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Dr Richard Harling  
Director of Adult Services & Health  
Worcestershire County Council  
County Hall  
Spetchley Road  
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27 January 2014

Dear Richard

### **Ref: 'Future Lives' Programme**

The statutory functions of local Healthwatch include the responsibility to promote and support the involvement of local people in the commissioning of local care services, and obtaining the views of local people regarding their needs for local services and making them known. Therefore, as the Chair of Healthwatch Worcestershire I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Future Lives programme to date. Healthwatch Worcestershire has signposted consumers to and encouraged them to participate in the engagement and consultation events that your Directorate has organised, as well as ensuring it has been represented at a number of them.

The key messages set out below reflect the views, observations and concerns of consumers of social care in Worcestershire and the organisations that represent them. Those views have been made known to Healthwatch Worcestershire during the period in which the 'engagement' events and subsequent consultation have taken place. I anticipate that Worcestershire County Council will already be aware of them. However, given Healthwatch Worcestershire's statutory responsibilities to make the views of local people or consumers known to commissioners the purpose of this response is to ensure that the County Council's decision makers in the 'Future Lives' programme and those that advise them are aware of the views, observations and concerns of the consumers of social care services.

## **1. Key Messages:**

### **1.1 Local Government Financial Settlement**

- Consumers acknowledge the financial situation that central government, and in particular the approach of the Department for Communities and Local Government has placed upon local government nationally, which will adversely impact on the delivery of social care services to consumers.

- The County Council will wish to be aware that Healthwatch Worcestershire is, with other Local Healthwatch organisations, exploring the opportunity of escalating this issue to Healthwatch England.

### **1.2 Participation in the engagement/consultation process**

- Healthwatch Worcestershire has promoted and supported local people in engaging in the Future Lives engagement and consultation process. In doing so Healthwatch Worcestershire representatives have attended a significant number of both the engagement and consultation events.

### **1.3 The County Council's Budget Allocation for adult social care services**

- Consumers have noted the County Council key message that it currently allocates 42% of its annual revenue budget to funding adult social care and, looking forward, in 2016 despite the financial pressures it faces will continue to allocate 42% of that budget to funding those services whilst at the same time acknowledging the demographic and inflationary pressures that will bear down on adult social care services. Consumers are concerned as to how realistic this approach is given those pressures.

### **1.4 Future Lives Programme**

- Consumers understand that in determining which services will be cut to reduce costs within Adult Services and Health the Council has applied 2 tests; is it a statutory responsibility of the Council to provide a service and is there a proven evidence that investment in a service reduces the numbers of service users developing substantial and/or critical needs.
- Consumers are concerned that these tests i.e. to only fund a statutory responsibility or to fund a service where it is evidenced that there is a return on investment do not appear to have been applied consistently by the Council, particularly in the strategic allocation of its budget across service areas.
- Consumers are also concerned that the focus of the Future Lives Programme on reducing investment in preventative service areas appears to fly in the face of current thinking on tackling health and well-being.

## **2 Within the Future Lives programme the following matters have received specific comments:**

### **2.1 The consultation process:**

- Consumers are concerned that the consultation period took place over the Christmas and New Year holiday which limited the time that consumers had to consider and respond to the consultation. In particular the delay in making available the accessible version of the consultation document is considered to have disadvantaged consumers with learning disabilities.
- Consumers have expressed difficulty in responding to the 'multiple choice' questions in the consultation document which require respondents to choose between levels of spend on a service because of the absence of data on which to make an informed choice.
- Further, it appears to consumers that the Council does not have an evidence base to support the choices proposed within the questions in the consultation

document, and there is concern that this approach contradicts the approach to selecting those areas for proposed reductions in spend.

## **2.2 Digital enablement:**

- The proposal to shift access to services to the internet has been one of the more controversial proposals of the Future Lives Programme for consumers, not least because of the wealth of evidence published in research reports nationally and locally identifying the risk of digital discrimination that such practice places upon the older and more vulnerable members of society, the very client group who will be effected by the Council's proposal.  
In particular, consumers are concerned about mental and physical capacity to use the internet, access to the internet and cost. During the presentations consumers are generally of the view that they have not heard a credible response from the Council to these very practical issues that have been raised in relation to this proposal.

## **2.3 Use of volunteers:**

- Consumers are concerned about the viability of the proposal to rely on volunteers to provide services that are currently provided by the Council in the absence of any plan to support the proposal with investment. There is also concern that the roles that the Council envisages volunteers undertaking in the future involve the delivery of complex services such as personal care to clients with complex conditions, and acute concern as to how the Council will discharge its responsibility for safeguarding in such circumstances.

## **2.4 Supporting People Budget:**

- Consumers look for reassurance that reducing the spend in areas currently supported by the spend identified by the Council as the 'Supporting People' budget will not lead to consumers deteriorating to a substantial or critical level of need once 'Supporting People' services are withdrawn.

## **2.5 Impact on the Council's Public Sector Equality duty**

- Consumers have questioned the implications of the proposed reductions in services for the Council's general equality duty, particularly as, by their very nature, the brunt of the proposed service reductions is likely to fall on those with the protected characteristics of age and disability.
- It is understood that the Council will only complete its Equality Impact Assessment on the Future Lives Programme when it has the results of the consultation. Consumers have expressed a wish to see that Equality Impact Assessment, and any assessment that was made in relation to the Cabinet's strategic decision in its allocation of budget to the Directorate of Adult Services and Health for the period April 2014 and beyond.

## **2.6 Bus Subsidies**

- As a related issue, consumers are concerned that the proposal to withdraw bus subsidies may impact on their ability to access health and care services.

## **2.7 Peer Challenge**

- Consumers who were party to the recent Peer Review are aware of the conclusions which identify the need to fully scope and resource this change

programme, and the need to join up Future Lives with the Well Connected programme. In particular, on this latter point there is concern that a shift to withdraw services that may prevent service users meeting FAC criteria will compromise the success of the Well Connected Programme.

### **3 Summary:**

- In summary the proposals have generated significant concern amongst existing users as I appreciate you are aware. It is anticipated that the publication of the Equality Impact Assessment may reassure those with protected characteristics that their representations have been taken into account.

I trust this summary will aid you in your decision making and if you require any further information please contact me. For your information this letter will be published on Healthwatch Worcestershire's website on Friday 31 January 2014.

Yours sincerely

Peter Pinfield  
Chairman Healthwatch Worcestershire