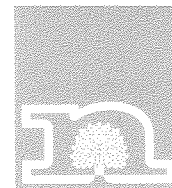


Your Ref
Our Ref
Please ask for AC/JP/CR3103
Tel 9774139
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e-mail
Date 13 April, 2005



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**
Social Services
Temporary Director **David Pearson**

Strategy Unit Disability Team
Cabinet Office
4th Floor
Admiralty Arch
The Mall
London
SW1A 2WH

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Response to the Consultation on:
"Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People"**

In January 2005 Nottinghamshire County Council completed a Best Value Service Review on the Promotion of Independence of Young Disabled Adults, (age range 16-25). The review was carried out by project team made up of a range of staff from different Departments of the County Council and from different agencies. My comments on the Government's report, "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People", are made on behalf of the project team and reflect some of the issues that have been raised in the course of our review.

The project team welcomes the report and supports the need to improve services and make changes that increase the choices and possibilities open to disabled people. Many of the recommendations of our Best Value Review closely relate to the report particularly in the areas of independent living, transitions between children's and adult services, and employment. We were pleased that a representative from your team was able to visit our Review Team in June of last year. I have enclosed our Executive Summary of the Best Value Service Review for your information.

Four areas highlighted by our review do not appear to have an emphasis in the Government's report. The project team would be interested in your responses to these:-

1. Many young disabled people we consulted felt over-protected or "wrapped in cotton wool" by some of their parents/carers and this led to their feeling ill-equipped and frustrated in their aspirations towards independence. Also some families are dependent on the additional income that the young person's disability allows them access to, and this can make it more difficult to persuade parents to help their sons and daughters to become more independent.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Our Welfare Rights Team (part of the Best Value Service Review Project Team) calculated exactly what the financial dependency could mean in terms of family income, and the loss incurred when a disabled member of the family moves out to live independently. A copy of the calculation is included with this letter.

2. Young disabled people we consulted were concerned about issues of safety when considering a more independent lifestyle. We described it as a concern about community safety – both within the home environment and out and about in the community.
3. We identified particular problems about inter-agency responsibility for communication equipment at the point of transition to adult services. Communication aids for children and young people up to the age of 18 years are currently funded by the Communication Aids Project, but this is not available for adults. The provision of communication aids for adults is not clearly the responsibility of any one agency. The Integrated Community Equipment Store (ICES) has not solved this problem. The lack of a solution means that adults who need aids to communicate, and also need help to maintain and upgrade their aids, may be denied access to the help they need or may be expected to fund raise for their own equipment. The cost of computer-aided speech units can be as much as £6000. This issue needs to be addressed in order to give some disabled people a voice, something that most of us take for granted.
4. In terms of the organisational structures of Health and Social Care we found, not surprisingly, that young disabled people who did not have the traditional diagnostic labels (mental illness, learning disability, physical disability, sensory impairment) were generally not well served. For example, people with brain injury, Asperger's Syndrome, autism, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and other conditions, may find themselves in a "no man's land" between the traditionally structured specialist teams of health and social services. Professional staff in these services may feel de-skilled and unable to offer informed and comprehensive service responses to these young adults.

The project team would also like to make some general observations about the Government's report:

1. We are concerned about the lack of clarity about funding. There needs to be a proper analysis of the cost of the policy objectives so that the amount that can be achieved from "efficiency savings" and the amount of new investment needed are mutually agreed and realistic.
2. There does not appear to be a reference to a key Government policy for social care services which have an impact on the initiatives set out in the report. This is the DoH "Fair Access to Care Services" guidance not mentioned on page 56 of the report but which is the means by which Local Authorities are expected to make decisions about eligibility for social care services.

A number of Local Authorities have restricted their social services department's services only to people with "critical" or "substantial" needs in order to stay within their resources. Government policy initiatives need to be "joined up" to make sure that they do not contradict each other.

3. We have concerns about recommendation 6.1 in which Children's Trust are to "work with young disabled people for whom the transfer to appropriate adult provision had not been completed, up to the age of 25". We doubt that this is the best means of achieving the goal of improved transitions for disabled young people. One reason for a poor transition is that some adult services across the country (in both Health and Social Care) are not adequate to meet the needs and expectations of young disabled or chronically ill services users: service provision can be focused on the needs of the much larger number of older people and often has not adapted to meet the needs of young people with increasingly severe impairments, who want to participate in ordinary life. The danger is that suggesting a continuation of children's services oversight will just move the "cliff edge" to a later age, with little impetus for enhancing resources for adults. Instead it continues a culture of reinforcing dependency.

I look forward to hearing your response to our review conclusions and to the observations made in this letter.

Yours faithfully



Joe Pidgeon
Project Manager on behalf
Best Value Service Review Team
Promotion of Independence of Young Disabled Adults