

Engagement, Participation and Involvement Team
Northamptonshire County Council.
Room 129, County Hall,
PO Box 177,
Northampton,
NN1 1AY.

14 February 2017

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Consultation on New Delivery Vehicle for Services to Vulnerable and Eligible Adults and their Carers

Following a special meeting of the Healthwatch Northamptonshire Adult Services Planning Group, which Carolyn Kus attended, we are pleased to submit the following response to the above mentioned consultation.

We acknowledge the difficult and challenging situation facing NCC, which includes:

- an increasing number of older people, who have a range of support needs
- an increasing number of people with disabilities and long term conditions
- a general increase in the overall population as a result of the significant current and projected housing development plans
- a challenging financial situation

You will agree, of course, that the foregoing does not preclude meaningful engagement and consultation - in fact it makes it ever more important.

In addition to the current consultation process on the proposed formal structural change, Healthwatch Northamptonshire urges the implementation of wider ongoing engagement and involvement of key stakeholders.

However, unfortunately we are aware a number of people, including carers and users of Olympus Care Day Services, have been concerned and upset at apparently not receiving any direct information about the proposed changes. This issue was raised at the consultation meeting held at the Gladstone Road Services Centre, where people reported this had led to real worries about the future of these services. We feel that:

- (a) it would be helpful to have a close look at this situation and see what steps you could take for it to be corrected or improved, and
- (b) it is imperative there is a commitment to a more inclusive approach to consultation processes, so that users, carers and other key stakeholders, feel both informed and empowered by having opportunities to make their views heard and influence decision makers



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By way of comparison, you have a good and specific example of this approach in action, which has been in the area of Learning Disability, where there has been meaningful involvement through partnership boards, which has led to the identification of what has and hasn't worked well, the development of new pathways, structures and ways of supporting and enabling people with learning disabilities to maximise their quality of life.

The "Consultation on New Delivery Vehicle for Services to Vulnerable and Eligible Adults and their Carers" does not stand up well in comparison with the work on Learning Disability, and we therefore ask that you seek to take steps to bring the standard of engagement and consultation up to that of the work on Learning Disability.

Turning to current providers, we know that you agree - and see much opportunity in the future - for working in new and innovative ways with an increasingly diverse range of service providers. It is therefore vitally important there is the widest possible dialogue with current and potentially future providers of services, including the local voluntary and community sector organisations. These providers have a considerable level of expertise, and currently provide a considerable level of support at all levels, but particularly for those with lower level needs, including many people who have little or no immediate family support. As a result, they have excellent local connection and expertise which could be of real value to the authority.

We would therefore like to receive your assurance there will be a level playing field, with the opportunity for VCS providers to understand new priorities and develop appropriate changes to their services in line with the new agenda. In the past we have highlighted the sector's value to communities. Many have excellent knowledge, links and confidence within their communities, and are able to attract additional resources to the county, which statutory bodies cannot access.

We warmly welcome the commitment made by Carolyn Kus, at a recent Healthwatch Northamptonshire Adult Services Group meeting, to work with the sector to look at the potential areas, including more complex situations, in which the VCS could work. We further understand there will be a dedicated workshop organised for this purpose, which approach we support and we look forward to that workshop being arranged in the near future.

However, Healthwatch Northamptonshire would like to express its concerns about the cost of implementation of the re-organisation, at a time when demand is high and budgets are challenged. We ask that these costs be reviewed and mitigated through appropriate actions.

Healthwatch Northamptonshire Volunteers also asked for reassurances that the restructure itself would not impact on areas such as:

- employment of appropriately qualified and experienced staff carrying out assessments of need - at the right level of pay, the concern here being that an alternative structure based on lower pay and lack of relevant qualifications could result in the loss of high quality and committed staff and therefore compromise the quality of the service; it is understood that as the new structure is still technically part of the local authority such situations will not occur - but we seek your assurance on this matter.

- Restricting levels of support to individuals, without sufficient consideration of both need and safety.

Healthwatch Northamptonshire Board Members and Volunteers were pleased to learn that the highly publicised “intention” to charge those people with incomes above £23,250 an administration fee for assessments, has been clarified. We understand this administration charge is in fact not intended as a general charge for all assessments, which the wording in the consultation document was seen to have implied and which the Care Act 2014 does not permit, but rather that it is intended that it is proposed to be applied to cover the administration costs in arranging for the care needs of those who have savings over the capital limit and who will, therefore, be funding their own care in any case.

We therefore, urge the authority to ensure there is an effective and pro-active publicity campaign to ensure people across the county are completely clear there are no proposals to make a general charge for adult social care assessments.

We ask that in so doing you also make it clear that even those who self-fund should be aware they have an entitlement to an assessment if they appear to have needs, or at the very least a discussion with someone about the choices they have, and be signposted to reliable provider organisation(s) who can provide appropriate support services.

Similarly, those elderly people who live alone and have no family contact or networks are particularly vulnerable, so it is important they have ready access to reliable information about rights and entitlements, and who provides what, in order to prevent them falling victim to unscrupulous individuals and organisations.

Finally, we reiterate our call for wider engagement and involvement of individuals and different communities in the development of the new organisation and its role.

Yours faithfully,

William Pope
Chair