

Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group

Statement from the Care Online Task & Finish Group

Background

During the consultation on the Care Online proposals, the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group indicated its wish to have an opportunity to review these proposals from an equalities perspective.

Leicestershire County Council welcomed the opportunity to involve LECG in the development of the Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment work in relation to the proposals and LECG set up a Task & Finish Group to that purpose.

Members of the LECG Care Online Task & Finish Group met with County Council officers involved in the development of the Care Online proposals on June 8 2018. At this meeting the Group explored the proposals and the public consultation process and had an opportunity to consider the consultation results and the identified equality implications and proposed mitigation measures.

Following this meeting, the following statement was agreed by members of the Group:

We appreciate the pressures on the Council and the context in which these proposals have been developed and need to be considered. We welcome the acknowledgement by the Council that these proposals are in no way a reflection on the quality of the service that has been provided. We are nevertheless deeply concerned that a valuable, successful, quality service like this, which support some of the most isolated and vulnerable people, may disappear.

We welcome the efforts of the council to consult with service users to gauge the potential impact of these proposals. The consultation responses received from service users are a testament to the quality and dedication of the staff involved in delivering the service and the value users attach to it. In that light, it is perhaps unsurprising that users perceive the suggested alternatives as unlikely to meet their needs. However, it remains difficult to see objectively how the alternatives available would provide a similar level and quality of service to all current and prospective service users, in particular to those with complex support needs.

A particular concern is that people may need to contact several providers to be able to get support that was provided in an integrated way through CareOnline. In that context it is also worth noting that old age and disability are not the only equalities factors at play here. A significant proportion of service users may face additional barriers to accessing support, We note a majority of service users are women and that 10% identify as being from an ethnic minority.

The Group notes various mitigation measures have been put forward by officers and these are broadly supported.

- The Group welcomes the intention to support current service users in accessing alternative support, thereby reducing the burden on people to contact various organisations to try and pull together suitable support themselves.

- The Group also welcomes the intention to work closely with organisations that currently signpost service users to Care Online to ensure they will signpost users to the most suitable providers in relation to their particular needs and circumstances.
- The Group in particular welcomes the suggestion to put in place a transition fund to help with the above.

However, the Group considers the currently proposed mitigation measures to provide no more than the very basic level of mitigation necessary – and we urge the Council to be more ambitious:

The Group feels strongly that the County Council should undertake further efforts to try and secure a service that provides a better alternative to the services currently on offer. This could be achieved by attracting external funding to continue CareOnline, by working with current providers to enhance their offer or by supporting a provider or other body to put in place a similar service on a charitable basis. The Council should consider using its proposed transition funding in that context.

The Group want to thank County Council officers for their time.

Task Group Members

Peter Lewis	LECG Chair
Lucy Smith	LECG Vice Chair
Iris Lightfoote	The Race Equality Centre
Mina Rodgers	Older Peoples Engagement Network
Anne Collier	John Storer, Charnwood
Troy Young	AgeUK LLR
Resham Sandhu	Leicester Faith Forum
Colin Norman	Social Housing
Tadeusz Stenzel	Leicester & Rutland Minority Ethnic Forum