

2. SOCIAL SERVICES



Social Services

In addition to carers' support organisations, there are a number of statutory services available within the borough for you and the person you care for. Some of these are offered by Croydon Social Services, a department of Croydon Council that aims to support people within the community. Before anyone can receive a service, an assessment of need must be undertaken. If the criteria is met, help that may be offered includes assistance with daily living, such as personal care (washing, dressing), meals and shopping, equipment, playschemes for disabled children, short breaks (giving you and the person for whom you care some time out), day centres and alternative housing options such as nursing homes. The ways in which these can be provided varies, for example they may be organised directly by social services, or by another organisation such as a charity or, increasingly, carers can be given money directly to make their own independent arrangements.

Who Provides a Service?

In some cases, the disability of the person you care for will determine who provides the service. For example, if you look after someone with a mental health problem, the South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust (020 3228 6000, www.slam.nhs.uk) provides social care services; see also chapter three. If you and the person you care for live in different boroughs then access to services is slightly different. For example, an assessment of need (to determine what, if any, services can be provided) for the person who is cared for, is always carried out by the social services department in the borough in which they live and therefore your assessment as a carer would also be their responsibility. So, if the person you look after lives in Croydon, but you live

elsewhere, then you would need to contact Croydon Social Services. However, if you live in Croydon but the person you care for lives somewhere else it will be social services in the other borough that carries out any assessments and provides services to you both. If this is the case, it would be a good idea to get in touch with a carers' organisation in that area for information and advice about local services; please contact us on 020 8649 9339, option 1 for more details.

How To Get Help

Assessment of Need

If you think that you need more support in your caring role you should begin by asking social services for an assessment of need of the person you care for. This can be done by contacting Social Services for Adults on 020 8726 6500 or, if you care for a disabled child, contact Children's Services on 020 8726 6400. This request can also be made in person at the following Access Croydon locations (these are Croydon Council offices). There is no telephone contact for these offices as contact should be made via the numbers above.

- Taberner House, Park Lane, Croydon CR9 3JS
- New Addington, 90 Central Parade, New Addington CR0 OJB
- Strand House, Zion Road, Thornton Heath CR7 8RG

Your telephone request will be dealt with by someone from the Croydon Council Contact Centre and you will be asked a series of standard questions to work out whether the person you care for can be referred to a specialist team for an assessment of need. These teams cover specific groups such as older people, adults with a learning disability and children with disabilities. Once a referral has been made and it is agreed that the person you care for does meet the specified criteria, arrangements will be made for a care manager to undertake a home visit. This is the time to say if you need an interpreter and whether you want or need to be present. If the staff at the Contact Centre do not feel that they can make the referral it will usually be because the person you care for does not meet their eligibility criteria; they should however advise you about alternative sources of help.

2. SOCIAL SERVICES

Croydon Social Services decides whom they can help by using guidance from the government's Department of Health called "Fair Access to Care Services". The aim of this guidance is to prioritise those people in the community at greatest risk of losing their independence. The person you are looking after will be assessed as having either a "critical", "substantial", "moderate" or "low" risk of losing their independence. This means that the higher the risk, such as not being able to live independently, the greater the level of service provision.

This system does not apply to children with a disability; if they are under the age of 18, live in Croydon and have a "permanent and substantial disability with a severe or profound impairment", you and your child will be assessed under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The CAF looks at your child's disability, health needs and education and will also take into account the needs of the family as a whole. If there are a number of professionals working with your child you may want one of them to be the "lead professional" who will support you during this, and future assessments, and co-ordinate all the services supporting your child.

If the person you are looking after is in hospital and is likely to need extra care and support when they are home, you should speak to ward staff who will put you in touch with the Care Management Team at the hospital. This team should carry out the assessment, make arrangements on your behalf and refer you to any other local services.

An assessment of need is an opportunity for the person you care for, or for you on their behalf, to describe the things that he or she likes and needs to do but finds difficult and to discuss solutions. As far as possible these needs will be taken into account, together with cultural, language and religious preferences, when deciding on the best support.

In order to prepare for the assessment, it might be helpful to think about the following and how they affect the independence of the person you care for. A written list is always useful so that you do not forget anything during the meeting.

- Are there health and safety concerns?
- Are there difficulties with personal care and other daily routines?
- Can the person you care for make choices and express their views?

- Are there barriers to involvement in family and community life including leisure, work, learning or volunteering?

There are organisations that offer support to carers at meetings like this and can liaise with social services on your behalf, see chapter one for more details.

Following the home visit and a financial assessment, if a service can be offered, the person you care for should receive a written care plan that includes details of these services and any charges to be made. This is an important document and it should be sent out within a “reasonable time” so it is probably a good idea to keep a record of each stage of the assessment so that you can chase it up if necessary.

Financial Assessment

There is no charge for an assessment, but like most local council departments, Croydon Social Services has a policy of charging for its services to adults but not to children with a disability. At the time of the home visit or soon afterwards, a financial assessment form will be given which asks for information about income and savings, so that social services can work out how much, if anything, should be paid towards the cost of services that the person you care for receives. A spouse or partner is not under any obligation to provide details of their finances unless residential care is needed.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the financial assessment form you can contact the Charging Helpline on 020 8760 5676. There are no national guidelines on charging, but charges must be “reasonable” and nobody should be caused hardship or denied a service they need because they cannot pay. You have every right to question the amount being charged by calling the helpline and you can also ask for a formal review. If the charges are not paid, the council can take legal action to recover the debt, but it will still have to provide the services.

2. SOCIAL SERVICES

Direct Payments

Direct payments are cash payments made to an individual, giving the person the choice to buy and arrange their own social care services. Anyone aged 16 or over who has been assessed as being entitled to help from social services can choose to have that help in the form of a direct payment. This money can then be used to buy services to help with identified needs in the care plan such as personal care, practical tasks, getting out and about and short breaks for carers. Many people use direct payments to hire a care worker through an agency or to become an employer of a care worker themselves. The Direct Payments Support Service (020 8664 3820) is run by DisabilityCroydon and provides help to users and those who are thinking about taking on a direct payment by offering advice and information, as well as practical support and training on all the financial aspects of employing people.

Independent Living Funds

The person you care for may be entitled to additional money from Independent Living Funds if he or she receives services or direct payments from social services. To be eligible, they must receive the highest rate of Disability Living Allowance (see chapter four) and be aged between 16 and 64. For more information contact the Independent Living Fund Development Officer for Croydon on 020 8239 4384 or see www.ilf.org.uk.

Self-Directed Support

Self-directed support is a new way of providing adult social care and all councils are expected to make significant changes towards this by 2011. Under self-directed support adults who are eligible for services will be allocated a personal budget and will agree a support plan with social services about how they will use it. They may choose to receive the personal budget as a direct payment, or to have it managed by someone else. They will have a financial assessment, as with the current system, and may have to pay towards services. For more information contact Croydon Council on 020 8726 6000.

Carer's Assessments

If you are looking after someone who is eligible for an assessment of need (even if they have not had one) and you provide care for a substantial amount of time on a regular basis you have a legal right (under the Carers' and Disabled Children Act 2000), whatever your age, to a separate assessment of your own needs. This includes young carers, who must be seven or older at the time of the referral. It is slightly different if you are a parent carer as your needs will be taken into consideration as part of the assessment of your child. You can have a carer's assessment even if the person you care for does not want an assessment of their needs. You can also ask for an assessment if you are going to be providing care for someone in the future, for example after they come home from hospital or if they are coming to live with you.

If you care for someone with a mental health problem you can request a carer's assessment from the community mental health team that co-ordinates care and treatment for the person you look after. Some carers will be referred to local charities such as Croydon Mencap (020 8662 9201), the Alzheimer's Society Croydon (020 8916 3587) and the Young Carers Support Project (020 8649 9339, option 2) who will carry out a carer's assessment on behalf of social services. To ask for a carer's assessment you should contact Social Services for Adults on 020 8726 6500 or, if you care for a disabled child, contact Children's Services on 020 8726 6400. You can also request a carer's assessment in person at one of the Access Croydon locations listed previously in this chapter.

A carer's assessment is not a judgement of your ability to care; it is your opportunity to tell social services about the things that would make caring easier for you. It can be carried out at the same time as the assessment of need for the person you are looking after, or separately. In Croydon, carers are often sent the carer's assessment form in the post to complete in your own time. You may want to discuss this with someone and there are organisations that can support you; see chapter one for more details.

Under the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004, local authorities also have a duty to take into account a carer's work, study and leisure interests. You will be given a form to complete that asks questions about finding time for yourself and whether any other roles and responsibilities are affected by your

2. SOCIAL SERVICES

caring role. Think about what you do each day, which times of the day are most stressful, and what the difficulties are:

- Do you get enough sleep?
- Is your health affected in any way?
- Do you get any time for yourself, and are you able to get out and about and follow your own interests?
- Are your other relationships affected by your caring role?
- Are you worried you may have to give up work or other responsibilities?

You should include any practical ideas you have about what will help you, and you can ask for services that will enable you to continue looking after someone as well as those that maintain your health and wellbeing. Possible services for carers include transport, equipment, a phone, driving lessons and short breaks. Your carer's assessment should also include planning for emergencies; see chapter ten.

Do not forget that you have the right not to be a carer. This can be hard to say or it may not seem like a realistic option, but a key part of the carer's assessment should be whether and to what extent you can continue, or take on, a caring role.

After you have submitted the carer's assessment form the care manager will let you know if you are eligible for any services, such as short breaks. All adults, including parent carers, will be asked to complete a financial assessment form to calculate how much you should pay, and the services you are going to receive should be detailed in a written care plan. If you do not receive this, or do not get a response to your assessment form, contact the care manager. You should have another carer's assessment if the person you care for is re-assessed because circumstances have changed, although you can also ask for a review of the care plan at any time.

Protecting Children and Adults

Another important function of social services is to “safeguard” vulnerable people. Carers need to be aware that children and adults who are disabled, ill or have long-term health conditions are regarded as being more at risk of suffering abuse. There is a system in Croydon that aims to provide immediate support if you are at all concerned. If you are worried about a child, contact Children’s Services on 020 8726 6400 and if you are concerned about an adult, contact the Adult Abuse Reporting Line on 020 8760 5697. Both numbers are open 24 hours.

For non-urgent advice and information ring the Safeguarding Adults Team on 020 8760 5790. You can also contact the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or Action on Elder Abuse on 0808 808 8141.

Registers

You may think that you need to inform social services, or ‘register’ yourself as a carer, but there is no requirement on social services to hold either a register of carers or of disabled adults. Social services are however legally required to keep a register of disabled children. The Register for Children and Young People with Disabilities is held by Register Services (020 8770 8237, www.registerservices.nhs.uk) and parents can place their child’s name on the register directly. One of the benefits of doing so is that all registered children are sent an I-Count Card that can be used as proof of disability. Adults who are blind or visually impaired can be ‘registered blind’. Their consultant ophthalmologist must send a certificate of visual impairment to the Sensory Impairment Team at Croydon Council (020 8726 6500) who will then contact the individual directly to arrange registration. The registration card can be used as proof of disability.

2. SOCIAL SERVICES

Complaints About Social Services

If you, or the person you care for, are not happy with the services you receive, or if you have been refused services, you should begin by discussing it with the care manager who carried out the assessment. If you are still not satisfied, you can make a formal complaint by contacting Croydon Council on 020 8726 6000 and asking for a complaint form which will give details of the procedures to follow, including timescales. If you would like help to make a complaint see chapter one for details of local organisations that can assist you.

If you are not satisfied with Croydon Council's response to your complaint you might want to take it further. You can make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, but only if it is felt that the council is at fault and this has caused problems for you. This might be because of the way in which a service has been delivered, or because of the way in which a decision has been made. You cannot complain about the decision itself simply because you do not agree with it. To find out more, contact the Local Government Ombudsman on 0845 602 1983 or go to www.lgo.org.uk.

Key Contacts

Adult Abuse Reporting Line	020 8760 5697
Charging Helpline	020 8760 5676
Children's Services	020 8726 6400
Croydon Council	020 8726 6000
Direct Payments Support Service	020 8664 3820
Independent Living Fund	020 8239 4384
Local Government Ombudsman	0845 602 1983
Register Services	0208770 8237
Safeguarding Adults Team	020 8760 5790
Social Services for Adults	020 8726 6500

If you cannot find what you are looking for please contact the Carers' Information Service on 020 8649 9339, option 1.

SOCIAL SERVICES. 2