

KEY ISSUES FROM SERVICE USER AND CARER REFERENCE GROUP REPORT

The seven aspects of the consultation survey comments that the Reference Group wanted Executive Board to note are set out below in italics along with details of how they have been addressed.

1. *A number of people stated that they should not have to pay for their services. Generally, people who made this type of comment felt that it was not fair for people who had worked all their lives and saved are then penalised. Some views were expressed that the money they pay in Council Tax should pay for their services; or that the Government should ensure that they have enough pension etc to pay for their services; or that the Council should find the money from other parts of their budget.*

Section 3 of the report sets out in some detail the reasons why ceasing service user contributions towards the cost of their services is not considered to be viable. Whilst the consultation options take people's savings into account, they do so in a way that is significantly more generous than the methodology applied by most councils. Sections 10.3 to 10.5 of the report outline the scope for alternatives to increased service user contributions within the financial context in which the Council is operating.

People should not think that it is a choice between either paying the extra money or not having a service. This is something that the Council needs to look at when implementing any potential changes to the Fairer Charging Policy. Similarly we are concerned that some people said that they would cease their services if they had to contribute more. The policy should be carefully implemented and monitored to ensure that vulnerable people continue to receive the services they need irrespective of the charging policy in place.

Section 8.7 of the report outlines the monitoring of service take-up that will take place following implementation and confirms that services cannot be withdrawn if service users do not pay their assessed contribution. As outlined in section 8.6 of the report there is a review process if service users do not feel that they can afford their assessed contribution and the Director of Adult Social Services has discretion to waive service user contributions if this is considered appropriate. To reduce the impact of the changes on service users, the proposed contributions levels for each service are those included within the consultation survey, with no inflation applied for 2009/10. In addition, a cap on the increase in the weekly payment that existing service users would face is proposed as set out in sections 11.4 and 11.5 of the report.

2. *A number of people commented that they could not afford to pay more or want to pay more. Older people who made comments were more likely to state that they were struggling financially and that living in their own home was a struggle. Some people who responded went on to say that they have to choose whether to be warm or whether to eat.*

As outlined above, no inflation has been applied to service user contributions for 2009/10, transitional arrangements are proposed to cap the increase for those who

would otherwise face the highest increases in their contributions and services cannot be withdrawn for non-payment. The potential impact of increased contributions is acknowledged with particular reference to the current economic climate in section 11.1 of the report. Service users will receive an explanation of the changes to contributions following the Executive Board decision and a freephone helpline will be available to address any concerns they may raise.

3. *Some people did agree with contributing towards the cost of their services. However, this was not the majority view. What appear to be the key messages from these comments are keep any increase small and use it to improve services.*

The additional income in 2009/10 from the proposals will be almost fully matched by the additional investment in assessment and care management and meals services as set out in sections 3.21, 3.23 and 10.7 of the report and further investment in future years is planned.

4. *Some people raised the issue of the inequalities in the benefits and allowances system, raising concerns that any proposed changes would hit some people more than others. The issue here is that younger adults receive less benefits and allowances (no winter fuel payment for instance), than older people and therefore they perceive that any proposed increases would be less fair to them.*

For financially assessed services, the lower incomes of younger adults will be taken into account and so they are less likely to be assessed as being able to contribute towards the cost of their services than older people. The flat-rate respite care contributions are based on basic benefit levels, which means that younger people pay less than older people.

5. *Carers should not pay for the services that they need.*

This report does not make any proposals for introducing contributions for services in a service users home that give carers a break. A further piece of work is proposed and this will take into account the views expressed during the consultation.

6. *There were a number of comments about services themselves. The number of positive and negative comments received about services were roughly equal.*

The comments received about services have been passed on to the relevant service managers where it is clear to which service they relate. In most instances the service is not clear, in which case they have been passed to service managers across Adult Social Care.

7. *A number of people found the questionnaire and information difficult to understand.*

The lessons learned regarding the clarity of the consultation survey documentation will be incorporated into the post-consultation review that is being undertaken. The outcome of this review will be reported to Scrutiny Board (Adult Social Care).