

GUIDE FOR THE SERVICE USER AND CARER REFERENCE GROUP

Introduction

The overall framework for involving service users and carers in joint reviews is set out in the guide. One of the methods used to facilitate involvement is the service user and carer reference group. Each local authority is asked to establish such a group for the duration of the joint review.

Purpose

The purpose of the user carer reference group is to:

- empower service users and carers within the joint review process;
- provide a group of local service users and carers with the opportunity to participate throughout the whole process of joint review;
- ensure that the joint review team obtains a good understanding of service users' and carers' experiences, opinions and perceptions;
- tackle some of the limitations inherent in 'snapshot' initiatives, such as one-off meetings of service user groups for a particular type of service;
- create a sounding board for emerging themes within the review;
- test out the information obtained from the other ways of involving service users and carers, such as the questionnaire survey.

Structure

The structure for the reference group will vary, in response to local circumstances and the way in which the local authority consults with service users and carers. In some local authorities, an established group may be

able to take on the specific role of reference group for the joint review process. In other areas, it will be necessary to constitute a specific group for this purpose.

In all circumstances, there should be common features such as:

- broad representation from a variety of service groups;
- a balance of service users and carers;.
- briefings for members of the group to ensure that they understand what is being asked of them;
- a framework of support for the group, either directly from the local authority or from a voluntary organisation able to take on this role;
- an agreed programme of meetings, with at least one meeting in each phase of the joint review process.

The lay assessor contributes to the discussions in the group alongside other members of the joint review team.

Constraints

The meetings of the reference group will operate with proper respect for individual rights to confidentiality. They should encourage honest and open debate about emerging themes within the joint review process. However, all those involved in the reference group will be expected to use the information and views shared in a measured and responsible way.

Reviewers will use information contributed by members of the reference group as part of the evidence obtained for the review and it may appear in the published report. To this extent, information is not confidential but it will not be attributed to individuals.

All those involved with the group will understand that this is part of the process of gathering information and intelligence for the joint review, not a problem resolution or complaints service. Feedback on individual issues from reviewers or the resolution of individual problems will not be possible.

Reviewers will be expected to share key themes openly and honestly throughout the process with the reference group. However, the reference group will not receive any pre-publication notification of the judgements contained in the review report. Members of the group would expect an invitation to the event where the report is presented to the local authority.

Code of Conduct

Reviewers and lay assessors will be subject to their codes of conduct in all their dealings with the user and carer reference group.

Model programme

As part of the review set-up process, the lead reviewer will agree with the local authority the composition of the reference group.

Before the first phase of fieldwork, the reference group meets with the local authority for a briefing.

As part of the Phase 1 fieldwork programme, the joint review team meets with the reference group to exchange information (including preliminary analysis of the service user and carer questionnaires).

In the latter stages of the second phase fieldwork, there is a further meeting to discuss emerging themes.

At the end of the second phase the reference group receives feedback from the joint review team about the overall findings and gives a response.