Information Sheet

Somerset County Council consultation on a change in charging for the sitting service

Background

Somerset County Council like many other local authorities faces very considerable financial challenges over the next few years. A big reduction in the amount of money we receive from central Government means that we have to make savings of more than £35 million over the next two years.

In order to do this, we must consider ways of reducing how much we spend across the full range of services we provide. The aim is to reduce spending in ways that have the minimum impact on those in greatest need.

Somerset County Council is entitled by law to charge for social care services. Our current charging policy meets the legal requirement to be ‘reasonable’ and complies with best practice guidance issued by the Government.

One of the services that the law allows us to charge for is the sitting service. At the moment, the way that we charge for the sitting service differs from the way we charge for other, similar social care services that help people to live at home. We are proposing to change this so that in the future we charge for the sitting service in the same way we charge for other, similar services.

What is the sitting service?

The sitting service allows carers to take a break from caring for an hour or more on a planned and regular basis. The service provides trained staff to 'stand in' for carers and look after the person they care for. This means the carer can take a short break with peace of mind. The service is available to all adults with social care needs who live at home with the help of an unpaid carer. This includes:

- older people;
- people with sensory loss;
- people with learning disabilities;
- people with physical disabilities;
- people with a mental health problem

The sitting service is currently used by approximately 350 people

Who receives the sitting service?

The sitting service is provided to people with social care needs who live at home with the help of an unpaid carer. People who use the sitting service are financially assessed to see how much they can afford to pay towards the cost of providing it.
**Current charging for the sitting service**

People with savings of more than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) currently pay £6.10 per hour for the sitting service. This is a subsidised rate; the actual cost to the council is £15.54 if they live in an urban area or £16.36 if they live in a rural area.

People who have savings of less than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) pay an amount according to their particular financial circumstances. The amount they pay is calculated using the subsidised rate for the sitting service i.e. £6.10, rather than the actual cost (£15.54 or £16.36).

The way that the council charges for the sitting service is different from the way that the council charges for other, similar services that help people to remain at home. Charging for those other services is based on the actual cost to the council of providing the service.

We are seeking the views of people who use the sitting service, their carers and the general public on changing things so that charges for the sitting service are calculated in the same way that charges are calculated for other, similar services.

**What is the proposal?**

1. To charge the full cost of providing the sitting service to people who have savings of more than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) and;

2. To consider the actual cost of the sitting service, rather than the subsidised rate, when assessing the maximum amount that someone who has savings of less than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) can pay towards the cost of the sitting service and their wider care package (if they receive one).

**What could change?**

Somerset County Council would no longer subsidise the service. People with savings of more than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) will have to pay the full actual cost of providing the service i.e. £15.54 per hour or £16.36 per hour, instead of the subsidised rate of £6.10 per hour.

People with savings of less than £23,250 (or £46,500 if they are part of a couple) will still be financially assessed to determine how much if anything they can afford to pay, but the calculation will be based on the actual cost of the service (i.e. £15.54 per hour or £16.36 per hour). This will mean that some people will be asked to pay more; but for some people there will be no change.

**Who will this affect?**

The proposal will affect all people who use the sitting service and have savings of more than £23,250 (£46,500 if they are part of a couple).

It will also affect up to 20 users of the sitting service who have been assessed as being able to afford to pay for the cost of their current care package and the sitting service. In all, we estimate that it would affect around 25% of people who currently use the sitting service. Around 75% of current service users will not be affected.

Please read the accompanying flow-chart which shows how the proposal will affect people according to their financial circumstances.