

Social Care Report – Riverside House



March 2026

healthwatch
Rotherham

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Introduction to ADASS and Healthwatch

What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use Health and Social Care services which exist to make sure that people are at the heart of care.

We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved, then share their views with those who have the power to make change happen. Helping people find the information they need about services in their area is another of our priorities.

In summary, the main aims of Healthwatch are to:

- Help people find out about local care.
- Listen to what people think of services.
- Help improve the quality of services by letting those running services and the government know what people want from care.
- Encourage people running services to involve people in changes to care.

What is 'Mystery Shopping'?

Mystery shopping for adult social care is a quality assessment method where trained individuals pose as potential service users to evaluate care services. They assess factors like staff friendliness, response times, communication, cleanliness, and overall user experience. Findings are reported to help providers improve service quality, making care settings safer and more supportive for clients. This proactive feedback helps maintain high standards and improves the user experience in adult social care.

Disclaimer

This report is only a true reflection of our RMBC's social care services on the day of the mystery shop. Information or guidance may have been updated since the time of this report. We also recognise that different staff would give different information based on their skill and experience within this role.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our medical student, Iqra from Sheffield University who was on placement with us and took part in the mystery shop.

Background

ADASS commissioned Healthwatch Rotherham to conduct a mystery shopping exercise at Rotherham Social Care service to assess the service's effectiveness in 2025. Ahead of the Peer review with CQC. The purpose of this was to evidence how access to social care information is working when providing information to the public on the services it provides.

Our report found that there was a need for frontline staff to have a refresher in how they should respond to enquiries with people wanting to access Adult social care. It was mutually agreed with Adult social care that we would revisit this work to show how staff had responded following their training.

Details of Activity	
Service address	Healthwatch Rotherham 2 Upper Millgate Rotherham S60 1 PF
Service Provider	Name: RMBC Adult social care Telephone: 01709 382121 Email:
Date and Timings	In-Person: 19th December 2024 at 9:10 AM Telephone: 11 th December 2024 at 12:20 PM Website: 11th December 2024 at 1:30 PM
Representatives	Iqra Ahmed: Student placement Danielle Payne: Healthwatch Rotherham Research & Campaigns Officer Kym Gleeson: Healthwatch Rotherham service manager. Nicola Fells: Healthwatch Rotherham Information & Signposting Officer

Rating Descriptions		
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Excellent	<p>The service you received exceeded your expectations.</p> <p>Lots of useful information - accessible/jargon free. Excellent, easy to navigate website, which provided more information than you thought you needed. Knowledgeable, polite and very helpful staff who gave you more information than you needed. You felt valued and respected as a customer, enquiry dealt with in a timely manner, informed where further information and advice could be accessed.</p>
★ ★ ★ ★	Good	<p>The service you received met your expectations.</p> <p>Adequate information accessible/jargon free information. Website was good and you found information easily. Knowledgeable and helpful staff. You were satisfied with the service you received, felt valued and your enquiry dealt with in a timely manner.</p>
★ ★ ★	OK	<p>The service you received partly met your expectations.</p> <p>Limited/basic information that was accessible. Website was as expected and you could find some information, but could only find everything you needed with some effort/or you couldn't find everything you needed. You were fairly satisfied with the service. The staff were pleasant but not overly helpful. Your enquiry could have been dealt with quicker, staff had some knowledge and answered most, but not all, of your questions or signposted you to the appropriate organisations.</p>
★ ★	Poor	<p>The service you received didn't really meet your expectations.</p> <p>Very little information provided. Any information was not accessible or included jargon, so not easily understood. The website was difficult to navigate, and it took time to find the right page where the limited information was. It took staff a long time to respond. The staff had very little knowledge and if they tried to help, it wasn't very useful. If they signposted you, they left you to go and find more information and follow up yourself. You were fairly unsatisfied with the experience.</p>
★	Awful	<p>The service you received fell very short of your expectations.</p> <p>No answer despite several attempts, no information given/available. The website was very poor, and you couldn't find anything even after trying a number of times and looking at a number of pages. Poor customer experience. You did not feel valued as a customer, enquiry not dealt with in a reasonable time. Very dissatisfied with the information/conversation. No information provided or information difficult to understand. Unknowledgeable and unhelpful staff.</p>

Methodology

We held a meeting to decide who would use which scenario and what type of mystery shop each person was comfortable to use, to prevent us from doing the same scenario.

Once we had each done our mystery shops, we met again to have a debrief and discuss our findings to allow us to ensure we would be fair and accurate across the whole of the mystery shops to ensure consistency in our scoring.

Once the report was completed we read it to ensure that we were happy with its contents, and it reflected the mystery shops we had undertaken.

Findings/Observations

The overall access to social care services and information, has been rated at an average of 2.7 out of 5. This was based on 9 different mystery shops, covering Face to face, Online and telephone enquiries.

There were discrepancies identified, surrounding staff's knowledge on key areas relating to social care in Rotherham. As well as recurring themes, relating to Website accessibility, call wait times and lack of physical resources.

The venue was clean and accessible, the building is located in the town centre and close to public transport links. Within Riverside house, it has a free public library & a cafe.



Face to Face Mystery Shop

Mystery Shopper One	
Date and time of the visit:	3 rd December 2025 at 15:30
Scenario used:	6b Easy Read
Overall rating out of 5:	2

- **Approximately how long did you have to wait before someone spoke to you?**

No wait

- **How friendly were the reception staff?**

The staff at reception were friendly. The lady at the front desk asked the gentlemen who had already been seen to move aside as she noticed I was waiting. She asked me if she could help. She did not introduce herself by name or ask for mine.

- **Did you only speak to a member of reception staff, or did they get someone from adult social care to come and talk to you/ refer you on to someone else?**

I was only able to speak to a staff member at reception who said they were not in a position to give me the information I requested. I prompted them by asking if there was anybody who could give me the information there in person but she said no, and that I would need to contact adult social services through the number I was handed. She did ask another member of staff at the desk about my query and they agreed that they could not help me further.

- **Did you get the information you were looking for?**

No

- **What information did you get?**

That I should call adult social services on behalf of my friend and instructed me to not press any numbers after dialling the number. The card given to me with the phone number to adult social services also had the web address of the council website

www.rotherham.gov.uk. I explained we already knew of the council website and my friend had found it hard to follow so wanted to be informed specifically where to find the easy format resources (if they existed) and/or of relevant support the council could provide.

- **Was there any information missing/ things you wanted to know?**

What support is available from the council for people who have learning difficulties. Information about the assessment process. What happens after the assessment (specifically how this might help someone with learning difficulties). If the aforementioned information is available in an easy read format. Where to find this information in an easy read format.

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? E.g. did they signpost you to other council departments, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information? If they provide further information, do they offer online and offline options?**

Yes, signposted to adult social services..

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

No, as no information was really given, only signposted and left to find by myself.

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? E.g. did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/ or what the council can and cannot provide?**

No, the staff at reception seemed to have no knowledge about any of this.

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

The reception staff offered me sweets.

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

No, due to the reception staff's lack of knowledge or scope in such matters, it would be a poor use of time.

- **Would you recommend the service to other people?**

I would if they had up to date resources.

What was your overall rating of the building and reception area?

3

- **Was it a welcoming place to visit?**

It was a little confusing as there were staff from different organisations around the area. Most of these staff clearly took notice of me but did not approach so I did not feel welcomed. The staff at the reception were very friendly (greeted with a smile and wanted to help).

- **Was there clear signage? E.g. large, good colour contrast and at a height everyone, including wheelchair users, can see.**

Yes, the signage 'customer reception' was big, had a good colour contrast and was at an accessible height. There was also a small stand/desk (unattended at the time) with a sign saying riverside house, I was unsure whether I should wait there.

- **Was it an easy building to navigate?**

Somewhat, the reception area is right as you walk in but due to the use of language, 'customer reception' it is confusing which organisation the reception is for (building seems to house more than one organisation).

- **Was the building accessible for everyone? E.g. flat access and easily opened doors, ramps provided or clear signage to an accessible entrance that isn't too far away.**

Yes flat access and there are automatic doors for those who can't/don't want to use the revolving door.

- **Was there a clear, easily identified, reception area?**

Yes, brightly decorated with extra-large lettering.

- **Were staff approachable and ready to help?**

The council staff were but it was not immediately clear which staff were part of the council.

- Was it easy to talk at the reception area, e.g. not too noisy, not distracting?**
Yes it was not noisy at the time (15:30 on a Wednesday). I could concentrate on the conversation and we could clearly hear each other.
- Was there anything particularly good about the building/ reception area?**
Tidy, accessible, quiet and organised.
- Was there anything that could be improved?**
There were no leaflets, having these on hand/on display would improve the appearance and provide offline information.

Improvement Recommendations

- Provide basic social care information at reception or in the foyer:** Providing **leaflets or information sheets** would allow visitors to leave with useful information when staff are unable to provide detailed answers.
- Improve reception staff signposting:** Reception staff were friendly but were unable to provide information beyond a phone number. Staff would benefit from basic guidance on how to signpost visitors more effectively, including: Explaining what Adult Social Care can help with, Advising where specific information can be found on the council website, Explaining what to expect when contacting Adult Social Care.

The mystery shopper reported that staff were friendly and the building was accessible and tidy. However, the experience highlighted limited access to information at reception and a lack of available resources, which made it difficult to obtain answers about Adult Social Care services.

Mystery Shopper 2	
Date and time of the visit:	3 rd December 2025 at 15:00
Scenario used:	4 Carers Support
Overall rating out of 5:	1.5

- Approximately how long did you have to wait before someone spoke to you?**
As I walked over to the reception desk I was welcomed straight away.

- **How friendly were the reception staff?**

The receptionist was very friendly, and helped straight away.

- **Did you only speak to a member of reception staff, or did they get someone from adult social care to come and talk to you/ refer you on to someone else?**

Only Reception

- **Did you get the information you were looking for?**

No – Signposted me to Adult Social care. With a contact number 01709 822330

- **What information did you get?**

She wrote down the contact number on a piece of paper for Adult Social Care Services. I did probe and say I'm not really sure what my options are, the receptionist responded with, "these are the best people to help with that"

I also asked if they had any leaflets, or anything I could look at: Got the same response that, "Health and Social care will be able to provide this information for me" She advised me to not press any of the extension lines, but to stay on hold and I would be put directly through to Adult Social Services.

- **Was there any information missing/ things you wanted to know?**

My options, empathy, explaining the situation a bit better.

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? E.g. did they signpost you to other council departments, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information? If they provide further information, do they offer online and offline options?**

No, just signposted me straight away. The 'With Compliments Slip' does have RMBC "Online Services Website - www.rotherham.gov.uk " but she did not advise me to visit the website, even after probing.

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

No, as no information was really given, only signposted and left to find by myself.

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? E.g. did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/ or what the council can and cannot provide?**

No.

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

They were friendly and there was no waiting time before being seen.

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

Conversation was super brief 1-2 Minutes max, there wasn't anyone else in so there was no urgency to rush the encounter. She did explain how to call and to stay on hold to get through to the Adult Services team. Did not explain what the council offers, the only question directed to me was regarding my siblings' age.

- **Would you recommend the service to other people?**

No, pretty pointless. Could have just called to get the contact number.

What was your overall rating of the building and reception area?	3
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No Resources or Leaflets

- **Was it a welcoming place to visit?**

Yes, clean and tidy, ample places to sit. Has a cafe but was closed at the time.

- **Was there clear signage? E.g. large, good colour contrast and at a height everyone, including wheelchair users, can see.**

I was a bit unsure where I was going at first as the layout is spaced out.

- **Was it an easy building to navigate?**

Yes, all on ground floor

- **Was the building accessible for everyone? E.g. flat access and easily opened doors, ramps provided or clear signage to an accessible entrance that isn't too far away.**

Yes

- **Was there a clear, easily identified, reception area?**

Yes

- **Were staff approachable and ready to help?**

Yes

- **Was it easy to talk at the reception area, e.g. not too noisy, not distracting?**

Yes

- **Was there anything particularly good about the building/ reception area?**

Tidy and organised

- **Was there anything that could be improved?**

Access to leaflets, a list of what services are in the building

Improvements and Recommendations

- **Train reception staff** to provide basic overview information about Adult Social Care before signposting.
- **Introduce a short information script** so staff can explain: What Adult Social Care supports with (e.g., care assessments, support for carers, help at home). What the next steps might be when contacting the service.
- **Provide customer care training** focused on: Active listening, Explaining services in simple terminology.
- **Install a leaflet stand** in reception/foyer covering: Adult social care services, Carer support, Community Organisations

In Hours Telephone Call Mystery Shop

Mystery Shopper 3	
Date and time of the visit:	20/11/25 at 10:30am
Scenario used:	9. Telecare/equipment 9a. Background
Overall rating out of 5:	5

- **Approximately how long did you have to wait before the call was answered?**

On hold for over 5 minutes. Message said would be answered soon but no indication of position in the queue.

- **How friendly was the person who answered the phone?**

Friendly and personable. Easy to talk to. Professional

- **Did you get the information you were looking for?**

Yes

- **What information did you get?**

The operator gave me lots of information on the services **Rothercare** provide:

- Response pendant
- Fall detectors
- Special equipment to safely lift someone who's fallen
- Emergency assistance
- Memory Bells to give prompts
- Automated medicare boxes for medication.
- Environmental sensors e.g. smoke, flood, etc.
- There is a cost for this service

I was told Rothercare can give more details and offered a phone number 01709 336255 also that there's information online.

Informed about **Occupational Therapy** service who can do an assessment.

Current assessment time is about 18 weeks wait, but they will prioritise cases to be seen sooner.

OT can look at adapting the home e.g.

- Access to the property
- Hand rails
- Equipment
- Aids to help get in /out of the bath

Also mentioned **Homecare** options and briefly explained that if they have savings over £23,250 fees generally apply.

- **Was there any information missing?**

No I think everything was covered

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? Eg, did they signpost you to other parts of the council, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information?**

Yes, The operator informed about other local services:

Meal providers

Park Care Meals (Rotherham service) provides hot meals.

Gave phone number 01709 365077

Also mentioned a service that provides frozen meal

And Wiltshire farm foods

Help with day to day

Age UK

Shopping services

Cleaning services

Sight and Sound

Service that could offer home phones with larger buttons

- **If they provided further information did they offer online and offline (eg leaflet, phone numbers etc) options?**

The operator offered phone numbers first but said there was information online as well.

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

Yes, and the operator clarified things when asked or when into more details

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? Did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/or what the council can and can't provide?**

Yes, they explained the Occupational Therapy assessment waiting list is currently 18 weeks but they look at individual cases and prioritize as required.

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

The operator gave lots of useful information and further information when asked. I felt like they were interested and wanted to help.

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

No

- **Would you recommend the phone line to other people? If no, why not?**

Yes, it was a good starting point and the operator said to come back to them for any further information.

Improvement Recommendations

- Reduce call wait times & Introduce queue position or estimated wait time announcements:** The caller waited on hold for over 5 minutes, and although there was a reassurance message, there was no indication how long the caller was on hold or what position they were in the queue. The service could also offer a call back service during busy periods, overall implementing any of the above would help improve caller experience and reduce frustration during waiting periods.
- Continue supporting staff with **knowledge resources or service directories** so they can provide this level of detailed information.
- Maintain an up-to-date directory of local support services, including:** Voluntary organisations Community support services, Private service providers where appropriate.

Mystery Shopper 4	
Date and time of the visit:	20/11/25 at 14:31 am
Scenario used:	8 Who can help? 8a. Activities
Overall rating out of 5:	2

- Approximately how long did you have to wait before the call was answered?**
On hold 8 minutes
- How friendly was the person who answered the phone?**
Friendly, I felt that they wanted to help.
- Did you get the information you were looking for?**
No
- What information did you get?**
The operator said they didn't know! Then asked the area my friend lives in and said they'd have a look. The operator asked me if there was a community center where she

lived. I wasn't sure so they looked it up, but couldn't see anything relevant. The operator asked if my friend could get out and about, to the shops etc..

I explained she could but doesn't drive, although she lives on a good bus route, so can get to many places. The operator asked where the craft group I mentioned she's attended before was. (I said I wasn't sure but it was no longer running) **Unfortunately, no options were found.** I asked about any befriending services. (I mentioned her being lonely now retired. The operator suggested contacting Age UK Rotherham to have a befriending service and run activities.

- **Was there any information missing?**

The operator didn't know what was available or where to look.

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? Eg, did they signpost you to other parts of the council, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information?**

Age UK Rotherham

- **If they provided further information did they offer online and offline (eg leaflet, phone numbers etc) options?**

Gave Age Uk Rotherham Phone number

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

Yes but very little information was given.

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? Did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/or what the council can and can't provide?**

No

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

The operator did try to help by looking things up. The operator asked for my contact details, to get back to me with more information but I declined. .

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

They didn't really have answers.

- **Would you recommend the phone line to other people? If no, why not.**

No, I didn't get much information, just signposted to Age UK Rotherham

- **Any other comments?**

We concluded with me saying I'll contact Age uk which they agreed was the best idea.

Improvement Recommendations

- **Provide staff with an up-to-date directory** of local services and community activities, including:
 - Social groups and community centres
 - Befriending services
 - Local voluntary organisations
 - Activities for older people or those experiencing loneliness.
 - Ensure the directory is regularly updated to reflect changes in community services.
- **Manage Expectations and Provide Clear Next Steps:** The caller reported that expectations were not managed, and the call concluded with the caller deciding to contact Age UK themselves.
- **Reduce Call Waiting Time:** The caller waited 8 minutes on hold, which is relatively long for an advice enquiry.
 - Review call volumes and staffing during busy periods.
 - Introduce queue information or estimated waiting times within the call system.
 - Explore call-back options where appropriate.

Improves the overall customer experience and reduces frustration before speaking to an operator. Despite the limited information available, the operator was described as **friendly, approachable, and willing to try to help**, including offering to call back with further information.

Website Mystery Shop

Mystery Shopper 5	
Date and time of the visit:	16/12/2026
Scenario used:	Accessible information 6a. Large print
Overall rating out of 5:	2

- **First impression of the website?**

Organised information tabs outlining what information is available. But a lot of information to navigate to find where to start. Difficult to know where to start. Used search bar 'easy read information on home help' got 6995 results top options aimed at professionals regarding other easy read options. Searched 'Home care support' 3311 results came up.

How easy was it to use – rating out of 5:	2
How would you rate the look and feel of the site – rating out of 5	3

- **Did you find the information you were looking for?**

Yes

- **What information did you find?**

Home care, also known as domiciliary care, is care given within your home. It could include:

- Personal care and support, such as help with washing, dressing, toileting
- Preparing and eating meals

I used the chatbot and found

- Social Care Assessment
- Financial Assessment
- Accessing Home Care

Plus Easy Read

- The website offers information in different formats, including easy read, accessible PDF, large print, audio recording, or braille.
- If you need information in an easy read format, you can contact Customer Services to request it. They will consider your request and respond within 5 working days.
- The website also provides options to change colours, contrast levels, font styles, and magnify the page for better accessibility.

- **How easy was it to find that information?**

Easier using the Chatbot. When clicked on Adult social care assessment it found videos explaining what to expect during a care assessment Also, 'Contacting Adult social care for the first time' video.

Which first signposts back to the main site and goes on to explain how the adviser will conduct the assessment and the next steps. *Which felt friendly and supportive.*

- **Did you find all the information you wanted? If not, what was missing?**

Easy read information has to be requested which could be off putting: *'If you need information in an easy read format, you can contact Customer Services to request it. They will consider your request and respond within 5 working days.'*

- **Was there a self-service option available online? This could have been an online form to complete or a referral form. If yes, could you see the whole form without having to fill anything in? Any other comments?**

Yes, You need to fill each page before you can move on to the next

- **Was there information about where to go if you still had questions/wanted more information? If yes, where did they signpost you?**

The councils main contact number 01709 822330 Plus a Link to GISMO website

- **How could the website be improved? If you don't think it could, please say:**

A lot of information to take in which could be overwhelming, the chatbot helped. But most routes signpost you back to where you've been.

- **Would you recommend the website to other people? If no, why not?**

As a starting point. You need to request an easy read version. I had to use the chatbot to find out how.

Answer: several methods:

- online form on the Council website,
 - email compliments@rotherham.gov.uk,
 - send a letter freepost
 - call 01709 382121, text 07860 021 447,
 - or visit one of the Customer Service Centres or any Council reception point.
- The customer service representative will direct your request to the appropriate department. You can expect an acknowledgment within three days and a response within ten working day

Improvement Recommendations

The mystery shopper found it difficult to know where to start, with large amounts of information and many search results.

Create a clear "Start Here" or "Getting Help with Adult Social Care" page that guides users through common journeys such as:

- Getting care at home
- Requesting an assessment
- Support for carers
- Help with loneliness or daily living.
- Use step-by-step guidance or quick links for common enquiries.
- Reduce duplication where pages repeatedly signpost back to the same content.

Mystery Shopper 6	
Date and time of the visit:	16/12/2025
Scenario used:	5 Carers support / safeguarding
Overall rating out of 5:	4

- **First impression of the website?**

The website looks professional. The council branding is clear and it feels like an official, reliable source for sensitive information such as safeguarding and carers' support. The homepage is cluttered, but the main services are easy to recognise

How easy was it to use – rating out of 5:	4
How would you rate the look and feel of the site – rating out of 5	4

- **Did you find the information you were looking for?**

Yes

- **What information did you find?**

I found information about support available for carers, including carers' assessments, financial and practical support, and where to get advice. I also found clear guidance on safeguarding adults, including how to report a concern if someone may be at risk of abuse or neglect.

- **How easy was it to find that information?**

The search bar is front and centre of the homepage so it was fairly easy to find the information by searching the key terms and then navigating through Adult Social Care and Support for Carers. The Safeguarding links were clearly signposted and written in layman's terms.

- **Did you find all the information you wanted? If not, what was missing?**

Yes but it would have been helpful to have a simple “What to do if you’re worried about someone” page that combines both carers’ support and safeguarding in one place.

- **Was there a self-service option available online? This could have been an online form to complete or a referral form. If yes, could you see the whole form without having to fill anything in? Any other comments?**

Yes. There are online forms to report a safeguarding concern and to request a carers assessment. Some forms require you to start filling them in before you can see everything, which might be worrying for people who just want to look first.

- **Was there information about where to go if you still had questions/wanted more information? If yes, where did they signpost you?**

Yes. The website provides contact details for Adult Social Care and the Safeguarding Adults Team, including phone numbers and online contact forms for further help.

- **How could the website be improved? If you don’t think it could, please say:**

It would help if carers’ support and safeguarding links were more visible from the main page. Some of the pages are quite text-heavy, so clearer step-by-step guidance would make it easier for people who are stressed or in a crisis. Allowing people to view full forms before entering personal details.

- **Would you recommend the website to other people? If no, why not?**

Yes. It contains reliable information and clearly explains how to get help or raise concerns about someone’s safety.

Improvement Recommendations

Based on this mystery shopper feedback, the website generally performed well, with clear safeguarding information and accessible support for carers. The recommendations therefore focus on enhancing visibility, simplifying content, and improving user reassurance, particularly for people who may be stressed or seeking urgent help.

- **Increasing visibility on the website:** Although the information was available and easy to find through the search function, the mystery shopper felt these topics could be more visible from the main page.

- **Add quick access links or tiles on the homepage for:**
 - Carers' support
 - Safeguarding adults
 - Reporting concerns about someone's safety.
- Highlight safeguarding links within **Adult Social Care landing pages** for quicker access.
- **Simplify Heavy text pages:** Some pages were described as text-heavy, which could be difficult for users in stressful situations, also making sure that the information provided is 'easy read'. Break up longer pages using:
 - Bullet points
 - Short summaries
 - Clear headings
 - "Key points" boxes.
 - Use **visual elements or icons** to guide users through processes.

Improves readability and makes information easier to understand during stressful situations, and caters to Rotherham's general public as the average reading age is 9 years.

Mystery Shopper 7	
Date and time of the visit:	16/12/2026
Scenario used:	Potential Domestic Abuse - 2b
Overall rating out of 5:	3

- **First impression of the website?**

Looks good initially it has a search bar – Searched 'Potential Domestic Abuse' But it came up with 6949 results.

How easy was it to use – rating out of 5:	3
How would you rate the look and feel of the site – rating out of 5	4

- **Did you find the information you were looking for?**

Yes

- **What information did you find?**

1st result: (Documentation and Information for Professionals) Victim Support Booklet: SYP Supporting Victims. How to put in a case and the process of when dealing with the victim.

2nd Result: Domestic Abuse Strategy - Briefly Covers different types of abuse and how they can appear. (Professional information not general public friendly)

3rd Result: Domestic Abuse:

- Honour based abuse
- Housing and Safe accommodation > Links to Shiloh, Citizens advice and Asylum Advice also a list of services for Financial Advice.
- Male violence against women and girls > Link to Visiting enough's Website to access support of report incidents.
- Recognise abuse: Destructive criticism and verbal abuse, Pressure tactics, Isolation, Harassment.
- Recognising Violence: Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Threats.
- Recognising other types of Abuse: Breaking trust, Denial, Disrespect.
- Sexual Abuse: With a email and Number for the Independent Sexual Violence Advocacy Service and Hackenthorpe Lodge number and link to their website.
- Support for young people and Adults: Local support says they have a range of domestic abuse services that offer things like 1-2-1 support, legal advice, and staying safe at home. But only had the details of one adult service (Hopian) > Child protection link > Child Protection - Report a concern, CSE and CCE, Spot the signs of CSE and CCE, Support for victims, How we are tackling child sexual exploitation, Responding to a child's sexual exploitation, Managing allegations.

- **How easy was it to find that information?**

Easy to find: But a hard read, a lot of information and a more formal/educational resource than public information. Also, very minimal signposting to services in Rotherham. Mentions Honour based abuse but no signposting to Apna Haq for example that specialise in ethnic based domestic violence.

- **Did you find all the information you wanted? If not, what was missing?**

It came across very formal: No links to a general advice line, the services provided were specialised in Sexual Assault: Have you been sexually assaulted get in touch with or call 999 .There was plenty of information about potential abuse but nothing on what to do, or how to approach domestic abuse issues if you are witness to it.

- **Was there a self-service option available online? This could have been an online form to complete or a referral form. If yes, could you see the whole form without having to fill anything in? Any other comments?**

None that I could see.

- **Was there information about where to go if you still had questions/wanted more information? If yes, where did they signpost you?**

Only referrals to a couple of services if a crime had been committed, not a general enquiry.

- **How could the website be improved? If you don't think it could, please say:**

Make it public friendly: It comes across more of a business tool than a public forum for information. The reports are again very formal and a lot of text, the links are not easy to find and it is not engaging to look at. Could be quite overwhelming for users, especially if they are in crisis and need information fast.

- **Would you recommend the website to other people? If no, why not?**

No, as it has too much information in it which isn't relevant to what I searched. I would only recommend it to other professionals as an educational page, useful links.

Improvement Recommendations

Based on your mystery shop feedback, the website seems informative but not very user-friendly, especially for people in crisis or members of the public.

- **Improve Search Function and Content Filtering:** Issue identified: Searching "Potential Domestic Abuse" returned 6,949 results, making it difficult to find relevant information quickly.

- **Add search filters such as:**

- "For the public"
- "For professionals"
- "Local services"
- "Urgent help"

Prioritise top 5 most relevant results for sensitive searches like domestic abuse. Add suggested quick links when certain keywords are searched (e.g., "Domestic abuse help", "Report abuse", "Support services").

- **Improve signposting to local services:**

Add a **local services directory** including organisations such as: Apna Haq, Citizens Advice, Victim Support, Age UK etc

Clearly label services by **type of support:**

- Emergency help
- Cultural/faith-based support
- Financial advice
- Housing support
- Support for men
- Support for young people

Users can **quickly find relevant and culturally appropriate support services.**

Out of Hours Telephone Call Mystery Shop

Mystery Shopper 8	
Date and time of the visit:	12/03/2026 at 8:40pm
Scenario used:	2a. Care home
Overall rating out of 5:	2

- **Approximately how long did you have to wait before the call was answered?**

After the automated answering message, it took less than one minute

- **How friendly was the person who answered the phone?**

Very friendly and very empathic

- **Did you get the information you were looking for?**

No

- **What information did you get?**

I was to call back in the morning because the person who answered the call said they're an answering service and not a social worker and couldn't answer my question, 01709 822330 When I said I was working in the morning. She told me there was an email address too; adultcontactteam@rotherham.gov.uk

- **Was there any information missing?**

I could've been directed to the council website and safeguarding protocols.

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? Eg, did they signpost you to other parts of the council, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information?**

I was simply told, they weren't social worker and couldn't help. It was an emergency line only. I could've been signposted to the website for more support if digital was an option.

- **If they provided further information did they offer online and offline (eg leaflet, phone numbers etc) options?**

Nothing but an email address.

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

Yes.

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? Did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/or what the council can and can't provide?**

N/A

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

She sounded apologetic for not being able to help me.

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

Asked if I had a computer or internet on my phone to look up the safeguarding and adult social care pages. Send a link maybe to the site for support as an automated response ready to go for set scenarios.

- **Would you recommend the phone line to other people? If no, why not.**

Not unless it was a real life emergency. No probing questions to ensure it wasn't a safeguard, so scripted screen prompts may be worth thinking about. If it had been an emergency would a member of the public know what that looked like.

- **Any other comments?**

None

Improvement Recommendations

- **Signpost callers to alternative sources of support:** When the call handler cannot provide the requested information, they should actively signpost callers to alternative sources of support. Provide callers with the council website link for Adult Social Care and safeguarding information. Offer multiple options for accessing support, such as:
 - Website links, Email addresses, Relevant phone numbers, Information about contacting the team during office hours. Ask whether the caller has internet access so digital information can be shared where appropriate.
- **Introduce Basic Screening / Probing Questions:** Even when calls come through an out-of-hours or emergency line, staff should ask a small number of structured questions to determine whether the situation may involve safeguarding.
- **Clarify the Purpose of the Line:** The call handler stated that the line was for emergencies only, but this was not clearly explained or contextualised.

Out of Hours Email Mystery Shop

Mystery Shopper 9	
Date and time of the visit:	12/03/2026 at 8:40pm
Scenario used:	4. Carers' support
Overall rating out of 5:	3

- **Approximately how long did you have to wait before the email was answered?**

After the automated email message, I received an email at 9.11am the next day

- **How friendly was the person who answered the email?**

Straight into sending over your details for a referral.

- **Did you get the information you were looking for?**

No

- **What information did you get?**

Good morning,

Could you please provide a dob, full names and address for both you and your sister in order for us to process this referral, please resubmit, thank you

Kind regards

When I said, I didn't want a referral, I just wanted information, I received this response. Adult Contact Team

Good morning,

I you would like to give our customer contact team a call on 01709822330 ,at your convenience, they are available till 5pm,where one of the wellbeing advisors will be able to advise you in depth on the options available, thank you

- **Was there any information missing?**

I could've been directed to the council website and community support, carer champions such as Crossroads.

- **Did they tell you where else to find information if they weren't able to provide it? Eg, did they signpost you to other parts of the council, the voluntary sector or other local organisations or information?**

No.

- **If they provided further information did they offer online and offline (eg leaflet, phone numbers etc) options?**

Nothing but an email.

- **Was the information clear and easy to follow? If not, why not?**

I felt as though there was no care involved in the email for how inadequate I felt as a carer who was struggling.

- **Do you feel they managed your expectations? Did they explain how long things might take like an assessment and/or what the council can and can't provide?**

N/A

- **Was there anything that was particularly good about the experience?**

Fast email turn around

- **Is there anything that could have been better?**

Asked if I felt an urgency with this to triage whether I was on the brink of a crisis maybe?

- **Would you recommend the phone line to other people? If no, why not.**

Not unless it wasn't urgent. It's a convenient address to have for people who are working like me. Empathised at my situation and have an email ready to go with relevant support agencies on it or to be asked if I would like a conversation with one of the carer advocates at RMBC. Rather than just asking for my DOB & address

- **Any other comments?**

N/A Overall the email made me feel like my concerns didn't matter unless it looked the way they wanted to deliver the service, very top down. I could've been sign posted to other agencies such as carers resilience service.

Improvement Recommendations

- **Provide Information Before Requesting Personal Details:** Ensure staff clarify the caller's needs before requesting personal details.
- **Improve Signposting to Support Services:** The council carers' support webpages, Local voluntary sector organisations, Community-based support services, Carer advocacy or wellbeing services. Include links, phone numbers, or brief descriptions of available support options.
- **Demonstrate Empathy and Supportive Language:** Train staff to use empathetic and supportive language in email responses. Encourage responses that acknowledge the challenges carers may face. Include a short statement recognising the situation before moving to next steps.
- **Introduce Basic Triage or Urgency Checks:** No questions were asked to assess whether the carer was approaching a crisis or needed urgent support.

Public Voice Survey

Healthwatch Rotherham carried out a public survey to gather additional feedback about Rotherham's Adult Social Care service and the contact team at RMBC. In total, **12 people responded** to the survey and shared their experiences, including what worked well and where they felt improvements could be made.

Q1. Thinking about your experience, what worked well for you?

"Being able to communicate via email rather than telephone, quick response from Emma"	"Answered my query and action was taken"
"Very little."	"Online referral"
	"I spoke to someone quickly and the

“There was no queue and I spoke to someone quickly”.

telephone wasn't ringing for very long. He explained what would happen next following our conversation and I felt reassured the call was taken seriously.”

“We have our own named social worker who has got to know us. We get weekly information sent to us regarding matters relating to our social care. We have a positive experience with Rotherham Council's Adult Social Care Team. Our social worker challenges services on our behalf that aren't treating us kindly or fairly. Our social worker explains information in different ways so we understand the information. Our social worker knows when we are overwhelmed and gathers information on our behalf. Our social worker does not force us to have meetings until we are ready for them. Our social worker lets us write our assessments and adds their opinions afterwards.”

Most of the feedback was positive. People appreciated being able to contact the service by email instead of phone and receiving quick responses. Calls were answered quickly with little waiting, and staff explained what would happen next, which reassured people that their concerns were taken seriously.

One person mentioned that an online referral worked well, and another said there was very little that needed improving.

There was particularly strong praise for having a named social worker who understands the family's situation. The social worker was described as supportive, listening carefully, advocating on their behalf, challenging services when needed, explaining information clearly, and being considerate when the family feels overwhelmed.

Q2. What, if anything, could be improved about the support or services you received?

“They could stop defending abusers. ”

“Not sure it could from my personal experience”

“Brokerage needs to improve because it is like a secret service that there is little information on. Brokerage pick providers for you without ever meeting you.

Continuing Healthcare need to work with social care better and stop asking adult social services to break the care act legislation.

“Referring on behalf of someone else, no confirmation that the referral has been received by the team – the web reference isn't accepted as confirmation.

<p>When you social worker is on leave there needs to be a better plan for being able to speak to a worker as you get lost in the contact centre being promised call backs and not receiving them.</p> <p>The voice mail system needs altering as you telephone, leave a voicemail and no one responds to you."</p>	<p>The team is 'faceless' and gives no assurance that they are following up referrals, only hear from them when there is an issue with the referral information, or when clients haven been contacted, or have been told news they don't agree with/or don't understand. "</p>
<p>"The receptionist was talking to another person sat at the same desk and I couldn't hear whether she was talking about me or what I'd asked for and it seemed very rude. They both seemed more interested in each other over me which isn't great."</p>	<p>"Not really"</p>

Feedback highlighted several areas where improvements could be made. Some people felt services should do more to support individuals and not appear to defend those causing harm. Others said their experience could not have been improved personally "Not sure it could from my personal experience".

Communication and follow-up were common concerns. People reported not receiving confirmation when referrals were submitted, difficulty getting responses to voicemail messages, and promised call backs not always happening. Some also felt the team could seem "faceless," with little reassurance that referrals were being followed up.

There were also concerns about systems and coordination between services. Brokerage was described as unclear, with limited information about how providers are chosen, and there were suggestions that Continuing Healthcare should work more closely with Adult Social Care. People also felt there should be better cover when a social worker is on leave.

Q3. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience?

"Not always confident that the service will be provided, trusting the website is working when the referral is submitted, or that clients will be appropriately supported / or signposted to alternative options if they are unable to help. Unable to share more information about the process when offering to make the referral, beyond minor adaptations which can be explained.

This is a problem for clients with no digital access to review the information on the RMBC website – older people 'generally' are unable to access this information digitally – no obvious telephone number for clients to call, if they would like to talk to the service and refer to themselves.

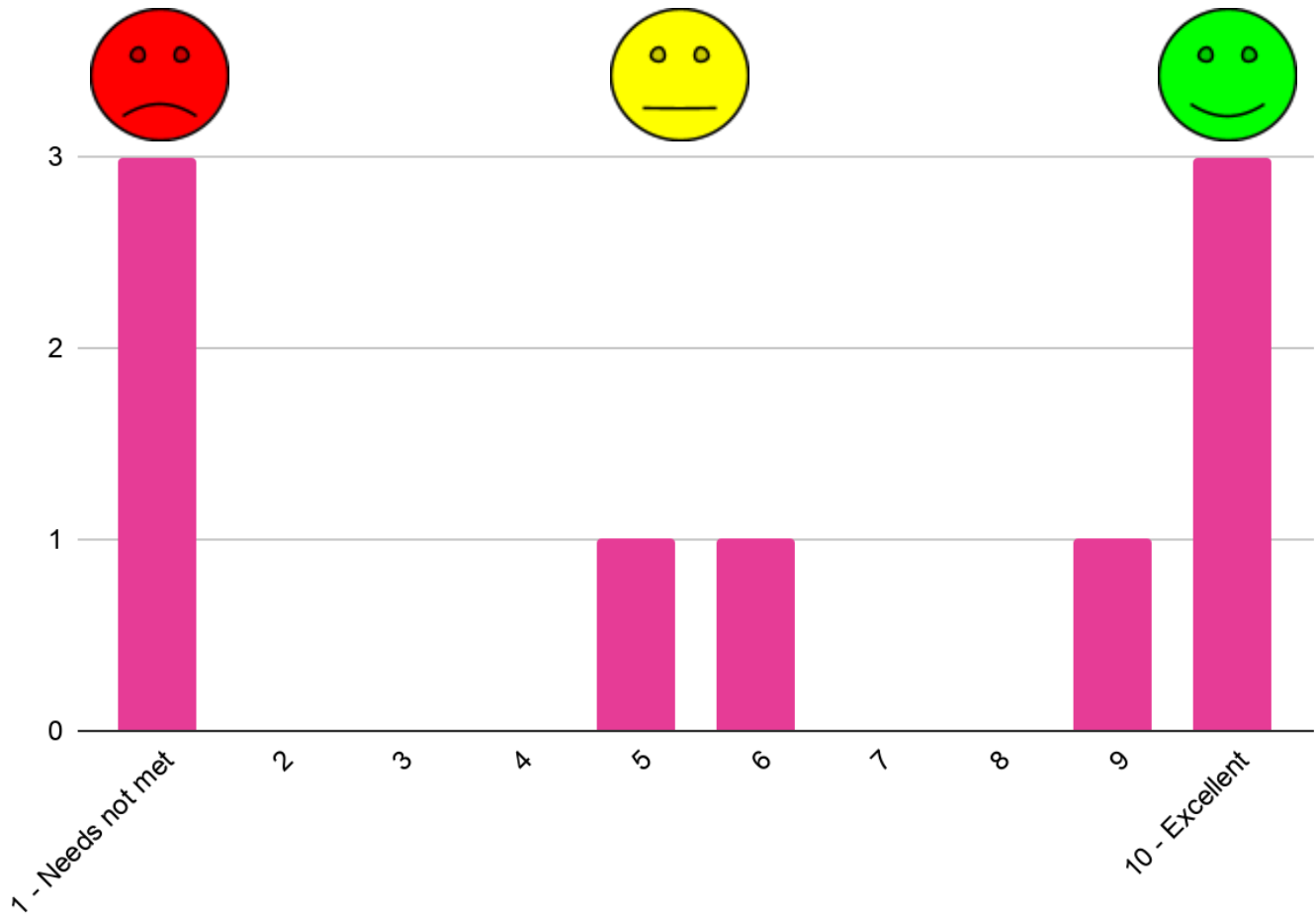
It is a complex area and understandable, but does limit the confidence/reassurance we can offer to clients at a difficult time about what the referral can help them with. Clearer information about SPA and the role of Adult Social Services would be helpful to share. "

<p>"Call handler was extremely polite and very helpful"</p>	<p>"No all went well and got some great starting points"</p>
<p>"The person I spoke to had a very good way on the phone. He made me feel reassured that my call would be taken very seriously and he felt empathetic. a credit to the council."</p>	<p>"It used to be awful but in recent years it has improved since we gained a named social worker who remains with us through life's ups and downs. It has been refreshing to be able to have a positive experience to share about the Rotherham Adult Social Work Team. "</p>
<p>"The person I spoke to was very good on the phone. He made me feel reassured that my call would be taken very seriously and he felt empathetic, a credit to the council."</p>	<p>"I called Riverside house today to see if they could help me find a care home for my mum. She has dementia and I'm worried about her living alone."</p>

Feedback was mostly positive, with people describing staff as polite, helpful, and reassuring. Some said their experience has improved over time, particularly when they have a named social worker. Others appreciated receiving helpful advice and support, such as guidance when looking for care for a family member.

However, some people lacked confidence in the referral process and were unsure if online referrals had been received. There were also concerns that information is mainly online, which may be difficult for people without digital access. Clearer information about the service and referral process was suggested.

Q4. We'd like to understand how your experience felt for you. Please choose a number from 1 to 10, where 1 means the experience did not meet your needs and 10 means it was excellent.



The feedback scores were mixed. Only 9 out of the 12 respondents answered this question. Four people rated their experience very highly (9–10), showing they felt the service met their needs well. However, three people gave the lowest score (1), indicating their needs were not met. A small number of responses fell in the middle range. Overall, experiences varied, with both very positive and very negative feedback.

Q5. Please describe why you have rated 1 to 10 in the previous question.

- “At this point very straight forward and prompt advice. Nothing to complain about or reduce the score”
- “The social worker was unhelpful and defended the abuse of an elderly person.”
- “I refer clients to this service and only hear outcomes as a 3rd party. I am unable to give a rating of how the referral is handled from the clients perspective. I know that referrals are

responded to, but there are exceptions – which can happen.
My rating is for the referral process, not a reflection of how referrals are handled with clients.
I am able to contact the Manager at SPA to follow up any problems.”

For the reasons I have previously mentioned. The call was answered quickly, I felt reassured
and my concerns were listened to.

“Rude receptionist, who didn't think I was the priority. If I didn't have the information I had
asked for and seen so quickly, I would have given it a lower score.”

“For the knowledge and prompt action”

“10 because of the huge improvements since we gained a named social worker who journeys
with us through life”

Feedback about the ratings was mixed. Some people gave high scores because they received prompt advice, quick responses, and felt listened to and reassured. Positive comments also highlighted knowledgeable staff and the benefits of having a consistent named social worker.

However, some negative experiences were reported, including concerns about staff attitude, a receptionist being perceived as rude, and one person feeling a social worker was unhelpful. One respondent explained their score reflected the referral process rather than clients' experiences directly. Overall, feedback shows both positive experiences and areas for improvement.

Improvement Recommendations

- **Improve communication and follow-up:** Including responding to voicemail messages and ensuring promised call-backs happen, and providing clearer updates about what happens after a referral is submitted. Also, by implementing target call back times such as 2 working days.
- **Provide confirmation when referrals are received:** So people know their request has been actioned and is being followed up.
- **Provide clearer information about the referral process, the Single Point of Access (SPA),** and the role of Adult Social Care.
- **Ensure there is better cover when a social worker is on leave:** So people can still speak to someone who can help.
- **Improve access to information for non-digital people:** Including clearer phone contact options.

- **Improve joint working between services:** Particularly between Continuing Healthcare, (CHC) the South Yorkshire ICB (Integrated care board) and Adult Social Care.
- **Ensure consistent, respectful customer service:** Including at reception and first points of contact.

Conclusion

This mystery shopping exercise examined how easily members of the public can access Adult Social Care information and support through the council website, telephone services, and in-person visits. The findings show that experiences vary depending on the contact method, with some interactions providing clear and helpful information while others offer more limited guidance.

Overall, people were generally able to reach the service, and staff were often polite, empathetic, and willing to help. Positive experiences were particularly noted when individuals had a named social worker, who provided consistent support, clear explanations, and advocacy for families. However, the level of information and support provided was not always consistent. In some cases, individuals were mainly signposted elsewhere rather than receiving clear guidance about available support, which may make it harder for those unfamiliar with Adult Social Care to understand their options.

The website contains a large amount of information about services and support, providing a strong resource for residents. However, the volume of information can make it difficult for users to quickly find what they need, particularly for those without digital access or during stressful situations. Telephone experiences also varied, with some calls providing detailed advice and reassurance, while others lacked follow-up, confirmation of referrals, or felt impersonal.

Feedback highlights that improvements are needed in communication, referral follow-up, clearer explanations of processes, and ensuring information is accessible to all residents, especially those without digital access. Addressing these areas would help build confidence in the service and create a more consistent and supportive experience for everyone.

Overall, Adult Social Care services have a solid foundation of information, support channels, and helpful staff. With improvements to how information is organised, shared, and followed up, the service could provide a clearer, more consistent, and reassuring experience for residents seeking support.

Strengths

Staff were generally helpful, friendly and approachable during both phone calls and in-person visits. They were willing to assist and sometimes offered to find further information or call back with details. Their attitude helped create a positive experience for people contacting Adult Social Care.

The council building was also described as tidy, accessible and welcoming. Reception staff were friendly and tried to guide visitors to the right place, even when they could not provide detailed information.

The website contains a large amount of useful information for residents. While it can sometimes be difficult to quickly find specific details, it provides a strong foundation that could become more user-friendly with improved organisation and navigation.

Areas for Improvement

The mystery shopping exercises highlighted several common themes in how people access Adult Social Care information and support. Overall, staff interactions were generally friendly and helpful, but there were some challenges in how easily people could find and understand the information they needed.

One key theme was that the website contains a large amount of information, which can make it difficult for users to quickly identify the most relevant guidance. Search results sometimes returned a high number of pages, and some webpages were quite text-heavy. Clearer starting points, improved navigation and simpler language would help users find information more easily, particularly when they may be stressed or unfamiliar with Adult Social Care services.

The findings also highlighted the importance of clearer signposting to local support services, such as organisations that provide help with issues like domestic abuse, loneliness, financial advice or support for carers. Providing a clearer and regularly updated directory of local services could help residents access support within their community.

Customer experience was another theme. While staff were welcoming and approachable, callers sometimes experienced longer waiting times without knowing how long they might need to wait. Providing estimated waiting times or call-back options could help improve the experience. Similarly, offering reception staff more guidance on how to utilise resources on the intranet and printed information could help them direct visitors more effectively.

Families valued having a consistent social worker, which was highlighted as a positive. However, it's important to ensure that appropriate cover is provided when their social worker is on leave.

Overall, the service has a strong foundation, with helpful staff and a wide range of information available. With improvements to organisation, clarity and signposting, the service could provide a more consistent and user-friendly experience for residents seeking support.

Council Response

"Rotherham Council Adult Social Care welcomes the insights provided by HealthWatch within this report. As an organisation, we continually strive to ensure our services are fully accessible and responsive to the needs of our residents.

We are now developing an action plan to ensure we can give feedback to staff on what is working well and areas we will focus on to ensure our customer contacts are fully responsive to a range of needs and contacts. Our primary focus will be on our face to face reception provision, as well as the accessibility and ease of use of our website.

We know that people who access Adult Social Care do so at a time in their lives when they need support either for themselves or a loved one; we want to ensure this is as simple and effective as possible." - Adult Social Care Team at RMBC

Appendix 1 – Scenarios

6b. Easy Read

Your friend has a learning difficulty and has started to think that they might need to get some extra help. They have never been in touch with the council and so don't know what support is available.

You have mentioned to them that they might need to have an assessment and they think this is a good idea. But they would like some more information about what it is and how it can help. They find the information on the council website difficult to follow and would like details in an Easy Read format so they fully understand what might happen as part of the assessment and afterwards.

You have looked online but can't find that information in Easy Read. Can the Council send some information or let you know where to find it.

Background:

Your friend has recently been given some information in Easy Read which they hadn't seen before. They found it incredibly useful and are now asking for Easy Read versions of information from other organisations. They are able to understand the information themselves and want this to be the case for everything and want to understand more about how the council can help them without relying on you or someone else to explain it.

You completely agree and want them to stay as independent as they can for as long as possible. Getting information in Easy Read will help.

4. Carers' support

You are a carer for your sister who has a learning disability. You are starting to struggle to support her effectively and are beginning to feel overwhelmed and that you need some help. You want to know what help is available locally, what the council can do and what you need to do to get the help you both need. You want to continue to live together.

Background:

You and your sister live in the same home. It is just the two of you. You are both in your 50s. You had some health issues earlier this year, which has made it more difficult for you, particularly as your sister is starting to need more help as her health is up and down. You don't want your sister to move out, but you realise that you will need help if you are going to continue to live together.

You currently work from home, so it is easier to help your sister. But supporting her is starting to make it difficult for you to work effectively. But you need to work.

Neither you nor your sister are in touch with any support organisations. Until this year you both managed really well. Your sister is in touch with a couple of local groups and goes out on outings and to occasional coffee mornings and activities for people with a learning disability. But they have started to say that they may not be able to help if she needs more support with personal hygiene, toileting etc.

9. Telecare/equipment

Your mum has dementia and is getting frailer. She has had a fall at home recently and you only found out when you found her on the bedroom floor when you went round the next day. Thankfully it was warm as she thought she might have been there for quite a few hours.

As well as having falls, your mum has got lost when she went out of the house twice recently and other people have had to help her get home. You wonder if there is anything or anyone who could help her.

9a. Background

Your mum is really keen on technology. She has an Alexa in the bedroom and lounge and uses them a lot to remind her to take medication. She has a smart phone and ipad and uses them to keep in touch with family around the country. Despite her dementia, she is really keen on trying new things and you feel that using technology is helping her.

8. Who can help?

The next two scenarios are similar and want to find out more about the options that the council can offer, but also whether they will signpost to other services both within and outside the council.

8a. Activities

Your friend is feeling increasingly lonely and isolated. One of the groups they used to be very involved in has closed and they are now finding that they have a lot of time on their own. While you try to support them, you have your own family who keep you busy.

You want to know what is available locally that they might be able to get involved in, particularly during the day and wondered if the council could let you know or tell you who can help.

Accessible information

6a. Large print

You are concerned about your dad. He is very independent and has lived on his own, very successfully, for the past ten years since your mum died. But he is starting to struggle and needs some help.

He wants to make his own decisions about what he needs, but has said he is happy for you to help find out what is available. But he wants to see all the information to make the decisions for himself.

You have noticed that he is eating more and more ready meals when he used to cook and the house isn't looking as clean as it used to.

Your dad is partially sighted and needs the information in 20 point font if possible or on a CD so he can listen to the options. Is it possible for the Council to arrange for information to be provided in this way? (You should not give out any details, just find out what is possible so you can let your dad know).

You do have a home computer, but you don't have a printer so can't help.

Background:

Your dad is 85. He has said that he knows that he isn't coping as well as he used to. But he is clear he wants to stay at home and only needs some help. He has said that he wants to sort out what he needs, but has eventually said he is happy for you to help find things out.

He is in touch with the local sight loss charity who have helped him get a magnifier that works for him. They have also helped him to get large print information from his bank, utility companies and pension provider.

You don't live too far from your dad and try to help all you can. But you are working and know he needs more help than you popping round every few days.

You have a sister/brother, but they live at the other end of the country and help when they can.

5. Carers support / safeguarding

Your friend has MS (multiple sclerosis). They have had MS for 40 years and now struggle with their mobility and have to use a walker or wheelchair. They are not able to do as much round the house as they were and need support with washing and dressing on most days. Their wife is their carer, does many of the household tasks and drives when they need to go to the hospital, doctor etc.

However, their wife has just been diagnosed with dementia and is finding it increasingly difficult to do things at home including cooking, shopping and driving. The last time they were out together in the car, the wife forgot where she was and your friend had to tell her to pull over when she tried to go the wrong way round a roundabout.

You are getting increasingly worried about them both and feel that they are no longer safe on their own. They seem to be eating a lot of sandwiches and some microwave meals and take outs, but you feel this isn't ideal. You want to know what to do, how the Council can help or if there are other organisations who can help. You particularly want to know what to do so that they stop driving.

Background:

Your friends have coped really well together until recently. They haven't let anything stop them and have enjoyed an active social life and international travel including to visit their children and grandchildren. Their children live in South Africa and Dubai with their families. They do try and visit when they can and you are in touch. However, the children don't believe that their mother really has dementia and feel she is still OK to look after their dad. That was the case last time they saw their parents but things have changed since their last visit.

You really feel that the wife should not be driving. When you mentioned it, your friend said that they would be lost if she couldn't drive and he thought it would be OK. However, he did tell you how terrifying it was at the above roundabout incident which he now seems to have forgotten or is saying it wasn't that bad and was just a one off. You think it is only a matter of time for something else to happen that could be a risk for them but also for other people on the road.

2b. Potential domestic abuse

Your father has just been diagnosed with dementia. This seems to be a family issue as his older brother (who lives somewhere else) has had dementia for three years.

You are very worried as your father and mother still live together and your father's behaviour has just started to change. After a year with his dementia, your uncle started to become violent towards your aunt and you think that this might happen with your parents and you are worried about your mum who is in her 80s and quite frail.

You want to know what you should look out for and what you / your mum should do to make sure your mum is safe and what to do if your father does start to get violent.

Background:

Your father has never been violent. He occasionally shouts, but nothing else. So far after his diagnosis he has become confused but you can see he is becoming frustrated. Your mum is also frustrated as she wants him to get things right and wants to explain things to him, but increasingly he doesn't understand what she's trying to tell him.

You know that your aunt got support from the local council when this happened to your uncle. You want to know if anything happens if your council could help or if there is anyone else you should contact.

2a. Care home

Your mum has just moved into a care home in the local area. She seems happy and has settled in. The staff seem good and so far everything is going well. However, you have just spoken to a friend in a different part of the country (choose somewhere as appropriate). They told you that they are worried about their aunt who is in a care home there. They don't think their aunt is being cared for properly. The aunt is losing weight, is never clean or well presented (she always took care to look good when she was at home) and she has some cuts and bruises. Your friend was really worried and told you they had contacted their local council who were looking into the issues.

You want to know what you should do if something similar happens with your mum. You also want to know whether the Council could help and what they would do. Should you call anyone else, including the police?

Background:

Your mum moved into a local care home in the last six months. So far you are all happy. Your mum is settled, has made a few friends and seems to get on very well with a couple of the staff.

She is eating well and likes the food. She is always wearing her own clothes and from what you can tell, she chooses what to wear and her clothes are always clean. You are still adjusting to your mum going into care and worry whether it is the right place.

You don't know what has happened to your friend's aunt, but you have heard other stories and want to be prepared just in case something happens to your mum. You don't think it will, but want to be prepared.

You don't know what the council can do, just that your friend told you their council was very helpful. So, you want to find out what the Council could/would do in a similar situation and if they can advise you what you should do in that situation and who to contact first.