

Summary

Welfare and benefits

The overwhelming majority of Local Voices participants were concerned about all aspects of welfare reform, including changes to unemployment, disability and housing benefits. Many people said they are already struggling and didn't feel the council was doing enough to update them on benefit changes and changes to services.

The council's Welfare Reform Task Group is committed to take the findings of the report forwards and will ensure it works with Local Voices. Visit the welfare reform page for more information.

In response to the report

- the council has developed a Welfare Reform Champions Network and offered social care staff comprehensive training sessions and support since the reforms were first announced. This has allowed them to be able to support their clients, including disabled clients, more effectively through the changes.

- the Welfare Reform Task Group has also published a booklet outlining all of the key changes taking place as part of welfare reform. The booklet provides clarity on exemptions, information on where residents can find local and targeted support and a specific section on disability related benefits. It also provides signposting throughout for those in receipt of disability related benefits and has been authored with input from the steering group.

Going forwards

- The council will work with Local Voices to provide clarity on a range of reforms including universal credit and the bedroom tax.

- The council will ensure that communications are fed through as many avenues as possible, to ensure residents are getting regular, accurate information on benefit changes

- Working in partnership with the Local Voices steering group and other disabled groups, we will develop a better understanding of where we can all work together to support disabled people, from information and training to advocacy and peer support.

Social care

Accessing appropriate social care was a key issue for Local Voices participants. It was the number one concern for survey respondents and was mentioned in almost all of the community activities. The research presents a mixed picture for social care, with some services valued highly.

In response to the report

- Adult Social Care services have embedded a Quality Assurance Framework which sets out how quality is monitored across all services. An evaluation has been undertaken to identify where we think our quality monitoring systems may need to be improved and we will work with Local Voices going forwards.

- An e-marketplace is being developed which will support social care users and carers to find innovative and cost-effective ways to meet their support needs. The aim is to implement an accessible online directory which can also be accessed over the phone, via the First Response team and via face-to-face contact with staff

- The council has made a commitment to fund preventative services, which will also become a legal duty as part of the care bill. The report made us recognise that people do not always understand the reasons behind social care decisions or know how to appeal against a decision they disagree with. To address this, we have printed leaflets explaining how decisions are made and how to appeal, and provide staff training on how to have difficult conversations.

Going forwards

- Social care services are committed to ensure people understand more about adult social care and will work with Local Voices to ensure new public information is clear, useful and easy to understand.

- When developing our 2014-17 Service User and Carer Involvement Strategy for the Education, Social Care and Wellbeing Directorate, we will consult with Local Voices to ensure a partnership approach is adopted.

- Work with Local Voices to seek feedback on people's experiences of agencies to determine if there are any areas in particular where people are having a poor experience. As part of the peer research work that is being planned, "service user networking" sessions are being developed via Local Voices to enable people with disabilities to support each other to find innovative and cost-effective solutions.

Negative attitudes towards disabled people

Local Voices participants commented over and over again how badly they think disabled people are being treated by society.

People often felt marginalised and there was a sense that things are getting worse not better. Throughout the project, disabled people shared their anger and fear and desire to build solidarity with others facing the same challenges.

Disabled people expressed significant worries about cuts to the income, services and support that many of them rely on. Many felt that the negative attitudes of service providers the media and members of the public is rubbing salt in the wound. Not only did this cause stress and affect self-esteem, but there was a worrying link drawn between worsening attitudes and increasing hate crime.

For the council, there is some reassurance to be had from many survey respondents reporting staff had positive attitudes to disabled people.

In response to the report

- We're working closely with colleagues in the Corporate Communications team to gather "positive stories" about disabled people which can then be used as press releases. Positive news stories will help dispel some of the negative impressions of disabled people being put forward by the media.
- Regular disability awareness events are being developed throughout the year at Idea Stores to raise awareness and understanding among the public and staff.

Going forwards

- The 2013-14 Communication and Engagement budget will be used to run a publicity campaign conveying positive messages about people with a disability. This will be done in conjunction with Local Voices.
- Refresher training on Third Party Reporting (TPR) as well as Hate Crime Awareness training will be offered via the Local Voices network.
- The service will undertake outreach with disabled people where opportunity arises and via Champions Programme. The service will also work with Local Voices to increase promotion of reporting hate crime, raising awareness and challenging prejudices. Training will be available to all housing associations on how to deal with hate crime.