

The National Valuing Families Forum
The National Forum of People with Learning Difficulties

16 FEB 2011

Dear colleague

**The National Learning Disability Programme Board - 20
January – Presentations by the National Valuing Families
Forum and the National Forum of People with Learning
Difficulties**



I am writing to thank you for your clear presentations at the last Programme Board. You shared concerns about funding of the Forums and about changes that are happening and the future of the Valuing People programme.



I agree that the Regional and National Forums are very important in helping Government understand the issues that people with learning disabilities and their families face.



Together, we have done a lot of work like publishing the **Staying Strong Guidance**, which Gavin launched at the Board on 20th January.



We also value the work of the National Valuing Families Forum to support the families of people with learning disabilities.

I have also heard, and I understand, what they have said about families.



I, with the rest of the Government, am determined to continue work to give people with learning disabilities control over their lives.



The NVFF letter asked about a number of new things that are happening



Cuts to Local Services

The situation in the whole country means that every council has to make savings. Each council has to decide on their own what cuts to make to services.

We know that the social care system is not working properly and we are looking at the way that it is working. There will be a report in July with plans to make it better.



Resource Allocation System (RAS)

This is the way that councils decide how much money someone needs for their care. Each council has to make their own decisions. If people do not like the decision they can complain to the council.



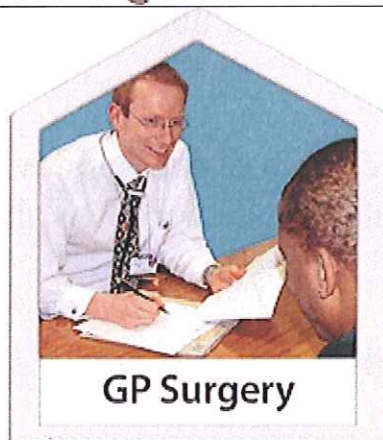
HealthWatch (to give patients a voice about health issues)

The National Forum of People with Learning Difficulties has been asked to join the Advisory Group that will talk about how the new HealthWatch will work. This is so that people with learning disabilities have a say in how HealthWatch works.



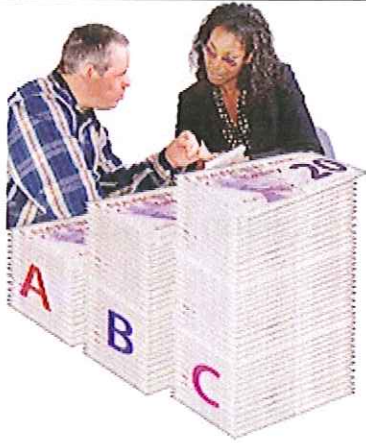
Support for Carers

People in the Forums wanted new money for carers to be ring fenced. This means that the money could not be used for anything else. It is up to councils and PCTs how they decide to spend their money but they want to help carers and they should work together to help them do this.



GP Consortia (groups of GPs working together)

You are worried that GP consortia could refuse to look after someone with lots of medical needs. GP consortia will not be allowed to do this. They cannot refuse to take on people because of their medical condition.



Independent Living Fund (ILF)

I have noted that both forums are very worried about ILF going. The Government thinks that services should be more personalised and improve the lives of people with learning disabilities.

Personal budgets are very important as they give people more control over their care. All councils should offer personal budgets by 2013. It is fairer than ILF. ILF will carry on for people already getting it



I want to continue to focus work from Government to support people to get jobs, homes of their own and to improve their health.

Health

The Government will work with the NHS to bring in new organisations like GP consortia (groups of GPs) to make sure they meet everyone's needs including people with learning disabilities.



You asked about future funding of the Confidential Inquiry and the Public Health Observatory.

As I said at the Board, I am expecting advice soon from officials about whether to go ahead with years 2 and 3.

This information will help me decide



Housing

I know you are worried about changes to benefits and how people with learning disabilities are supported to live on their own in the community. I am talking to other Ministers about this.



Employment

The Government is committed to helping people with learning disabilities get jobs.



We are also talking to colleagues at the Department for Education about how this issue will be included in their Green Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disability, which will be published soon.



We are determined to make sure that the voice of people with learning disabilities and family carers remains at the heart of policy at a national level.



I said at the Programme Board that I would write to let you know about funding as soon as I had any news.



I expect to be writing to you very soon with a decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Burstow".

PAUL BURSTOW