

HOME CARE – The Forgotten Service?

There are over 200 home carers in Milton Keynes Council. They form a major part of the social care workforce. The overwhelming majority is women who work part-time caring for the elderly people, disabled people, those with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems.

UNISON case for Homecare:

RECOGNITION OF THE WORK THAT HOME CARERS DO

Home care workers play an essential role in improving the quality of life for thousands of elderly, disabled and mentally ill, providing practical and personal care. They are a key part of the social care team of social workers, occupational therapists; community care workers and other social care professionals.

A HIGH QUALITY AND WELL RESOURCED SERVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO NEED HOMECARE

The majority of service users are elderly people who feel forgotten, often becoming the brunt of social service budget cuts, as case studies carried out show. Because home care is carried out in service users' homes it has become the "forgotten" social service. Their needs should be recognised and valued. Service users have the right to a decent quality of life and to live their lives in dignity.

PROPER REWARDS TO RECOGNISE THE CHANGED ROLE OF HOME CARE WORKERS

Home care workers have a primary care responsibility. They are in the front line of social care provision. The role of home care workers over the last 10 – 15 years has evolved from doing domestic work such as housework and shopping errands, to providing personal care for people, such as washing, dressing, getting them up and putting them to bed.

RECOGNITION OF HOME CARE WORKERS AS THE FRONT LINE OF SOCIAL CARE

Quite often the home care worker is the only member of the social care team who service users see on a daily basis. A relationship of trust and care is built up between the home care worker and the service user.

Home care workers are the "eyes and ears" of social services. This is because of the level of personal care they provide and the fact that they do frequent home visits. So they are often the first to spot developing problems or needs of clients.

DIRECT PUBLIC PROVISION OF HOME CARE

Privatisation means the standard of care is cut – people suffer. Local authorities are increasing their use of private agency workers. Agency workers have often not received the same level of training as the in-house workforce and often do not provide the same standard of care.

SINGLE STATUS AGREEMENT – WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND WORKING TIME

All local government workers are entitled to fair working time and conditions under Part II of the Single Status Agreement, which states that:

- Variations to the established working week or patterns of work will be reasonable and subject to adequate notice;
- Working arrangements will comply with relevant Health and Safety legislation, including the European Working Time Directive and its associated UK legislation.

Part III of the Single Status Agreement also allows for fair working time arrangements stating that:

- In determining working arrangements to suit the needs of the service, authorities will take into account the circumstances of individuals.
- Working time arrangements should avoid –
 - (a) Short notice changes to rostered or expected patterns of work;
 - (b) Excessive hours in any particular working week;
 - (c) Unnecessarily long periods over which the weekly hours are arranged.

BETTER TRAINING AND ACCESS TO TRAINING

Home care workers often have to alert the relevant medical/social services staff to take action where necessary. They need more training on how to deal with problems and where to refer them if necessary.

Home care workers should have better access to training: they should be given time-off and financial support to train; they have a right to a range of training on specific tasks and training on general social care.

It is vital that home care workers are given training and information on clients' medical conditions, particularly where service users' health can be at risk.

THE RIGHT OF SERVICE USERS TO BE CONSULTED ABOUT CHANGES IN HOME CARE

Service users are often not consulted about changes in the home care service such as use of private agency staff, or cuts to the home care service. If they are to be valued, they must be consulted about these changes. Because of the climate of cuts in the home care services, service users often become anxious about whether they will receive any care at all.

A RIGHT TO A SAFE AND NON-ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

UNISON demands that home care workers should be free of the fear of violence, harassment and intimidation.

As lone workers, home care workers can be very vulnerable.

Travelling to service users' homes at night or early in the morning, particularly if they walk to work, they can be at risk of attack.

When working in service users' homes they can be verbally or physically abused. This should not be seen as "part of the job".

This Council must:

- introduce policies and procedures to protect home care workers from violence and abuse;
- conduct risk assessments to identify employees at risk and clients likely to be violent or abusive;
- provide training on awareness, and on how to deal with difficult behaviour;
- provide workers with a mobile phone or personal alarm;
- set up a system to ensure all abusive and violent incidents are reported and dealt with;
- monitor, evaluate and review practices and procedures on risks and experience of violence and abuse.

Staff side position on Homecare

- ✓ Guarantee hours and current patterns of work of those currently employed in Homecare for up to 37 hours.
- ✓ Contracts to be available:
 - ❖ Weekdays only working
 - ❖ Weekday and some evening working
 - ❖ Weekday and some weekend working
 - ❖ Weekend and evening working
 - ❖ Weekend only working
 - ❖ Evenings only working

By guaranteeing regular hours efficiency savings should reduce overheads thereby reducing the costs of Homecare as required by the Best Value review. It is generally accepted that the present way of operating causes the Payroll section more work than would be needed should guaranteed hours working be adopted, again financial savings could be made.