Caring for our future: social care engagement

Issue

1. This paper outlines the current social care engagement, *Caring for our future*, and asks the NQB for its input and comments on the key questions for the quality and workforce workstream.

Context

2. On 15 September\(^1\), the Government launched *Caring for our future: shared ambitions for care and support* – an engagement with people who use care and support services, carers, local councils, care providers, and the voluntary sector about the priorities for improving care and support. The engagement will last until early December.

3. *Caring for our future* is an opportunity to bring together the recommendations from the Law Commission and the Commission on the Funding of Care and Support with the Government’s Vision for Adult Social Care, and use these recommendations as a basis for a discussion with stakeholders about what the priorities for reform should be.

4. The forthcoming social care White Paper is an opportunity to get reform right. However, Government recognises that it cannot make all the improvements to the care and support system at once. In this challenging economic environment, we need to weigh up what the priorities for reform are and produce a realistic roadmap for change. The discussions we will have over the next three months will help us to shape those priorities.

**How Caring for our future will work**

5. We have identified six areas where we believe there is the biggest potential to make improvements to the care and support system. These are:

- Quality and the Workforce: what are the priorities for improving quality and developing the future workforce?
- Personalisation: what are the priorities for promoting increased personalisation and choice?
- Shaping local care services: what are the priorities for creating a more diverse and responsive care market?
- Prevention: what are the priorities for supporting greater prevention and early intervention?
- Integration (in partnership with the NHS Future Forum): how can we take advantage of the Health & Social Care modernisation programme to ensure services are better integrated around people's needs?
- The role of financial services: what role could the financial services sector play in supporting care users, carers and their families?
6. We have asked a key member of the care and support community to help the Government to lead the discussions for each of these six areas. We want to work collaboratively, drawing upon the networks of expertise and experience that have developed over many years.

7. Together, we will be attending events, holding meetings, listening to the views of user organisations, carers’ representatives, care providers, local councils on what the priorities for improving care and support should be.

8. Our website will contain discussion materials and a feedback form, so that people can hold their own conversations with their local communities on these crucial issues.

9. As part of Caring for our future, we also want to hear people’s views on the recommendations made by the Commission on Funding of Care and Support and how we should assess these proposals, including in relation to other potential priorities for improvement. The Commission’s recommendations present a range of options, including on the level of a cap and the contribution that people make to living costs in residential care, which could help us to manage the system and its costs. We want to hear people’s views on these different options, and the trade-offs involved. Later in the autumn, as part of the engagement, we will ask the six discussion leaders to bring together the views they have gathered on support for the Commission’s proposals, and the wider priorities for change.

**Why is the engagement exercise looking at quality and workforce?**

10. Quality of care, alongside the financial performance of an organisation, dictates its success. Delivering the social care vision will require that we focus on creating organisations that continuously strive to improve the quality of care they provide to users.
11. It is not enough, however, to focus purely on hard measures of quality. We know that the perception of users, their families and the public of the quality of the care people receive is of equal importance. Our approach to quality needs to guarantee essential standards of safety whilst also delivering real improvements in the quality of interaction and outcome that people have with social care and the social care workforce.

12. The development of the future workforce, its skills, culture and values, will be critical to achieving the high quality interaction we are seeking. This will be impossible to achieve without looking at how we can shape market to increase the accountability to users and think through how workforce roles are designed to create a gravitational pull for users towards independence.

**Current approach to quality**

13. The current approach to a quality strategy for social care services set out in Transparency in Outcomes\(^2\) includes provision on:

- **safeguards**: providing assurance within the adult social care market of essential levels of safety and quality;

- **the market**: as there may be links between the quality of care and the financial health of the provider, CQC currently undertakes a financial check of the operator as part of the registration process. However, recent events have highlighted the risks if a large, national provider fails. The Health and Social Care Bill has provision to extend the role of Monitor to social care in the future - should we decide that this is needed. The Department is currently undertaking work looking at whether further measures are necessary to ensure service continuity, and will shortly be publishing a discussion paper on the issue;

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o **NICE Quality Standards**: extending the scope of NICE’s Quality Standards beyond the NHS aspects of social care and into social care proper, to establish an effective method for collating and disseminating guidance on best practice;

o **sector Led Improvement**: ensuring minimum standards by taking into account how both councils and providers move beyond these baseline requirements to improve the quality of their care;

o **local Accounts**: as a pivotal element of the sector lead improvement model, with councils undertaking on-going self-assessment and assurance and providing information on priorities and publishing progress;

o **the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework**: as a critical element of the Government approach to quality, transparency and accountability, it offers a set of outcomes measures, brought together to achieve the best possible outcomes for people who use social care in England; and,

o **the future Excellence Ratings**: through CQC and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), work is underway to reform the rating system used to judge quality of social care providers.

**Future priorities for quality and workforce**

14. We want to agree what our priorities are for improving quality and developing the future workforce. This will include how users, their families, staff, local authorities, providers and regulators share responsibility for improving quality and how we can give them the freedom to do so.

15. In future, more people will make their own decisions about the care they buy using their personal budget. We want to think about how people are
empowered to make choices about the care they buy. This will mean creating meaningful choices that drive quality, supporting people to be informed consumers of the services they are purchasing and the people providing the service so as to encourage the market to develop based on quality, not cost.

16. We also want to consider how best we support users, their families and employees to raise concerns if they are not happy with the quality of care and to feel supported to speak out.

17. Delivering on this will require a clear distinction to be made between what is best performed nationally and where choice through local and market competition is the best approach.

18. Improving the quality of social care services and reducing inequalities in outcomes will be a key priority for the future White Paper. The framework for quality, whether ensuring essential criteria through regulation, promoting best practice and rewarding quality, will need to be responsive to this shifting landscape.

19. In an environment where individuals make their own choices about the care they wish to receive from a diverse care market, we will also need to describe how the social care workforce and quality standards will be assured across the care system and how the right incentives are aligned to make sure that the care market works effectively to support quality.

**Expected engagement outcomes**

20. By the end of the first phase of the engagement our reference group will be expected to have considered and agreed a clear view on:

- a shared understanding of what is meant by quality
- the priorities for supporting improving quality
o the priorities for supporting the workforce

o the key issues and barriers and options for overcoming them (including links to other workstreams such as markets and personalisation)

Strategic Questions

21. There are a number of central questions that we will be asking through the engagement events in the Autumn. These will support the development of our approach to meeting the broader strategic challenges we will be required to address within the White Paper in the Spring.

22. We would welcome the Board’s views on whether the following questions would capture the right quality and range of feedback needed in order to answer the policy questions outlined above. In particular, it would be helpful to have the Board’s views on any potential alignment issues that could arise from a separate NHS and social care approach to quality.

Question 1
Should there be a standard definition of quality in adult social care as quality can often be interpreted differently? What do we mean by it and how should it be defined? How can we use this definition to drive improvements in quality?

Question 2
How will the approach to quality need to change as individuals increasingly fund or take responsibility for commissioning their own care? How can users themselves play a stronger role in determining the outcomes that they experience and designing quality services that meet their personal preferences?
Question 3
How do we make quality the guiding principle for adult social care? Who is responsible and accountable for driving continuous quality improvement within the system?

Question 4
What is the right balance between a national and local approach to improving quality and developing the workforce? Which areas are best delivered at a national level?

Question 5
How can we equip the workforce, volunteers and carers to respond to the challenges of improving quality and responding to growth in demand? How do we develop social care leadership capable of steering and delivering this?

Question 6
How can we improve the mechanisms for users, carers and staff to raise concerns about the quality of care? How do we ensure that these concerns are addressed appropriately? What is the link with the ongoing challenge to the NHS in maintaining quality during the transition?
Next steps

23. The engagement will run until early December. At the end of the engagement, we will discuss the priorities for change in each area with the discussion leaders.

24. The conversation will help us to decide our next steps. We have committed to publishing a White Paper in spring 2012, alongside a progress report on funding reform, and to legislating at the earliest opportunity. The White Paper will set out our approach to reform, to start the process of transforming our care and support system.