

Community Care Services: Eligibility Criteria Consultation

Public Group Meeting 15th February 2007

Question/issue: 'Substantial' needs relate to the individual but family needs will also be taken into account –is that right?

Response: Yes, family members supporting service users are entitled to have an assessment in their own right.

Question/issue: Did all Councils start by providing services to all four categories of need?

Response: We don't think so but most did.

Question/issue: How would 'direct access' services work in the future compared to now?

Response: Instead of coming to us for an assessment a person would go directly to the service provider and providing they meet some simple criteria they would be provided with that service, for example, day care or stair rails.

Question/issue: Presumably, under any new arrangements, some people may lose their services! Who decides when a person doesn't need a service?

Response: A social worker or care manager decides on the basis of an assessment. This decision can be challenged by the service user-they have a right to complain. However, we do not want to take services away from people if they are useful to them. We want to protect existing users and our lawyers tell us we can use our discretion to do this if appropriate.

Question/issue: Are you working to become like other local authorities then, to reduce the levels of needs you will help?

Response: Our main purpose here is to target our resources on those that need them most.

Question/issue: In the longer term, the effects of only providing services to people with higher needs will have a big impact!

Response: Yes but we will develop a prevention strategy to minimise the impact on local people. Also, social workers tend to 'upgrade' people's needs to make sure they get a service so the impact may be less than we expect or plan for. We do expect to make savings in the longer term though.

Question/issue: When will you decide on your proposals?

Response: The consultation period ends on the 30th March now that it has been extended. We will produce a report for the 17th April Executive Committee meeting where a decision will be made.

Question/issue: Do you expect any changes to be implemented this year?

Response: Yes.

Question/issue: Where do you get your evidence that the changes you propose will work?

Response: Our experience tells us that the proposals, if agreed, are likely to work. Also, in other local authorities where only higher needs are responded, to their 3 star performance rating, as decided by the Government, has not been adversely affected. We will in any case be monitoring and evaluating any changes we make.

Question/issue: The Government is looking for evidence of what works yet, it seems to me, we don't really know what works!

Response: Possibly, but we know we need to target our resources. This targeting has not compromised high performing local authorities' star ratings. Our view is that if we do need to target our resources it is better to do it in a transparent and fair way.

Question/issue: So many deficits are caused by Primary Care Trust overspends spilling over into social care services nationally.

Response: Yes, there is a big national issue.

Question/issue: How much do you spend now on the different categories of need and how much will you save?

Response: We do not have any reliable information on this as up to now we responded to all needs so we cannot compare. We reckon though we will save £100, 000 per year on a budget of around £40 million which is about 40% of the Council's entire budget.

Question/issue: I understand you need to target resources and save money but this is about people and their lives!

Response: Yes, we are very aware of this.

Question/issue: Will any new criteria apply to all service user groups?

Response: Yes they will.

Question/issue: Will your changes affect disabled people's welfare benefits?

Response: These changes are about local authority services and not people's benefits.

Question/issue: If a person had 'Moderate' needs and wanted a Direct Payment instead of a service would they still have to pay your charges?

Response: We do charge for our services now and this would not change under any new criteria. We have no plans to change our charging policy at the moment. If someone is eligible for a service then they would have to pay for it, subject to certain safeguards, irrespective of how the service is delivered. Some voluntary organisations do not charge for their services so people could choose to use this option.

Question/issue: You should develop a prevention strategy first before you make any changes.

Response: We do provide some funding to some voluntary organisations now for preventative services but we do need to identify the gaps that need to be filled.

Question/issue: There's a lot of work to be done here in terms of capacity building. You still do not have a strategy in place!

Question/issue: Who do you fund now?

Response: We fund a range of local organisations, including Milaap, Age Concern, Kingston Advocacy Group, MENCAP and the Fircroft Trust. Our prevention strategy will help us focus on what we are trying to achieve in a strategic way rather than rely on historical patterns of funding.

Question/issue: I looked at the Age Concern website for help and was referred back to you – so much for direct access to services!

Response: Yes, this reflects how we have been working to date. We need to change our approach and way of working to make sure it is effective under any new arrangements.

Question/issue: Have you introduced any 'In Control' projects here in Kingston and what has been the impact?

Response: We are not one of the Government's national pilots but we do have five people with individualised budgets. It is early days here so we can't really say what the impact has been yet. However, in case you think otherwise, the 'In Control' projects are not about saving money as such but about giving service users and their families more say in their lives and the way their services work.

Question/issue: Do you welcome talking to voluntary organisations about the strategic future?

Response: Yes we do. We need to target our resources so we need to talk to our voluntary sector colleagues to make sure what we do is effective and economical.

Question/issue: Your proposals will create winners and losers with a lot more losers.

Response: We will need to invest in prevention services to minimise these risks and to avoid people coming to us in crisis. We need a good balance between the services we provide and those direct access services provided by the voluntary and independent sectors.

Question/issue: How desperate is the situation in the Council?

Response: We need to save around £20 million over the next four years. We have the highest Council Tax in London, which cannot be increased to make up any shortfall in funding because we would be capped by the Government, yet we spend less per head of population than London as a whole. Kingston residents have to pay a greater share for their services than London as a whole because we get less Government grant so the system is very unfair.

Question/issue: If the Council decides not to support people with 'Low' and 'Moderate' needs then does this mean that people with those needs will not be able to receive Direct payments?

Response: Yes, assessments will determine people's level of needs and if these are below the ones the Council decides to support then people will not be entitled to a service or its alternative, a Direct Payment.

Question/issue: I only became aware of this consultation by chance and I am in a 'hard to reach group' according to the Council's own Consultation Strategy! The Council's own Consultation Strategy states that special measures should be made to reach these groups. What special measures were made?

Response: We have done our best to get information out about our proposals and the public meetings. We have put information on our website, told local voluntary groups and asked them to send information on to people, put out press releases, sent out letters to parents and carers of disabled children and young people, and so on. We took the decision not to inform parents of disabled children under 10.

Question/issue: You should have informed parents and carers before this!

Response: We did do our best but we haven't got everything right, we agree.

Question/issue: Please hang on to the value of things in Kingston even at the expense of the cost!

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