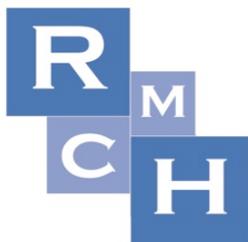

Redbridge Disability Consortium

Redbridge Conversation
London Borough of Redbridge
Budget Consultation, 2015

Jon Abrams
jon@redbridgeconcern.org
www.rcmh.org.uk
020 8925 2435

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Introduction

Redbridge Disability Consortium welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Redbridge 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 cuts that will have to be made over the next few years.

Redbridge Disability 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, increase in charges 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. We therefore fully support Redbridge Council's decision to set up a **Fairness Commission** to help tackle poverty and inequality and make Redbridge a fairer place for everyone.

There are certain groups in Redbridge that are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged including those who are very young, very old or disabled or have complex mental health conditions and their interests need to be protected in a time of smaller budgets.

In light of rising demand and reduced money we are concerned about Redbridge's ability to fund social care in a way that results in high quality services, in places that people need them, at the heart of the community enabling people to live with dignity and pursue independent and flourishing lives.

Certainly local deaf, hard of hearing, vision impaired and disabled people felt they were bearing the brunt of the cuts. This has been made harder by worsening negative attitudes towards them particularly in the media. For instance, the narrative around "the deserving and undeserving poor". All in all this, has created an environment where most people felt that progress on equality is going backwards.

Redbridge Voices, The views of deaf, vision impaired, hard of hearing and disabled people, February 2015¹

¹ Redbridge Voices, Draft v1.2 due for publication February 2015

Summary of Recommendations

- ✓ Redbridge Council must remain committed to supporting and empowering the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in Redbridge.
- ✓ Increase Redbridge Voluntary Sector investment and funding in real terms
- ✓ London Borough of Redbridge to carry out a Cumulative Impact Assessment to gauge impact of cuts, welfare reforms and changes to services on local disabled people
- ✓ To quantify impact of proposed charges on disabled people and families as part of cumulative impact assessment
- ✓ Accessible information

The link between disability, poor mental health and poverty is well established.

Evidence and research clearly demonstrates that insufficient income is associated with worse outcomes across virtually all domains of health, including long-term health and life expectancy. Disabled people are, for example, twice as likely to live in poverty as everyone else; and are more likely to be working in low-paid jobs (when working at all). Increases in financial support are crucial for many disabled people in to enable them to do day-to-day things such as: getting out bed; cooking a meal; shopping; having a shower and getting around

- Mental illness is consistently associated with deprivation, low income, unemployment, poor education, poorer physical health and increased health-risk behaviour
- High levels of unemployment among the disabled population means disabled people have lower incomes than average and are disproportionately likely to live below the poverty threshold and be dependent on benefits for a large proportion of their income.
- According to the DWP in 2008, over half of disabled people incurred extra expenses as a result of their impairment (DWP July 2008, 145)
- According to a Demos 2010 report, the proportion of households with a disabled person who are below the poverty line is more than doubled to 47% when the extra costs of living with a disability are included (Demos, October 2010, 20). Apprentice

- Disabled people face higher costs of living for instance you may need to pay for a taxi more frequently than non disabled people, or pay for people to support you with various tasks or to buy pre-pared food.

“I am now almost completely blind. I returned to the UK after 10 years in India helping my family. I am unemployed and it’s impossible to get a job. Yet, when I go to the job centre they tell me that I’m not entitled to any support whatsoever because I have not contributed enough. I don’t even understand what that means, but I do know that I have no money and have to rely on my brother but he will not be able to support me forever.”

Redbridge resident with a physical impairment

Disabled people are being hit by multiple and cumulative cuts and increases in charges

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.

How people experience these cuts is also complex. For different people, to different degrees, there will be⁵:

- Reductions in or a complete loss of support
- Ineligibility for support as thresholds are raised
- Higher means-testing, often leading to loss of support or loss of income

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

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

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

⁵ Counting the Cuts Author: Simon Duffy,
<http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/counting-the-cuts.html>

- Loss of income or reduced spending power

Moreover it is possible to calculate the average annual cut, per person, in income or support, by 2015-16, for each one of these groups of people⁶

- ✓ **People in poverty** will lose an average of £2,744 per year
- ✓ **Disabled people in poverty** will lose an average of £4,660 per year
- ✓ **People using social care** will lose an average of £6,409 per year

Cuts in care and support

Disabled people have been hit hard by the cuts in care and support funding made by Local Authorities: £890 million was taken from the national care and support budget between April 2012 and March 2013.⁷

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.

Disabled people are very concerned that their rights under Article 19 of the UNCRPD will be ignored and they will be forced move to residential care, with the accompanying risks of abuse and loss of independence, because the level of domiciliary care is adequate. For users of the Independent Living Fund, which the government proposes to close in 2015, the issue of a forced move to residential care is a huge concern.

Recommendations

Redbridge Council must remain committed to supporting and empowering the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in Redbridge.

There are certain groups in Redbridge that are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged including those who are very young, very old or disabled or have complex mental health conditions **and their interests need to be protected in a time of smaller budgets.**

The link between disability, poor mental health, and poverty is well established. High levels of unemployment among the disabled population means disabled people have lower incomes than average and are

⁶ Counting the Cuts Author: Simon Duffy,
<http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/counting-the-cuts.html>

⁷ http://www.adass.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=813:a

disproportionately likely to live below the poverty threshold and be dependent on benefits for a large proportion of their income.⁸

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.

Increase investment and funding in Redbridge voluntary sector

We are concerned that in real terms that there has been cuts to funding of local voluntary and community organisations in Redbridge. Evidence is also emerging that there is an increased demand for the services and resources provided by voluntary and community sector groups, particularly those working with 'disadvantaged' groups, but that crucially these groups are struggling to survive.

The voluntary sector in Redbridge plays an essential role in preventative services, so what appear to be cash savings now may be storing up considerable challenges for the future.

Reduced investment in the Redbridge Voluntary and Community Sector coupled with the growing restraints due to the economic and financial climate could curtail the ability of the sector in several areas:

- To advocate on behalf of vulnerable people
- To press for changes in public and social policy
- To be the voice of service users
- To suggest alternatives to market approaches to meeting need.

Research in other parts of the country has also pointed out a number of concerns that cuts to local funding will have on volunteering:⁹

- Reduced the capacity of voluntary sector organisations to provide support, training and suitable placements for volunteers
- Reductions in funding have forced to depend on volunteers to provide services, reducing their users' access to qualified professional staff.

⁸ Demos, The most effective way to tackle disability poverty is by reducing costs..., <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/countingthecost>

⁹ Manchester Metropolitan University Community Audit and Evaluation Centre Community North West, Surviving, Thriving or Dying, June 2012

London Borough of Redbridge to carry out a Cumulative Impact Assessment to gauge impact of cuts, charges, welfare reforms and changes to services on local disabled people.

“We are also very concerned about the cumulative effect of local and national changes – we have local cuts and national cuts proposed (e.g. DLA, child benefit, and health services).

Put together all these cuts could chip away at all the support mechanisms and services our families relies on and causes even costlier family breakdown and deeper inequalities.”

Redbridge Resident, parent of disabled child

We have over the last few years made a number of requests for a ‘Cumulative Impact Assessment’ to determine the impact on the disabled community. It is becoming increasingly difficult to assess and judge the impact of all the different changes to benefits, charges, service restructuring on the disabled community.

Many disabled people now face the combined impact of social care cuts, benefit cuts, changes to in and out-of-work benefits; housing cuts, and shortly the roll out of Personal Independence Payments.

Access to information

Many participants in our focus groups were concerned and worried by the fact that so much information was now being put on the internet. The vast majority, particularly amongst older respondents, said that they found accessing the Internet very difficult or impossible.¹⁰

People with a hearing impairment and from the deaf community said their biggest problem was a lack of accessible information. Their primary source would be friends or relatives, but as many pointed out this source was only as good as the knowledge

“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?”

¹⁰ Redbridge Voices, The views of deaf, vision impaired, hard of hearing and disabled people, Feb 2015

Whilst the Redbridge Conversation has its merits a number of studies are making it increasingly clear 'that a digital underclass is emerging in Britain, a group of people who are increasingly more disadvantaged in their ability to use the internet and other Information and Communication Technologies.

"These individuals are those that rely most on the government services that are now becoming 'digital by default' and will continue to do so. Those who need access to services most, from where the biggest cost savings through the digitisation of services are supposed to come, are the least likely to take these up even when access is available

London School of Economics¹¹

¹¹ The Emergence of a Digital Underclass: Digital Policies in the UK and Evidence for Inclusion, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/60556197/Policy-Brief-Emergence-of-a-Digital-Underclass>

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