

Proposed Cuts in Social Services

West Berkshire Council is proposing to cut its Care and Support Services by £1.8M in 2012/13. This forms part of £9M cuts needed to balance the budget without increasing the council tax levy. A final decision on where cuts will fall will be taken by the full Council in March. WBNA is astounded at the proposals put forward.

Along with West Berkshire Disability Alliance (WBDA), WBNA has engaged in a consultation exercise and hosted meetings between members and council staff. Both our organisations have written to strongly voice objections to these proposals and to suggest alternative ways forward.

The proposed cuts will hit a wide range of services used by those with neurological problems. These include: social care, personal budgets, community meals, voluntary sector support, home care and transport. We have suggested that the Council considers finding cuts elsewhere, reducing the number of senior management posts and raising the council tax rather than directly targeting essential services for the disabled and most vulnerable in society.

WBC should be investing more, not less, in the Voluntary Sector, since this sector is efficient and could be returning an average 5:1 ratio on any investment. Hence, proposed cuts of £85k will probably mean a potential loss of some £400k in volunteer service provision. There also needs to be more support for people who are willing to take over their own Personal Budgets to commission and manage their own care and support. WBNA has pointed out that if WBC goes ahead with these proposed cuts to Care and Support Services, it could be in breach of both the 2010 Equality Act and

the spirit of Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; the right to live independently and be included in the community.

Goodbye to Travel Tokens

One of the proposed cuts in transport services is the withdrawal of Travel Tokens. Several groups of people with physical and psychological problems benefit from Travel Tokens, especially those affected by neurological problems such as Multiple Sclerosis. Some people with physical problems rely on Travel Tokens for getting about. Tokens provide flexibility that alternatives (e.g. bus passes) cannot provide. Those unable to use buses, due to disability or to lack of nearby bus routes, will have to cover additional costs themselves or travel less. This is likely to result in their further social isolation and worsening of health and well-being status. Transport is just as important to people with neurological problems as the general population. Transport is essential for getting to medical appointments, making family visits and the ability to continue in work. We urge WBC to keep Travel Tokens available for qualifying individuals, wherever an assessment confirms tokens to be the most appropriate solution.

Audit of Neurological Services

The National Audit Office has released a report suggesting that the NHS faces a time bomb if it does not get to grips with neurological conditions (*NAO Report on Services for People with Neurological Conditions*, December 2011). This NAO study highlights delays in diagnosis, poor information, badly coordinated follow-up care and variation in access to services. It says the situation means too many patients end up in hospital as emergencies and this

results in them being seen by staff who are not specialists in neurological conditions.

There are currently more than 8 million people in the UK affected by a long-term, neurological condition (*NeuroNumbers*, Neurological Alliance, 2003). This figure is expected to rise because of the ageing population.

The Neurological Alliance in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee called for:

- A targeted and properly-resourced national outcomes strategy for neurological conditions
- A national clinical director for neurology
- Properly resourced, NHS-managed neurological networks
- Personalised care plans for all people with neurological conditions
- A commitment from the DoH and NHS to work with those with neurological conditions and the third sector in the new long-term conditions strategy
- A follow-up review by the NAO within three years

The Neurological Alliance has set up an online campaign 'A Better Deal for Neurology'. Please sign up at:

<http://www.neural.org.uk/campaigning/its-time-for-a-better-deal-for-neurology>.

Meeting with NHS South of England

In January WBNA joined a delegation from the South of England Neurological Alliances to meet the Chief Executive and other senior officers from NHS South of England. The group discussed neuro-prevalence, hospital bed occupancy rates, frequency of GP and similar consultations; all of which confirm that neurology is a major activity and cost burden, not normally given much priority. Discussions included: opportunities for more productive GP time, increasing consultant capacity through deployment of more nurse specialists, making various therapy services more

relevant to need. Numerous quality improvement and cost savings opportunities were identified. An action plan has been formulated with a view to follow up discussions between the relevant parties.

WBNA 2013 Conference

WBNA has hosted five very successful biennial conferences exploring the latest positive developments in neurology and neuro-rehabilitation. Each conference has brought together between 100 – 150 professionals, support workers, patients and carers and been accredited for Continuing Professional Development. The WBNA committee plans to host a sixth conference in the Spring of 2013 using the services of professional conference organisers, Mondale Events Ltd, to organise the event. However, we need someone to take the lead in planning the programme and co-ordinating the event. If you have planning and organisation skills to help us mount another successful conference please contact Fred Davison (Tel. 01635 202605 or email secretary@wbna.org.uk).

Dates for your diary

Our next open meeting will be on March 8th 2012. The speaker will be Dr Alex Anderson from Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group. He will talk about the plans for commissioning local patient services after the present PCT is abolished in 2013. Further dates for meetings are May 10th, July 12th, September 13th (AGM) and November 8th. All meetings, except for the AGM, are held at St Joseph's Church Hall, Newbury, 1.45 for 2.00 pm. Please come along and join us.

West Berkshire Neurological Alliance

2, Clayhill Crescent, Newbury,
Berkshire RG14 2NP

Tel: 01635 33582 Fax: 01635 569177

Email: secretary@wbna.org.uk

www.wbna.org.uk

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