

Dementia Select Committee – Briefing Note – Telecare and Dementia

(relevant to hearings on 29th March, 5th and 8th April)

It is envisaged that Telecare will be one of the ways in which people will be better able to balance caring responsibilities with their own work responsibilities. The intended dual benefits are that businesses and the wider economy can continue to benefit by retaining skilled and experienced workers for longer while, at the same time, technology is used to enhance the safety and security of the home environment for the cared for person.

The Department of Health has funded a two year trial of both Telecare (which is particularly relevant to the review topic of dementia) and its companion programme Telehealth, involving 6000 participants including 470 carers. The outcomes are currently being evaluated, with a report expected later this year. Kent has taken part in the Whole System Demonstrator (WSD) programme and Members will be informed about its progress by Hazel Price at an interview on 8th April.

Ethical issues that may arise from the use of Telecare to augment the provision of social care services have been the topic of much debate and the most crucial issues are those concerning autonomy, mental capacity and consent balanced by the need, and indeed duty, to safeguard and protect people who are vulnerable.¹ These issues are of particular relevance when such methods are used to safeguard people with dementia.

Other technological safeguards such as the use of cameras to 'keep an eye on' a person in order to protect them and alert a carer to any difficulties and other products such as the Carer's Watch being demonstrated today are further solutions which may be favoured by carers in their attempts to keep a loved one safe, particularly when he or she is prone to wandering, a behaviour which may be exhibited by a person with dementia (in some cases) at any stage of illness.

Wandering referred to in connection with dementia is not to be confused with 'going out for a walk' in the usual sense as it may place the person concerned in harms way if they are unable to reach home safely, or for example are inappropriately dressed. These issues were the topic of a lecture attended on behalf of the Select Committee at the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC), Canterbury Christ Church University.

Feedback notes from the lecture at DSDC are being emailed to members of the Select Committee separately – these are relevant to hearings on 29th March (Mr. O'Dell) and to a panel discussion on 5th April on the theme of crisis/emergency (prevention and response) when Mr Ivatt, a volunteer with Kent Search and Rescue, who contributed to the lecture, will be taking part.

¹ Social Care Institute for Excellence (2010) Ethical issues on the use of telecare <http://tinyurl.com/telecare-ethicalissues>