

13th November 2009

Response to the Social Care Green Paper - Shaping the Future of Care Together

Worcestershire's County Council welcomes the opportunity to put its views forward on the important topic of the future of the adult social care and support system.

The County Council has carefully considered the matter and has undertaken a number of activities during the consultation period to seek the views of its members, residents and staff to inform its response. Two public stakeholder Big Care Debates were hosted in October one in the north of the county in Bromsgrove, the other in Worcester, with eighty people plus attending each. A Key Issues Debate was held in full Council on 12 November. The responses from these debates are attached separately along with this submission. A staff poll was also posted on the County Council's staff intranet with questions asked regarding the main issues on future services and funding.

The Vision for the Future

Worcestershire County Council welcomes the Green Paper's bold attempt to address the service delivery and funding issues that will be faced in the future by this sector. It also welcomes the impact that the Big Care Debates have had in raising the profile of adult social care and support both locally and nationally.

There is a pressing need for reform of the system to meet current capacity and funding demands and to prepare for further increases in demand in the future due to demographic growth, people with disabilities living longer and to raised expectations about the type of care that will be provided. The existing system is no longer fit for purpose.

The concept of a National Care Service is to be welcomed if it succeeds in raising the status of adult care services and puts these services on an equal footing with services provided through the NHS. It was confirmed through the County Council's consultation exercises that equal status with health care for social care is essential for ensuring the delivery of high quality, joined up support for people with disabilities and older people. The County Council is particularly keen to know how the government will address the relationship between the National Care Service and the National Health Service. It will be necessary to ensure that this relationship is underpinned by formal arrangements both at national and local level.

The County Council believes that expectations of a National Care Service will be raised unrealistically unless there is much more detailed attention given to how the funding arrangements will work in practice and how central government and local authorities, who will be administering the services, will work together.

The Green Paper gives relatively little attention to how the needs of younger people with disabilities will be addressed, particularly those who may not have high level needs attracting 'free care' but will still require additional state support. A number of people with disabilities we talked to during the consultation period said that the Green Paper had left them perplexed and doubtful about their future, even though assurances are given in the paper regarding free access to some care for those born with disabilities.

Making the Vision a Reality

The Green Paper's focus on the importance of preventative services is welcomed, however there needs to be more detail of what preventative services would be included under a National Care Service and how a national assessment would work as the key to accessing such services. There is a concern that with the continued pressure to meet critical needs, neither a national system nor a local authority based system will be able to meet lower level needs. Some additional funding will be required to ensure preventative services can be effectively provided, however the provision of this funding will lead to significant savings in health spending.

Joined up services are also to be welcomed, however there needs to be more emphasis on the links between social care and housing for instance, including the building of more lifetime homes, and an upgraded status and training for housing support workers and mobile wardens, with more of the latter required. Self care and greater education about social care at all levels is required.

The importance of the role of informal carers featured highly in all the consultation events hosted by the County Council and some doubts were raised about the level of recognition given to carers by the Green Paper. Whilst the Carers Strategy is referenced in the Green Paper there needs to be more detail of tangible services that carers will be able to expect to be delivered by a National Care Service.

Fair Funding

The County Council would like a greater understanding of how the incorporation of benefits into a National Care Service would work, in particular how would assessment for any future these benefits work and how would local authorities be expected to manage demand for such benefits within a capped budget.

A National Care Service will need to be properly funded if it is to meet expectations and growing demand. There will also need to be clear eligibility criteria for services. Whichever model is chosen, unless there is sufficient revenue coming to local authorities to administer the system, local authorities will struggle and the unmet demand will fall back on the NHS, at greater expense overall. The County Council would like to question why the fifth option for funding, via income tax in line with the NHS has been completely discounted. A National Care Service is more likely to be viewed with pride and work more effectively if it is on same footing as the NHS. It may also prove to be more cost effective.

Local or National

It is recognised that there needs to be national standards for assessment and funding, with flexibility in providing services at the local level, however there needs to be further detail on how the funding mechanisms would work in practice and the responsibilities of local authorities.