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Mr Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
Worcestershire County Council

By Email

18th December 2018

Dear Mr Robinson,

RE: Proposed cuts to Learning Disability Partnership Board and involvement of people with a learning disability and their carers

We are writing to you regarding concerns that have been raised with Healthwatch Worcestershire about proposed cuts to the Learning Disability Partnership Board and funding that enables people with a learning disability to be involved in gathering and providing feedback about local services.

We feel that these decisions are not in line with the commitment to Co-production made by Worcestershire County Council at the Health and Wellbeing Board and within the Worcestershire Learning Disability Strategy or the statutory requirements set out in the Care Act. We feel the speed at which these proposed changes will be implemented will be detrimental to the involvement of people with learning disabilities and their carers in Worcestershire.

Reduction of the Learning Disability Partnership Board

We understand that the meetings of the Learning Disability Partnership Board will be reduced from six to three. This would mean reduced opportunity to involve people with a learning disability and carers in key decisions, reduce their opportunity to provide feedback and raise concerns and reduce their opportunity to monitor effectiveness and delivery of services.



Directors: Peter Pinfield, Jane Stanley, John Taylor, Jo Ringshall and Martin Gallagher
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Cuts to Sub Groups on key priorities

We also understand that unless taken on by other partners four of the sub groups will not be continuing: Living Well, Preparing for Adulthood, Staying Safe and Having a Job, and a further sub group Having a Place to Live will only continue for a limited time.

We are not clear how the Council will ensure there is involvement from people with a learning disability and carers on these issues. These are key areas and are priorities within the current Worcestershire Learning Disability Strategy, both in terms of improving the lives of people with a learning disability and carers in Worcestershire, but also in terms of the prevention agenda and the knock-on impact of these issues for demand on wider services and resources.

Impact on the SEND Improvement Plan

The recent joint inspection by CQC and Ofsted of provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities identified a need to improve involvement and co-production. It also highlighted the need to improve provision for young people as they move into adulthood and the disproportionate number of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities who are not in education, employment or training. The Preparation for Adulthood sub group enables partners including both Children's and Adult services to engage with young people and carers. It is therefore important to ensure the work and involvement of this group continues.

Cuts to learning disability self-advocacy

We have concerns about the impact of the reduction in the funding given to SpeakEasy N.O.W. and their reduced ability to ensure that people with a learning disability from across Worcestershire have a voice.

Impact on individuals with a learning disability

We are also concerned about the impact for individuals with a learning disability, who will potentially no longer have a role as an Expert Member for the Learning Disability Partnership Board or as a Quality Checker for the Worcestershire County Council team. Not only does this mean they are no longer able to contribute their own views and experiences and those of others, but it takes away from them a meaningful paid role.

Impact on the future of the Learning Disability Strategy

Worcestershire's Adult Learning Disability Strategy 2015 - 2018 makes a commitment to the principles of co-production: 'This means people with learning disabilities and their carers working as equal partners with us'. It also sets out the importance of the areas of work carried out by the sub groups of the Partnership Board, the value of the involvement of Expert Members and carers and the importance of the Board and the sub groups in making sure that the Strategy is implemented.

We are unclear how the aims and priorities within the strategy will be taken forward, without the current structure of the Partnership Board and as we have now reached the end of the intended time frame for the strategy.

Speed and implementation of changes

We are concerned that the timescales for the proposed changes do not allow for alternative arrangements for involvement to be put in place or for others to take on the running of the sub groups. It also provides very little time for organisations and people with a learning disability directly affected to understand and adjust to the changes.

We therefore request further information and your response regarding -

- If any assessment has been carried out about the impact of these changes, in particular for the Expert Members and Quality Checkers involved.
- How you will ensure continuation of the workstreams within Worcestershire's Learning Disability Strategy and the intentions regarding the updating of the strategy.
- How you will ensure that people with a learning disability and carers are involved in the design, implementation, monitoring of services and the Worcestershire Learning Disability Strategy.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Pinfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping tail.

Peter Pinfield
Chair - Healthwatch Worcestershire