexibility and peace of mind.**

- **Some care agencies say that regular bookings are easy to manage, however ad hoc bookings can be difficult to manage in terms of staff and availability.**



- **The majority of providers have had to decline a request to use the vouchers due to staff availability.**

- **Some providers would like to be able to offer an expanded service to include personal care tasks.**



In addition:

- Care agency staff feel the scheme enables them to build closer relationships with the carer and cared for person.
- Some providers would like to see an increased use of technology such as electronic vouchers rather than the current paper vouchers.

## Conclusions

This review has highlighted a number of key themes, many of which are linked to all four strands of engagement.

Carers who use the voucher scheme regularly report generally high levels of satisfaction. Many of the responses included detailed descriptions of the positive effect of using the vouchers. Some carers reported being able to do essential tasks which they would otherwise struggle to manage. This includes attending their own medical appointments, shopping and household tasks. Carers also described being able to access social and leisure opportunities including seeing family and friends. Others described being able to have a much needed break and having time for themselves.

The review has highlighted a significant issue around the availability of care staff to deliver the service. Some carers have given up trying to use the scheme due to problems with finding a care agency with availability. Some of the carers who use the scheme regularly have described these kind of issues. Responses from staff who work with carers have also mentioned this as a concern.

This issue is further evidenced by the fact that the majority of provider agencies who responded have had to decline a request for care, often due to issues of staff availability. Some providers have stated that regular bookings are more manageable in terms of planning staff availability, whereas ad hoc bookings can be tricky. This approach may work well for some carers, however it is unlikely to be suitable for all, particularly those who need more flexibility when it comes to dates and times.

Some carers have stated that they would like the scheme to be extended to include care tasks. At present the scheme is intended to be a “sitting service” only. Some carers have found this to be a barrier if the cared for person needs, for example, assistance with toileting or a medication prompt. Staff have also raised this as an issue as well as provider care agencies, some of whom seem willing to take on the extra tasks as part of an extended service.

Staff and provider care agencies have suggested that technology could be incorporated into the scheme such as introducing electronic vouchers. One member of staff felt that this would be beneficial for younger carers in addition to the paper vouchers. The provider care agencies have suggested that electronic vouchers should be introduced as a replacement to the paper vouchers. However, it should be noted that none of the carers who responded stated this.

Our full report will be submitted to Liverpool City Council for their consideration. We hope that the insights provided in the full report will help to inform improvements to the scheme. However, any changes will need to be carefully considered as the scheme is already working well for a large number of carers who use it regularly.



**To read the full version of this report visit our website:  
[www.healthwatchliverpool.co.uk/care-matters](http://www.healthwatchliverpool.co.uk/care-matters)**



# About Healthwatch Liverpool

**Healthwatch Liverpool is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Liverpool. We're here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.**

**One of our main purposes is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.**

**As part of a national network made up of local Healthwatch organisations in every local authority area of England and Healthwatch England, the national body, our work contributes to a nationwide perspective of health and social care services.**

**At Healthwatch Liverpool we also provide a dedicated information and signposting service which helps to put people in touch with services and activities that can help maintain and improve their health and wellbeing.**



## Appendix A - Response from Liverpool City Council to the full report

*Thank you to Healthwatch Liverpool for their support in putting together this comprehensive report on Liverpool City Council's carer voucher scheme. It was good to hear that the majority of carers accessing the carers voucher scheme find it supports them in their caring role. However, we acknowledge that there are improvements that could be made to the service. The contents of this report will be used to improve the quality of the carer voucher scheme and ensure it is an effective service fit for the future and one that meets the needs of all carers. We look forward to working with Healthwatch Liverpool in the near future.*

**Jane Weller**  
**Commissioning and Contract Manager**