



Learning Disability Coalition

LEARNING DISABILITY COALITION

Presentation to the Local Government Association Community Wellbeing Board, 3.9.07

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Today I am representing the Learning Disability Coalition – a group of 10 charities that have got together to campaign for the funding needed to improve chances and choices for people with learning disabilities.

It seems very timely to be talking with you about your priorities for next year, because there is a lot going on about the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families:

- a series of investigations and inquiries, such as the Cornwall abuse investigation and the Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry into the human rights of adults with learning disabilities
- a 'refresh' of the White Paper 'Valuing People', led by Ivan Lewis
- work by the LGA, ADASS and Care Services Improvement Partnership on expenditure on learning disability services

This is all against the backdrop of current policy on the evolving role of councils as leaders in 'place-shaping' and community wellbeing.

We want to make the case to you for the Community Wellbeing Board to choose people with learning disabilities as a priority for next year. Why should you do this? There are two main reasons:

First, this is a group of people who by and large still live impoverished, marginalised lives. You will have read about the three shocking murders of men with learning disabilities publicised in the press recently – murders preceded by long periods of hate crime targeted at very vulnerable individuals. These are the tip of the iceberg. More typical are the people I met last week – people who don't feel welcomed in their local community amenities, people who are afraid to go out in the evening, people whose support has been trimmed and trimmed until they are getting just the bare minimum that keeps them safe at home but does not promote their wellbeing. These are people who have generally not been well served by area based wellbeing and regeneration initiatives. Then there are the people with more severe disabilities – people who need a lot of support but who can still lead fulfilling lives and make a contribution if they get good support. Many families tell us that their sons and daughters are still very reliant on them for such support. The Government has recently announced a lot of

extra money for support to disabled children. But what happens when these children become adults. What sort of lives can they expect?

Second, your members are caught in a spiral of increasing expenditure on learning disability services – around 9% a year in real terms according to the ADSS report. I'm sure I don't need to rehearse in detail for you the causes of this – changing demography, changing expectations, and the trap of rising costs of more and more intensive services for fewer and fewer people. The consequence in many areas is a failure to invest in just those community services and amenities that could, with support from learning disability services, help to break out of this spiral. In 2005/06 councils in England spent £3.3 billion on services for adults with learning disabilities (social services and Supporting People) – around half this total was spent on care in registered homes, but the proportion spent on this by different councils ranged from 9% to 79%. Many councils are responding to financial pressures by reviewing their eligibility criteria for social care. We understand the London Borough of Harrow has just pulled back, in response to a legal challenge, from becoming the fourth council to restrict eligibility to people whose risk is assessed as 'critical' under Fair Access to Care. No doubt this will happen in other councils around the country. We are very concerned about the implications for people's lives.

So we think there is a really important piece of work to do and we would like to collaborate with you on it. This is to examine in greater detail:

- the causes of rising expenditure
- the range of possibilities for making best use of existing resources
- and the case for increased funding.

To conclude:

- many people with learning disabilities – and their families by association – remain socially excluded, segregated and at risk
- many councils are facing very significant budget pressures attributable to spending on learning disability services
- this is a really good time to tackle these issues and draw attention to the disparity between Government policy and the reality of what life is like for people.