

Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service

Report by Advocacy Manager

Subject: Review of learning disability service charges in West Dunbartonshire.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the review of learning disability charges agreed by West Dunbartonshire Council.

Background: In August 2008 West Dunbartonshire Council introduced charges for some learning disability services.

Following the introduction of such charges Council approved a motion instructing the Chief Executive to instigate a review of charges for learning disability services. Council agreed:

"The review will consider the following:

1. *Do service users "have sufficient means to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life"?*
2. *What is the Council's definition of "sufficient means to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life"?*
3. *How can the above be assessed?*
4. *The impact the charging policy has had on the service, including take-up.*
5. *Whether constituent are now using other services as stated in the option appraisal*
6. *The views of service users and carers.*

The review should include service users, carers and interest groups and report to the Council in three months time."

Independent Consultation: West Dunbartonshire Learning Disability Services recognise that the process of consulting with service users and carers may be strengthened if it is facilitated by an agency which is independent of the local authority, thus minimising the possibility of any real or perceived conflicts of interest, which may, or may be seen to, influence the views of service users and carers.

Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service: Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service is an independent advocacy provider working across West Dunbartonshire and has well-established links with people with learning disabilities. The service provided independent advocacy services to 27% of people with learning disabilities in receipt of council services last year. This represents the second highest uptake of independent advocacy in Scotland. The Service is a not-for-

profit company and a recognised charity and is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. Whilst agreeing its strategic objectives with commissioners, the service maintains its independence in all the work it undertakes.

Consultation Process:

1. Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will gather comment and up to date statistical information from West Dunbartonshire Learning Disability Service relevant to the review ordered by the Council.
2. In seeking the views of service users on the issue of charges and their impact Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will draw on some of established forums involving people with learning disabilities in West Dunbartonshire.
3. Elected "Client Councils", independently facilitated by The Changed Days Advocacy Project, have been established in both Dumbarton Centre and Auchentoshan Centre. Each forum consists of eight representatives elected by service users. It is proposed that each forum should convene a "focus group" involving the eight elected representatives in addition to a similar number of service users who are not elected members of the forum. These "focus groups" will meet in both Dumbarton and Clydebank and involve a total of around thirty two service users. The focus groups will be independently facilitated by advocacy service staff and will seek to elicit the views of service users on charges for learning disability services and their impact on the individuals affected. Participants will be assured that and views they express not be attributed to any individual in the final report. Focus groups are scheduled to meet on the 17th and 18th of November 2008.
4. The Good Life—Positive Attitudes Group is a collective advocacy forum for people with learning disabilities in West Dunbartonshire. The Group recently researched, produced and published *"Listening to the Voice of Experience: A Shadow Partnership in Practice (PiP) Agreement for West Dunbartonshire"*. This document represents the first PiP, or plan for the development of learning disability services, written by people with learning disabilities themselves and has attracted a great deal of attention and much praise. The Good Life Positive Attitudes Group seeks to provide a collective voice for people with learning disabilities in West Dunbartonshire and views from the group will be sought as part of the proposed consultation project.
5. Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will also promote the review being undertaken a welcome comments from individual service users.
6. Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will also seek the views of carers of people with learning disabilities on the charging policy and its

implications. It is proposed that this will be done by way of a written questionnaire, inviting comments from a random sample of carers.

7. Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will again promote the review being undertaken a welcome comments from carers.
8. Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service will produce a written report on the outcome of the above process for consideration by West Dunbartonshire Council. It is anticipated that the process will be concluded and a report available by the end of November 2008.
9. West Dunbartonshire Learning Disability Services undertake an annual consultation even involving people with learning disabilities and their carers. These events are organised in partnership with Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service and The Good Life – Positive Attitudes Group. The next event will be held in Dumbarton on the 4th of December 2008 and will provide an opportunity for ongoing consultation with service users and carers.

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Advocacy Manager.

