

## Response of Design Options for a Versatile Environment to the strategy review 'Improving the life chances of disabled people'.

Design Options for a Versatile Environment (D.O.V.E) welcomes the strategy review 'Improving the life chances of disabled people'.

Design Options for a Versatile Environment (D.O.V.E) We provide advice on housing and adaptations to the home to disabled people. It is one of a very very few centres with a showroom of adapted kitchens, bathrooms, showers, stairlifts and a hearing resource room consisting of loop systems, telephones, door bells and other communicators for people to try out before they consider buying.

The response does not encompass every issue concerning D.O.V.E rather the main points of concern or omissions in the review.

### Office for disabled people

D.O.V.E is concerned as disabled people want, need and benefit from services and support being provided to them by other disabled people. We would urge the office to be staffed by disabled people and disabled people themselves being in the majority. Mainstreaming of activities must remain a priority.

### Older people

The report does not address the transition of disabled people retiring from work. Amongst other issues they may suddenly find they are financially a lot worse off even with small pension as they are means tested and charged for the services received since they have given up working. We therefore submit that policies which have been seen to be beneficial towards the working disabled population are carried over into retirement.

## Volunteers

There is little or nothing mentioned about disabled people under 65 years volunteering prior to perhaps considering work or as part of their rehabilitation programme. To this end disabled people are often willing to volunteer but cannot as there is no support or equipment offering and these can be expensive. There is little or no funding available for the organisation to obtain such equipment. Day centres are inappropriate for some disabled people as they have skills to offer. Also, local authority Social Services Departments are keen to include disabled people within mainstream services. There is a question of the right level of appropriate funding for this to happen in a successful manner. Several examples have occurred of which two are described here:

1) A disabled person with limited mobility had extensive knowledge of adaptations and hearing equipment needed support with a powerchair to enable him to volunteer at the premises. The organisation unsuccessfully tried to obtain funding to purchase a powerchair for him, other volunteers and potential volunteers. This was a lost opportunity for a skilled disabled person

2) A disabled person with speech, hearing and dexterity problems could not volunteer as there was a need for a computer, and an adapted telephone to be enabled to perform.

Some disabled people do not get personal support for volunteering and so cannot progress. We would suggest an extension of the Access to Work scheme or Direct payments for volunteers.

## Independent living

Charging by local authorities is mentioned on page 78. paragraph beginning 'Budgets... .. And there should be a national charging policy which so far as possible minimises financial disincentives to seek paid employment. (132) .. 132 This is already the situation in the current charging policy for community care services but (a) it will be more

clearly stated in revised guidance and (b) it will need to be extended to the means test for disabled facilities grants and for residential care.

This policy is clearly contradictory and unfair. Not only are pensions deferred earnings but the policy treats disabled people with the same needs differently on the basis of age, impairment and status. Status means whether they are earning money or not earning money; the policy could be challenged under the human rights act. Further, the charging policy itself is a disincentive to the long established virtues of learning, earning and saving.

It is unjust to charge those unable to work under the age of 65 when those disabled people under aged 65 and earning money are not charged have more resources to spend. There is an implication in the equal opportunities field. An example is disabled people unable to work have to pay to get up in the mornings and those working for money do not pay.

The governments strategy document on benefits and rhetoric that everyone should save for retirement is negated as there is a disincentive to save for retirement if the costs are not equal, as is the case at present time. The disabled person will have a incentive to consume up to the limit i.e. spending all their earnings on holidays, cars, etc. This also applies to the person not working- they may as well not bother saving any money when they have an unexpected windfall. The Joseph Rowntree report published in late 2004 is a timely reminder of the extra costs of disability but it does not address the issue of charging.

We would urge abolition of charging as it is unfair to charge one sector of disabled people and not another. Again, there is a question, both of equal opportunities and justice.

## **Centres of Independent Living**

We welcome the concept of CIL's but the concept becomes rather confusing when different organisations are providing the services that a CIL would provide as a whole to the same council. We would suggest that the recommendation for CIL's is over a longer lead time (no later than December 2012) allowing councils to reconsider contracts and review the current scenario and evaluation of setting up a CIL within the prescribed concept.

D.O.V.E knows of one council that purchases its disability services from five different organisations. The services mentioned in the report are provided within the council and offering no independent advocacy service. The services offered need to be properly funded.

## **Supporting people budgets**

The level of funding allotted by the ODPM is decreasing over the next few years including 2005/6 The proposals for the housing programme cannot be achieved without a significant increase in funding and ring fencing of budgets in particular Disabled facilities Grants which are currently very limited.

## **Employment**

1) The permitted work rules in chapter 7 are complex and the rate per hour is equal to that of the minimum wage when calculated on the National Insurance minimum level of £92p.w. when one tries work for 18 hours. Until the whole of IB is reformed, we would suggest the Income support maximum of £20p.w. is raised to the NI minimum of £92p.w. to be consistent and to encourage some people to try work.

There may be some highly skilled people on IB that may want to work 7 hours a week but because their wage is higher than the level of IB permitted work rules they cannot afford to do so. For example a

person may be paid £15ph and only be able to work 7 hours a week which equates to £105 p.w.

2) Little has been mentioned about working from home. Some disabled people cannot go out to work because of personal circumstances. Although home working requires defined lines of responsibility, support and trust on the part of the employer and employee, with the use of the internet it has worked extremely effectively in many cases.

3) Self Employment is another area which can be explored by disabled people as an option to working from home.

4) Mainstream agencies should not be expected to be right all the time. They appear to be in fear of failure. When signposting people to specialist agencies this should be looked at as a positive way forward. Specialist agencies should be properly funded to reflect the deeper knowledge and specialist skills that the personnel have gained.

### **Funding**

We remain sceptical of adequate funding streams for all the recommendations. The suggested invest and save proposal for the spending review in 2006 should also include small feasibility studies on different topics as many local CIL's and disability organisations including ourselves do not have the funds to carry out such work.

### **Reporting**

The reporting process to Government should follow an agreed clear pro-forma and targets. It must include failures and the reasons for them, and difficulties and the way to overcome them, as this will be the only way we will see an improvement. It may not be politically palatable but we have to learn by our mistakes and this includes parties as well as Government.

## Conclusion

We would urge that all disabled people including older disabled people who are too often at the bottom of politicians priorities are included throughout the programme of transition. Our concerns are as follows

- 1) Justice and equality in government policies.
- 2) Adequate and appropriate levels of funding.
- 3) Other methods of working for a salary.

Jane E Hunt  
Chair