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| **Darlington Association on Disability**  Centre for Independent Living  Unit 1P Enterprise House Tel: 01325 489999  Valley Street Text: 07624818780  Darlington DL1 1GY Fax: 01325 267758  Web Logo- high res |

31 May 2016

Dear Sir / Madam

Darlington Association on Disability would like to submit the following formal response and information as part of the consultation and Disability Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed budget cuts outlined in the council’s medium term financial plan.

As an organisation Darlington Association On Disability (DAD) has responded directly to impact assessments and consultation on various specific cuts (these are listed in appendix 2), this letter outlines our general concerns that we have as a local disability user led organisation regarding the proposals.

DAD are very concerned about the extent of these proposals, and in particular wish to challenge the public perception that disabled people and carers are a small group of people which a large resource is spent. Such services including adult and child social care in fact provide a life long support for the whole population, which a high percentage of residents will have support from in their lives.

We urge Officers and Cabinet Members to consider the points we raise, and as always DAD would welcome the opportunity to co-produce solutions with the council to help ensure that the current economic climate does not result in disabled people and carers, losing independence, being socially excluded as a citizen of Darlington or carers deciding they can no longer continue to provide informal caring support.

As an organisation we are committed to co production and feel the current approach taken in these proposals has not harnessed the expertise which DAD can offer as a well established disability user led organisation which is in touch with its community including people of all ages and impairments, carers and parent carers.

Whilst DAD fully acknowledges and understands the very difficult financial situation that the council faces, DAD feels that it is often not realised the extent to which disabled people will be multiply impacted by:

* Specific proposals to cut services for disabled people and carers
* All the other cuts to services which the budget proposals outline, which impact generally on residents e.g. Christmas lighting, environment etc.
* For many disabled people and carers the impact of previous rounds of cuts are still having a high impact on people’s lives and in some cases the impact is just beginning to be realised, for example the closure of Shopmobility, increase in social care charges etc.
* National changes to policy and services including changes to the welfare system, closure on Independent Living Fund and reduction to services from other agencies.
* These proposals also come at a time when changes to the policy of Darlington’s non-residential social care charges are being introduced and consulted on. If implemented these will result in direct increases in charges for many people up to £30.00 per week, and charges for Carers Services. DAD has submitted a separate response to this proposal. However DAD strongly feels that this proposal must be considered alongside the budget proposals, as the multiple impacts are huge.

DAD strongly feels the points above lead to disabled people and carers being impacted inequitably and unfairly compared to other groups and general resident population.

In respect of the Blue Badge proposal, DAD feel strongly that this proposal

will not save money, and that the income will be very small, as there

is strong evidence (from the multi storey car park) that blue badge holders do not park in these spaces where charges are now applied. The cost of providing accessible and increased number of meters will also be incurred. This will mean the council legally have to provide the spaces in car parks by law but they will be under used, disabled people will need to find free on street parking which will have a negative physical impact as it will not be accessible.

DAD feel that the council have the opportunity to disregard this proposal as it will not impact economically on the council. National and local changes to policy means many disabled people are not able to afford such charges. In addition the fact the Darlington does currently have free parking for blue badge holders, means that Darlington is the town of choice for many disabled residents from other towns to visit and shop, and contribute to Darlington’s economy.

Appendix 1, is a spreadsheet which DAD have compiled further to a meeting which Lauren Robinson (Chief Executive) and Gordon Pybus (Chair Person) attended with Bill Dixon, Veronica Copeland and Suzanne Joiner, where our concerns included a lack of awareness and involvement of disabled people in the consultation and Equality impact Assessment process. It was agreed that DAD would undertake an exercise to support the identification of multiple impacts of the different proposals. As an organisation we contacted 600 disabled people and carers electronically who use our services.

DAD received 113 responses from disabled people and carers, who identified how they will be impacted multiply. The data shows that on average the people who responded to our questionnaire will be affected by 5.2 of the proposals specifically impacting on disabled people and carers, this is in addition to the other proposal which affect all Darlington residents.

A major concern which DAD has identified as part of collating this information and attending a range of impact assessment meetings is that disabled people and carers can recognise which cuts will affect them; but are not able to imagine and identify the actual impact it will have on their life, both financially and their physical wellbeing. Many people will have given their view or opinion on a particular cut, but this is very different to what the actual impact will be.

DAD therefore feels that officers and members will not have sufficient information to understand the impacts, and that further evidence will be needed. DAD would be happy to assist with this process where ever possible.

As an organisation DAD is also massively impacted other rounds of cuts, and potentially these proposals; alongside a decreasing amount of external grants and increasing competition for grants available. We would ask officers and members to consider the impact on the specific proposals that impact on DAD as an organisation, as the funding enable DAD to provide accessible, flexible and responsive support. In addition it also enables DAD to support the council to meet it’s statutory functions such as the Accessible Information Standard which it must meet under the Care Act 2014.

DAD would urge members and officers to consider our response, and take into account the breadth and depth that these proposals would have on over 30,000 disabled people, disabled children, carers and parent carers.

Thank you for taking time to consider DAD’s response.

Yours faithfully



Lauren Robinson

Chief Executive