

MS(CS) SPEECH TO LEARNING DISABILITY TODAY CONFERENCE

8 December 2010

Congratulations, firstly, to Learning Disability Today on its 10th anniversary.

And congratulations to all of you – to providers, to commissioners, to people with learning disabilities and their families – for everything you've done in recent years.

There's been more investment, more innovation, more opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

But perhaps most important of all, much more involvement of disabled people and their families, in designing services themselves.

This is a particularly welcome trend. And something that is absolutely in tune with the instincts of the new Government. To put more power in the hands of the individual.

But just as no one should deny this progress made; equally, no one should doubt there's more to do.

More to do in extending choice and control – so people with learning disabilities and their families get the right support, at the right time to help them lead a full life.

And in reducing bureaucracy and bringing services together, both to save money and to ensure care fits around the person's needs.

Choice. Control. Integration.

Old messages, with a new urgency.

Because today's progress report on the Valuing People Now programme reveals a mixed picture.

Some areas great; others less so.

In health, yes, it's encouraging more people are getting annual health checks.

But there are still thousands not getting the regular medical checks they need.

For those admitted to hospital, we're seeing more patient passports are being used to share information and personalise care.

And we need to see all hospitals using them to ensure everyone's safety and comfort.

Regrettably, nearly four years on from the *Death by Indifference* report, we continue to hear examples of poor care across the NHS.

Failures in training.

Failures in provision and making the right adjustments.

Failures, sometimes, in the attitudes and awareness of staff.

We need constant vigilance to ensure people with learning disabilities are treated with dignity and respect.

We're therefore continuing the Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths, and establishing a Public Health Observatory study to provide information nationally and locally.

Alongside this, the Health Self Assessment Framework will continue to provide a key check on NHS performance – making sure the patient's voice is heard, and that every assessment involves people with learning disabilities.

I also think the new focus in the NHS – with services driven by patients and anchored around outcomes, not processes – can help to drive further progress. And I'll say a bit more about this later.

But let's move on to housing – another thing that people with learning disabilities tell us they value extremely highly.

Again, a mixed picture.

Good progress on closing health campus homes, with the few hundred people still living in these homes due to have plans to move out in place by the end of the year.

That's a huge achievement, showing that even people with the most complex needs can be supported to live independently.

But beyond this? Well, beyond this, the system – the system we inherited from the previous Government – still operates as a lottery.

Last year, a best practice report from the Department of Health (*Use of Resources in Adult Social Care*) talked about two types of council.

It called one of them “Careland”, where councils pumped budgets into nursing and care homes.

And the other “Communityland”, where more money was spent on support services to help people with learning disabilities to live in the community.

And that division comes through in today's report.

A third of councils spent less than 40% of their learning disability budgets on care home, whereas nearly one in 10 spent more than 60% on them.

Interestingly, research from ADASS back in 2007 found that councils spending a high share of budgets on residential care tended to spend more overall and achieve worse results.

The message is clear. If councils want to achieve the right outcomes at the right price, they need to improve the levels of community-based support for people with learning disabilities.

Personal budgets can be a big catalyst for change.

We've said we want everyone to have a personal budget, preferably in the form of a direct payment, by 2013.

Personal budgets unlock opportunities. They help people with learning disabilities to enjoy things that others take for granted.

Making friends. Having a social life. Getting involved in the local community. Growing your confidence and self-esteem. And yes, finding a job and building a career.

Only 6 per cent of those who use social services are in work. That really isn't good enough.

We need to do better at supporting people with learning disabilities.

We also need to do better at changing attitudes, tackling stigma, and frankly raising our expectations for people with learning disabilities.

And raising their expectations too. Encouraging more people to use their personal budgets to find a job and forge a career for themselves.

Councils running the 'Getting a Life' and 'Jobs First' programmes show the way.

Show how personal budgets can help people get the support they need.

Like the professional photographer who hired a personal assistant who shares his passion and support him in his work.

Or the entrepreneur who got support from a social enterprise to help him set up his own business selling books.

Or the young lady, who has set up a fashion accessories business, using her personal budget to buy help from an employment assistant.

The point is, people with learning disabilities have big ambitions – we must do more to help them fulfil them.

It's better for them – and better for the taxpayer, with one report saying that for every person supported into work, the council saves

over a thousand pounds, and the taxpayer saves three and a half thousand pounds.

But let me turn to some of the tougher questions.

I'm very aware that the rhetoric coming from politicians like me can seem out of step with the reality on the ground.

These are tough times. I know that many of you here today are worried about the future.

About the financial challenge.

About cuts that are perhaps already being made to local services.

And about whether the Government is wavering in its commitment to supporting people with learning disabilities.

Well, yes, the job is more difficult given the financial situation.

More difficult, but not impossible. And certainly not an excuse for slow progress.

We've made up to £2 billion a year extra available over the next four years. Additional money to keep pace with increased demand – so councils should be able to maintain the services that many people here rely on.

There is no need, and frankly, no excuse for local authorities choosing to slash and burn services for people with learning disabilities.

However, the reality of devolution, of passing power to local councils is freedom for those councils to make their own choices.

By removing the ring-fences, we're giving councils the authority – and the responsibility – lead a local debate about what the priorities should be. About what stays, what changes, what goes. About how the available resources can be used to best effect.

Central Government and politicians like me can't play Pontius Pilate, washing our hands of what happens locally.

We will continue putting a spotlight on the key issues.

And we're taking a number of steps to ensure councils and the NHS live up to their responsibilities.

First, the shift from targets to outcomes will mean that councils and the NHS have to work more closely to support people with learning disabilities.

Health and Wellbeing Boards – in many ways taking the lead from the Learning Disability Partnership Boards – will bring together the various partners involved in health and social care.

Through Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the NHS and local government partners will work together to plan services according to local needs.

And the Social Care Outcomes Framework, which sets the key measures by which councils will be judged, do include indicators around housing and employment.

So the needs of people with learning disabilities will be hard-wired into the performance framework for local government.

Secondly, I think GP-led commissioning will make a difference. It will bring decisions much closer to the community.

And it should improve the quality of referrals and help to build stronger relationships between primary care and other local services.

There is a big training and awareness job to do before GP consortia take control in 2013, and I'm confident that the NHS Commissioning Board will pick up the mantle when it comes into being next year.

The other crucial development is around local accountability.

This Government is committed to a transfer of power.

From institutions to individuals through personal budgets – which is certainly one lever for change and improvement.

Because where you call the shots, where you buy the services, then you control the quality, and can hold services to account very directly if you don't get the care you expect.

The other transfer of power is from Whitehall to the Town Hall.

Councils will get new responsibilities.

A new responsibility for holding the NHS to account for any decisions it makes about services.

And also for bringing a wide range of local services together to promote general health and wellbeing under the recent public health white paper.

What this means, in essence, is that lobbying at a local level becomes all the more important.

Speeches and actions by Ministers will only achieve so much at a national level.

The future is local.

Local campaigns, local pressure, local action.

That's what really makes the difference.

And that's the switch in emphasis we need.

So my advice: don't sit back and wait.

If you haven't already, make contact with emerging consortia. Build relationships with your council. Learn how you can feed in joint strategic needs assessment. Start to understand the new rules of engagement within your area.

CONCLUSION

The money's there for social care.

The money's there to push ahead with personalisation.

To continue improving support for people with learning disabilities.

And to continue involving them in the key decisions.

So be positive. Be creative. Be ambitious.

Above all: think local.

That's how we can go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

And that's how we can improve many more lives, even during this tough financial period.

Thank you.