



NIASW RESPONSE

Northern Health and Social Care
Trust

Draft Carer's Strategy

The Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers is part of BASW, which is the largest professional association for social workers in the UK. The Association has over 13,500 members employed in frontline; management, academic and research positions in all social care settings.

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The Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's Draft Carer's Strategy, which is of increasing importance and pertinence for those we represent and support.

What follows is an overview of key considerations that we hope will be considered by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the development of its Carers' Strategy. Before commenting on the substance of the strategy, of core consideration for NIASW surrounds the notion of definition in three regards.

Firstly, reference is made to staff carrying out assessments of the needs of carers. It is apparent from our experience that the majority of staff involved in this activity are social workers, a core component of whose workload incorporates assessment of need. Therefore, whilst welcoming the adoption of this strategy, we wish to stress that it is imperative that supports and recognition are put in place by the Trust for those social workers undertaking what effectively amounts to an increase in workload.

Secondly, reference is made to various definitions of 'carers'. It is apparent from our experience that, in certain instances, families may have more than one person who self-defines as a 'carer', and who is no less deserving of support than another family member. We would urge the Trust therefore to exercise a degree of discretion and flexibility in facilitating workers working with families in which there is more than one 'carer'. We would also urge the Trust to clarify that in relation to defining the significance of support and in the interests of carer involvement (incorporating PPI), carers should be facilitated in taking the opportunity to define what they believe is a significant level of care.

Thirdly, we are aware of the fact that social workers, may also have caring responsibilities, and may at times experience vulnerability in relation to their workload. **We feel it imperative therefore to urge the Trust to continue to develop an element of the strategy which explicitly sets out in detail how it intends supporting staff who have caring responsibilities.** We welcome the proposal to include information annually in the staff newsletter, but believe that the needs of staff should be more specifically and explicitly reflected in this strategy.

We welcome the proposal to improve the provision of information for all concerned in relation to support for carers, but reiterate the notion that the Trust has a responsibility to staff undertaking carers assessments (predominantly social workers) in addition to staff who have caring responsibilities.

NIASW understands anecdotally that social workers are being requested to carry out assessments of carers' needs even though another keyworker may have already established and developed a relationship with them. In the interests of continuity of care and support we believe that an individual's or family's keyworker, having developed a relationship with them, is best placed to undertake an assessment of need pertaining to those who support them at home, thus reducing duplication.

We hope that the Trust will give consideration to the points raised herein, and believe that this undertaking could result in a more valued workforce, improving morale within teams and going some way in mitigating against the impact of budgetary constraints on the workforce.