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Thursday 10 August 2017

Update letter on the Healthwatch Wiltshire report about the impact of the new charging policy for Wiltshire Council Adult Care Services

The full report, to which this covering letter refers, is now on the website for Healthwatch Wiltshire.

Following the implementation of the new Adult Care Services Charging Policy, Wiltshire Council commissioned Healthwatch Wiltshire to undertake a short-term study to assess the impact of the new arrangements on service users. This was requested in order that elected Members and Council commissioners could better understand the effects of the new policy on the everyday lives of those people who were financially assessed for their contribution to care costs.

During the period when meetings with service users took place, feedback was given to Wiltshire Council about matters which could improve the process. These matters are highlighted in the Healthwatch Wiltshire Report, and in the written response from the Council.

Some of the immediate Wiltshire Council actions resulting from service user feedback included collaboration with Healthwatch Wiltshire and with the Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living on the production of information leaflets. These are now sent to service users when financial assessment letters go out and feedback suggests that they are providing clear and helpful information.

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Healthwatch also acknowledges the effort of the financial assessments and benefits team (FAB) in completing reassessments, particularly the additional work required as a result of the changes to the calculation of the Minimum Income Guarantee agreed in April 2017.

In future, there will be programmed annual reassessments for all of those people in receipt of publicly funded care. This will ensure that changes to circumstances, as well as to policies, are known promptly. In addition, Wiltshire Council are looking at ways that they can inform people when larger changes which may affect their finances are 'on the horizon', including national changes to welfare benefits.

There are a number of recommendations in the report, all of which were discussed in July 2017 when a meeting took place between Healthwatch Wiltshire, Councillor Jerry Wickham and senior Adult Care officers. At that meeting a series of further actions were agreed which are also covered in the response from Wiltshire Council. We are therefore able to report that feedback from service users has been taken into account and has led to improvements in the process of financial assessment for contribution to care costs.

Healthwatch Wiltshire will continue to welcome the views of people who are affected by the impact of the charging policy for adult care services. We will keep personal details confidential but will continue to pass feedback to Wiltshire Council.

Sandie Lewis, Associate, Healthwatch Wiltshire

