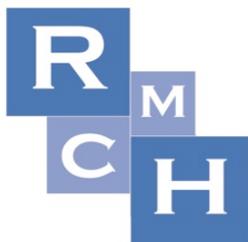

Redbridge Disability Consortium

Response to London Borough of
Redbridge Budget Consultation 2016

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Introduction

Redbridge Disability Consortium welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Budget Consultation. We recognise the budget constraints on the local authority and the fact that national not local government has control over the level of many funding streams and the welfare system. We also appreciate that Redbridge Council will have to make difficult judgements over the coming years in light of the further savings of that will have to be made over the next few years.

Redbridge Disability Consortium is committed to working in partnership with Redbridge Council to ensure that we minimise the pain that will inevitably be caused and to ensure that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community are not unfairly impacted by any reductions and cuts in services.

In the current economic climate, as public services are cut – we strongly believe - that fairness matters more than ever. It is incumbent on Redbridge, Council to ensure that we improve the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in Redbridge, making it a fairer place. The fact is, however, many disabled people in Redbridge believe that life is unfair¹.

Indeed, disabled people, the Deaf Community and people with mental health problems and a learning disability are facing a range of interrelated hardships and challenges including: welfare cuts, inaccessible transport, lack of affordable and accessible housing, declining levels of social care and limited labour market opportunities. It is why we have repeatedly called on Redbridge Council to carry out and produce a cumulative impact assessment so we have a clear and true picture of the impact of the changes and cuts on disabled people.

It is disappointing; especially in light of the Fairness Commission that there are proposals to cut social care packages, the Redbridge Mobility Scheme as well as a range of other proposals to increase charges and reduce services. We oppose the closure of the Redbridge Mobility Scheme, and fear it will severely restrict the lives of many disabled people in the borough. Moreover, we dispute that Dial A Ride and Taxicard are adequate to fill the gap if the scheme is ended.

The proposal to end the Redbridge Mobility Scheme, however, is more profound than merely the merits of the taxi card alternative or not. It is about whether affordable and accessible transport in general exists in the borough and whether the removal of the scheme re-imposes barriers that the scheme

¹ Redbridge Voices, The views of Deaf, vision impaired, hard of hearing and disabled people (2015), http://www.rcmh.org.uk/documents/reports/Redbridge%20Voices_Final_april15_emailversion.pdf

was originally designed to remove in the first place. In other words, not only is it imposing an additional tax on certain disabled people, it also means that many disabled people may have to pay more for a substandard transport service, if they can access it at all. (Mobility scooters are unable to access to Taxicard scheme)

We are also concerned about the proposal to review the assessment of need for care packages and the stated objective of reducing 'care packages and in some cases the removal of packages altogether.' It is imperative that Redbridge Council continues to support people to do day-to-day things such as getting out of bed, cooking a meal, shopping, caring for families, having a shower and getting around. It is also of fundamental importance to continue to develop and promote services that meet people's needs and enhance their dignity and promote independent living and encourage flourishing lives.

Finally, we would like to remind Redbridge Council about the importance of co-production and meaningful engagement with disabled people and groups. It is important that disabled people are given the opportunity and the support to participate at all stages in planning and decision-making. These approaches can also help Redbridge public sector bodies meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We are disappointed therefore that more hasn't been done to consult with disabled people prior to making public the Council's proposal to cut the Redbridge Mobility Scheme.

Summary of Recommendations

- ✓ Redbridge Council to produce a **Cumulative Impact Assessment** to determine impact of cuts - on disabled residents in Redbridge - including (but not limited to): welfare benefit changes, charges, cessation of services, transport changes, housing reforms and welfare reforms
- ✓ Meaningful participation – **nothing about us without us** - disabled people participating at all stages in planning and decision-making. These approaches can also help Redbridge public sector bodies meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- ✓ We are **opposed to reducing or ceasing care packages** – especially in light of the lack of detail in the proposals about community alternatives.
- ✓ We are opposed to the proposal to cut the **Redbridge Mobility Scheme** and fear it will severely restrict the lives of many disabled people in the borough. Moreover, we dispute that Dial A Ride and Taxicard are adequate to fill the gap if the scheme is ended. Redbridge Residents are telling us that Taxicard and Dial-A-Ride differ

from the Mobility Scheme in that they are less reliable; less available and travel less far.

- ✓ As more and more forms, benefits, information and advice go on line and public services become 'digital by default' it is becoming harder and harder for many disabled people to **access information and expert advice and support**. The fact is those who need access to services most, are the least likely to take up these on-line services even when access is available.

Meaningful Participation - Nothing About us Without Us

Participation by disabled people in development and decision-making is vital – from seeking feedback through to full decision-making and leadership by disabled people. To achieve fully inclusive outcomes i.e. disabled people taking part in society requires fully inclusive processes. In other words, disabled people participating at all stages in planning and decision-making. These approaches can also help Redbridge public sector bodies meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This means that any decision by a public body which will or may result in a reduction in services to one or more disabled person must involve the person or people in this decision and pay proper regard to their views.

Cumulative Disability Impact Assessment

We strongly recommend that Redbridge Council produce a **Cumulative Impact Assessment** to determine the impact of cuts, welfare benefit changes, charges, cessation of services, housing reforms and welfare reforms on disabled residents. This is particularly important especially in light of the increasing complexity of the budget consultation documents which cut across housing, transport, welfare, business, social care and the environment.

We do know the following:

Disabled people have been disproportionately hit by the government's austerity measures: the cumulative impact of the welfare benefit cuts and cuts to care and support have hit disabled people 9 times more than most other citizens².

- Disabled people, (8% of the population) bear 29% of all cuts³.
- Disabled people with high support needs will lose on average 19 times more than most other citizens⁴

² <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/a-fair-society1.html>

³ <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/a-fair-society1.html>

- Best estimates suggest that in London in 2007/08 the poorest 10% of individuals who experience a limiting-longstanding illness or disability had a weekly after housing costs income of less than £141. By 2012/13, best estimates suggest that this figure had fallen to £100. This is an apparent fall of around 29% (£41 a week) – double the equivalent figure for Londoners without disabilities and more pronounced than elsewhere in the UK⁵
- Children in families with a disabled person are almost twice as likely to live in poverty⁶
- Disabled people pay on average £550 per month on extra cost related to their disability⁷

Redbridge Mobility Scheme

Inaccessible transport, the cost of transport or the lack of availability of transport often means that people cannot access education, employment services or the community. Accessible and flexible transport is a pivotal support service which if not available can exclude many disabled people from many or all aspects of their community.

We are strongly opposed, therefore, to the proposal to cut the Redbridge Mobility Scheme and fear it will severely restrict the lives of many disabled people in the borough. Moreover, we dispute that Dial A Ride and Taxicard are adequate to fill the gap if the scheme is ended. (See below).

Disabled people are telling us that they value the Mobility Scheme because availability is good and because there is the flexibility to use the service for longer journeys. The Mobility Scheme enables disabled people to participate in public life. Without it, people will be forced to use their limited transport choices for priorities such as healthcare appointments, often leaving no options for social or leisure trips.

The proposal to end the Redbridge Mobility Scheme, however, is more profound than merely the merits of the taxi card alternative or not. It is about whether affordable transport and accessible in general exists in the borough and whether the removal of the scheme re-imposes barriers that the scheme was originally designed to remove in the first place. In other words, not only is it imposing an additional tax on certain disabled people, it also means that they will also have to pay more for a substandard transport service, if they can access it at all.

⁴ <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/a-fair-society1.html>

⁵ London School of Economics, March 2015

⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, 2014 Households Below Average Income

⁷ Scope, 2014 Priced Out: end the financial penalty of disability by 2020

Transport for All, who through the Redbridge Transport Action Group have strong links to Redbridge point out:

“Taxicard is unreliable: members say that sometimes 5 minutes before, they get a phone call saying that ComCab is still looking for a cab; and we’ve taken complaints from people who have had to wait more than an hour to be picked up, late at night, with Taxicard. That’s not acceptable when you need transport for an appointment.”

People are also telling us that the Taxicard system can be very expensive. It’s £2.50 for one ‘swipe’, which gets you around £10 of distance on the meter. Especially when there is traffic, this effectively limits disabled people to living life within a 3 or 4-mile boundary.

People have told us of instances of being stuck in traffic on Ilford Lane and Gants Hill roundabout. The metre keeps ticking and a short journey in traffic can cost £20 or so. And when transport goes wrong it’s often not possible for a disabled person to simply just jump out of a taxi or switch routes.

Furthermore, it’s worth remembering that travel is free for older and disabled people who are able to use buses and trains, with a Freedom Pass. Why should people who experience more severe barriers to public transport have to pay more?

“This will be a disaster. My daughter has a profound learning disability. She would no longer be able to go to SEN College in Tower Hamlets twice a week. I would not be able to afford a Taxicard. And how would the driver manage the behavioural issues? If it goes ahead it will cause a big big problem for both of us

“I’m 84 years old and I have lived in my current house for 50 years. My wife has Alzheimer’s. The Redbridge Mobility Scheme is one of the reasons we are not housebound”.

A day out for all of us together on the bus (Redbridge Mobility Scheme). We can’t do that with a taxi card. Taxi cards don’t allow mobility scooters.

Without the Mobility Scheme my mum who has dementia would be housebound. It would take away her independence. It is also a godsend for me as it gives me time to do my own things

It goes without saying that for many disabled and older people in the borough, public transport is not a realistic option. There are no step-free stations in the south of the borough; and only four in the borough as a whole (Roding Valley, Epping; Woodford; Chadwell Heath).

Taxicard and Dial-A-Ride – not adequate substitutes⁸

Taxicard and Dial-A-Ride differ from the Mobility Scheme in that they are less reliable; less available and travel less far.

Dial-A-Ride is a lifeline for many thousands of disabled and older Londoners, but is stretched and often there are issues of members not being able to get through to the call centre to make bookings and/or not getting trips at the desired times. Dial A Ride requests are frequently turned down – many disabled members just stop trying after a while. Taxicard only allows one return journey a week. For those of us with no other options, that might mean being housebound the rest of the week.

Furthermore, availability can also be a problem, with one in twenty Taxicard passengers waiting for more than 15minutes for a cab. Taxicard is operated by ComCab, and there are fewer ComCab drivers than there were five years ago.

Taxicard might take a disabled person to church and back on Sunday; for the rest of the week, unless one can afford a minicab (although as only 5% of the minicab fleet is wheelchair accessible this is not an option for many); it will be a week of staying indoors. This increases social isolation.

Also, despite being subsidised, Taxicard is not affordable for many people; as the cost to users has gone up and the distance one can travel with one swipe has gone down. It now costs much more to travel a shorter distance than in 2010, and many are finding that for some journeys it is cheaper to book a minicab.

Social Care and Support packages

We are **opposed to reducing or ceasing care packages** – especially in light of the lack of detail in the proposals about community alternatives. Disabled people have been hit hard by the cuts in care and support funding made by Local Authorities. In many areas the funding for support packages is being cut in real terms, so disabled people are either having to fill the funding gap to maintain the same level of care, at the same time as the costs of care are rising, or face a cut in support.

⁸ Transport for All, Consultation Response, London Borough of Redbridge (January 2016)

It is imperative that Redbridge Council continues to support people to do day-to-day things such as getting out of bed, cooking a meal, shopping, caring for families, having a shower and getting around. It is also of fundamental importance to continue to develop and promote services that meet people's needs and enhance their dignity and promote independent living and encourage flourishing lives.

Digitilisation - Access to Information

As more and more forms, benefits, information and advice go on line and public services become 'digital by default' it is becoming harder and harder for many disabled people to **access information and expert advice and support**. The fact is those who need access to services most, and support for filling in welfare benefit forms and so on are the least likely to take up these on-line services even when access is available. This is compounded by the fact that there has been a reduction in expert advice across Redbridge for disabled people and resources have not kept pace with increasing demand.⁹

“How else would you find out if you want to find out a about benefits what is available? What you are getting? Are you making sure your state pension is right? All these new rules....Those internet aware people have an advantage because the Government thinks everyone is on the internet but what about if you are not on the internet?”

⁹ Redbridge Voices, The views of Deaf, vision impaired, hard of hearing and disabled people (2015), http://www.rcmh.org.uk/documents/reports/Redbridge%20Voices_Final_april15_emailversion.pdf

About Us

Redbridge Disability Consortium

www.redbridgedisabilityconsortium.org

Our work is driven by the goal of a society in which disabled people are treated with dignity, fairness, respect and understanding. We are passionate about developing high quality, accessible services for disabled groups, working in partnership to influence policy and outcomes affecting disabled groups; and challenging the stigma and discrimination that disabled people encounter in their day-to-day lives

Redbridge Concern for Mental Health

www.rcmh.org.uk

Redbridge Concern for Mental Health - established over 15 years ago – is a service user led organisation based in the London Borough of Redbridge dedicated to promoting, improving and protecting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the wider community.

We offer high quality services to local residents seeking mental health support. We also provide information and signposting as well as challenging the stigma and discrimination that people experience in their everyday lives.

Redbridge Forum

www.redbridgeforum.co.uk

Our aim is to help improve the quality of life for people with a learning disability and their carers, including those on the autistic spectrum. A lot of our work at present is based around children's services and we run 4 projects Fun 4 All, Bright Ideas, TrueColours and Childrens Advocacy. We also support people with a learning disability to speak up for themselves and we also engage with local carers to find out what they think about services in Redbridge