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Dear Ms McMahon

Consultation on the Abolition of Charges for Social Care

Adam Coldwells, the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care has discussed this issue with me and asked me to respond directly to you. I write with regards your consultation on the bill to abolish charges for Social Care and thank you for the opportunity to put forward the views of Aberdeenshire Council and the emerging Health and Social Care Partnership.

After careful consideration of the bill to abolish charges for non-residential social care charges there remain some grave concerns around funding for this and how local authorities will deal with the loss of income this bill will result in. As you point out local authority budgets have been cut in recent years however the changing demographics of an ageing population exerts additional pressure as more people require a service.

Social care charges are financially assessed and only those with the ability to pay do so, some people pay nothing or a small contribution, nobody will ever pay more than the cost of providing the service. The process of local authorities carrying out a financial assessment can have benefits for the client as it can sometimes highlight when a person is not getting all the benefits they are entitled to. As a local authority we employ Welfare Right Officers who would assist clients with income maximisation as an anti-poverty measure. If no financial assessments were carried out there is concern that it could detrimentally effect some clients who would benefit from this service.



Clarity is required on whether the proposal is just for social care provided to people in their own home or would include activities such as social support, residential respite or day care which is not provided in a person's home.

In the bill there is discussion around the lessons learnt from Free Personal Care and the bill correctly assumes that there may be an increased take up of non-residential services if there is no financial charge to act as a disincentive. As a local authority we still offer packages of care to those with lesser care needs than substantial and critical, if raising eligibility criteria was used as a way of mitigating this it would have a detrimental effect on this group. It would mean that they would have no preventative care and there could be a risk of their health and care needs deteriorating.

We would anticipate that people would opt to stay at home instead of entering residential care for solely financial reasons, it would not be sustainable if this were to happen.

The bill mentions the rate in which charges have been increased however the cost of providing these services has also increased. National legislation on living wage will have a further impact on the cost of providing care and support services for local authorities.

This local authority does recognise that living as a disabled person can incur additional living expenses and our charging policy allows for any disability related expenditure to be given as an allowable expenditure in a financial assessment.

The bill calls for increased consistency among how local authorities charge for social care and our local authority has been involved in the Charging Working Group, led by COSLA. A standard financial assessment template has been introduced and while the bill states it only benchmarked the lowest figures for the treatment of each element many local authorities were actually more generous than the minimum, to adhere to a standard would actually penalise certain groups. This local authority is one which applies the more generous allowances for under 60s. However there remains a need for local authorities to set their own charges due to the differences in demographics, wealth and logistics there are legitimate reasons for the variation in charging.

Work has been ongoing with Scottish Government and COSLA to look at the buffer that has been applied to the personal allowance with the proposal to raise this from 16.5% to 25%. This would ensure that those who have the lowest income benefit while those who do have a high income and capital pay for their care. It would be a more realistic anti-poverty measure to introduce and ensure that local authorities can still deliver the same standard and level of care to vulnerable people most in need.



In this time of austerity Local Authorities are facing huge demands on their budget and at this time it is not realistic to consider abolishing social care charges. A far bigger issue needs to be raised on the future funding of social care given the rate at which demand is increasing.

Yours sincerely

Clare Thomas

Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership