

The policy context for partnership of users and carers with policymakers

The Government is laying great emphasis on involving users and carers in health and welfare policy development. All concerned with policymaking need to be aware of their responsibilities and of how they can effectively involve users and carers. Users of services and carers need to become more effective in contributing to policymaking.

Health

A medium term priority of the NHS Executive is: 'Give greater voice and influence to users of NHS services and their carers in their own care, the development and definition of standards set for NHS services locally and the development of NHS policy both locally and nationally.'¹

'Health Authorities should have a strategic plan for, and be engaged in early, systematic and continuing communication and consultation with local people, users and carers' groups, community health councils and other representative and voluntary groups, about plans to respond to local health needs and to developing local services. They should be able to demonstrate the impact of that consultation on their plans and how its outcome has been fed back to the local community.'²

A Department of Health initiative, *Local Voices*,³ emphasised that local people need to be listened to, kept informed about issues on which their views will be sought, involved in discussions about options and constraints and informed of decisions (and the reasons for them) taken on their behalf.

Local Authorities

Guidance to local authorities on planning services for adults with learning disabilities states that 'Carers and user groups..... should be consulted'.⁴

The Community Care Act 1990 (Section 46) requires Social Service Departments of local authorities in preparing Community Care Plans to

consult with, among others, voluntary organisations representing users and voluntary organisations representing carers.⁵

The Children Act 1989 requires Social Service Departments to have clear policies for the inclusion of voluntary organisations in planning local services.⁶

Joint Commissioning

Department of Health guidance includes as parties to joint commissioning:

'Users and carers. Contributing to building a picture of need, broad strategy and options for service development through regular involvement in planning, monitoring and review activities.'⁷

'User and carer involvement is a safeguard against joint commissioning becoming an inward looking bureaucratic process. They should be involved in identifying need, and providing input to monitoring and review. Commissioning authorities should be clear about the overall process, and the role of users and carers within it.'⁸

Partners in Policymaking

Partners in Policymaking is a course for disabled adults and parents of disabled children up to school leaving age to develop the competence and confidence to work with policymakers at national and local levels.⁹

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¹ NHS Executive 1996 *Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS: 1997/98*.

² NHS Executive 1996 *Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS: 1997/98*.

³ Department of Health 1992 *Local Voices* NHS ME.

⁴ Department of Health 1992 *Social Care for Adults with Learning Disabilities (Mental Handicap)* LAC(92)15.

⁵ Department of Health 1990 *Caring for People: Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond: Policy Guidance* HMSO.

⁶ Department of Health 1991 *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Vol 6, Children with Disabilities* HMSO.

⁷ Department of Health 1995 *An Introduction to Joint Commissioning* page 5.

⁸ Department of Health 1995 *An Introduction to Joint Commissioning* page 7.

⁹ Gathercole, C and Elwell, L 1996 *Partners in Policymaking: the first UK course* NWTDT.