

CHANGES TO THE ADULT CARE SERVICES CHARGING POLICY FROM APRIL 2006

Hertfordshire County Council's Cabinet has decided to make changes to the Adult Care Services charging policy for non-residential services.

The changes come into effect from the 10 April 2006 and may affect you if you receive services from Adult Care Services to help you live independently, such as care at home, day services, direct payments or transport to day services.

The changes were made following a three month public consultation from September – December 2005. This document sets out each change, summarises key points from the consultation responses and sets out the subsequent decisions made.

THE CHANGES IN DETAIL

1. Amending the charging policy in line with Department of Health "Fairer Charging" guidance. This means we will:

- include disability benefits such as Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance in the assessment of a person's income;
- advise and assist service users with benefit claims;
- take into account an individual's disability related expenditure;
- change the income limits so that charges are made with in line with the *Fairer Charging* guidelines (basic income support/pension credit rates plus 25%).

Consultation response: there was concern about the impact of this proposal on existing service users on fixed incomes. The proposal to integrate benefits advice into the financial assessment was generally welcomed, but concerns were expressed about the effect of taking Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance into account, and how Adult Care Services will ensure that disability related costs are accurately assessed, particularly in the early stages of the policy when a postal or telephone assessment

would be necessary. The position of carers and the effect of charges on household income was also an area for concern. There were a number of helpful suggestions on the types of expenses that should be considered for inclusion in the policy.

Decision: it was agreed to adopt the Fairer Charging guidelines as above. To alleviate concerns about postal assessments, a standard amount of £30 a week will be allowed for disability related expenditure during the initial stages of the policy, until service users are visited to review actual expenditure. Service users who have expenditure above the £30 standard level will be able to request that this is taken into account in advance of a visit (on production of evidence), and service users who have expenditure below this level will benefit from the standard allowance until the review visit. An additional six temporary staff will be employed to visit existing service users in the first year of the policy to ensure personal assessments are completed as quickly as possible.

2. Basing charges for care in supported and extra care housing schemes on the unit cost of providing care in that scheme.

Consultation response: Many people who responded did not express an opinion on this proposal. Those who did, raised concerns about any sharp increases in charges and potential disincentives for people who were trying to remain independent.

Decision: this change was agreed. More detailed work over the course of the next twelve months will ensure that charges are set fairly and there is a clear separation of care from support funded under the Supporting People programme.

3. Charges for transport to day care

Consultation response: there were concerns that a flat rate charge for transport may impose a financial burden on those

who may be unable to afford a charge but are unable to make alternative arrangements.

Decision: a flat rate charge of £2 per return trip to day centre will be adopted, but the charge will be waived if it reduces an individual's income below the minimum levels set out in the *Fairer Charging* guidance.

4. The standard rates for home care and day care.

Consultation response: there were concerns that rises in the standard rates for home care and day care above inflation would heavily penalise those who had managed to save, particularly elderly people, and worries that people would withdraw from services. The impact on carers was a concern if services are refused.

Decision: the standard rates for home care and day care will **not** be increased above inflation. The 2006/07 rates will be set at £11.60 an hour for home care and £29.00 a day for day care.

5. Charge for a meal in day centre

Consultation response: there was not undue concern about the proposal to increase the cost of a meal in day centre, although some respondents requested that any increase should be reflected in the quality of the meals.

Decision: the charge for a meal in day centre in 2006/07 will increase to £2.50.

6. Exemption from charging for people who are severely mentally ill.

Consultation response: there was some agreement to the removal of the exemption from charges for people who severely mentally ill, but also concern that this would

compound difficulties for this group of people, who need extra encouragement to take up services.

Decision: the removal of the exemption from charges for people with severe mental illness will be delayed until October 2006 to ensure that processes and procedures for charging are developed with Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Trust. While the county council must ensure that charges are demonstrably fair between client groups, there will be discretion to reduce charges in appropriate cases, rather than a blanket exemption in all cases. (N.B. the position of people exempt from charges because they receive after-care services under section 117 of the Mental Health Act is a legal requirement that remains unchanged by this policy.)

7. Exemption from charges for people whose only service is day centre attendance of less than five hours a week.

Consultation response: there was some agreement to the removal of this exemption to charges, but concern that services provided on a “drop-in” basis should continue to be free.

Decision: the exemption will be removed from the policy, with a distinction drawn between “drop-in” services and day services.