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Some Surrey care services at a crossroads?

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A Surrey charity has warned that unpaid carers could be pushed “beyond breaking point” after Surrey County Council ended contracts for two carer support services.

Crossroads Care Surrey said the county council has withdrawn support for its Emergency Care Provision and Carer Emergency Planning services, decisions it claims were made with little notice and without consultation with carers who rely on them.

The charity said the changes follow earlier reductions in respite support for carers and could leave many families struggling at the most critical moments, particularly when dealing with medical emergencies or caring for loved ones at the end of their lives.

Crossroads said it received notification only days ago that Surrey County Council (SCC) would no longer support its end-of-life respite service, which enables unpaid carers to take short breaks while supporting terminally ill relatives at home.

The Carer Emergency Planning service will also end at the close of March, giving what the charity says is only three weeks’ notice. Crossroads says almost 1,500 carers who already have emergency plans in place will lose the safety net those plans were designed to provide.

The charity warned the changes could have “serious and far-reaching consequences” for vulnerable residents and already stretched health and care services.

It suggested that without emergency support, more carers could reach exhaustion and be unable to continue caring at home, potentially leading to avoidable hospital admissions or crisis interventions from social services.

Terry Hawkins, chief executive of Crossroads Care Surrey, said unpaid carers provide care worth an estimated £162 billion a year across the UK, a contribution broadly equivalent to the NHS budget.

He said: “Over the past year we have already seen vital support reduced following the removal of respite services. Now, further contracts are being ended early, leaving carers with fewer and fewer places to turn.

“Unpaid carers are the invisible backbone of our health and care system. Without them, the NHS and social care services would simply not cope.

“These services provide the basic safeguards that allow carers to keep going, knowing that if something happens to them, or when families face the end of life, support is there.

“Removing them risks pushing already exhausted carers beyond breaking point.”

Crossroads also questioned why the decision had not been considered by Surrey County Council’s Cabinet, arguing that services affecting thousands of vulnerable residents should be subject to public scrutiny.

The charity has said it will attempt to launch its own emergency support service to help carers who may now find themselves without practical respite assistance.

Surrey County Council has defended the decision, saying the contracts had not delivered the impact expected and that a new approach to supporting carers will replace them.

Sinead Mooney, Deputy Leader of the council and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said the authority had carried out a review before deciding not to renew the agreements with Crossroads.

She said: “After careful review, we’ve decided to end – or not renew – contracts with Crossroads Care Surrey for carer support services because the contracts have failed to achieve the impact we expected.

“Take-up has been lower than we intended and we can’t justify continuing to fund the arrangements.”

Cllr Mooney said the council would introduce a new model of support, including a flexible £300 wellbeing break payment for carers.

She said the council would also work with NHS partners and other care providers to ensure carers can access help through the wider health and social care system.

“Surrey’s carers do an extraordinary job, often in challenging circumstances,” she said. “We’re absolutely committed to making sure the transition from these contracts for carers is smooth, responsive and supportive.”

The council also rejected suggestions that emergency support would disappear, saying replacement care in crisis

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situations would continue to be provided by the county council.

Cllr Mooney added that carers currently receiving support through the end-of-life contract would see no reduction in services until that agreement ends in September, after which support could be delivered by a different provider.

She said carers concerned about support should contact the council's information and advice service.

The dispute highlights the continuing pressure on social care services across Surrey, where unpaid carers play a central role in supporting vulnerable residents at home.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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