**Challenges with Local Funding**

The NNPCF Steering Group (SG) continues to listen to its membership about the issues that have been impacting in local areas. It has become clear that there is currently considerable concern about the funding cuts that are being proposed in many areas, ranging from significant reductions in Short Breaks to closures of services.

This position statement shares the initial thoughts of the SG on this challenge and provides some consideration of how forums have dealt with the possibility of financial cuts to date. We hope that this will support forums in working with Local Authorities (and health) during times of financial constraints and will contribute to ensuring that the parent carer voice continues to be heard in all local decision making.

The NNPCF SG realise that this is a worrying time for families and those that work to support them. We recognise that local Forums rightly feel strongly about the need to ensure that services that provide support to vulnerable families are protected and about promoting the need for Local Authorities to invest in creating resilient families and communities. Local Forums will also understand the strategic implications of decisions and the likely (perhaps unintended) consequences for children, families and young people if decisions are not being made in full appreciation of the value of services and the invest to save arguments that may underpin them. They are also conscious of the new Children and Families Act changes and the need to improve outcomes for all children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families.

Local Parent Carer Forums should be focusing on engaging in participation and co-production when it comes to responding to finance cuts that affect their membership and other local families. It is important that the parent carer voice continues to be heard in all discussions about local services and that any decisions about funding are fully informed by the views of parent carers.

The SG believe that Local Forums have a key role in ensuring that any changes to services due to budget reductions only happen after Local Authorities have fulfilled their legal duties to consult and have a comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of any proposed cuts. We urge Local Parent Carer Forums to do what they can to ensure that in these difficult times the knowledge and experience of parent carers continues to be at the heart of local decision making.

The NNPCF SG believes that forums know their own area better than anyone and are able to decide how to respond to each situation appropriately. This is not always easy however and while having a membership allows forums to scope general opinions from wide ranges of families, sometimes forums have to react quickly since consultations about changes to services can come at untimely moments throughout the year.

With this in mind it might be useful to consider the following when you hear about proposed cuts to services or changes that you believe will have negative impacts on outcomes for children, you people and families;

* Has there been an official and meaningful consultation for these cuts or changes?
* Do the proposed changes reflect an understanding of the needs of families, children and young people and possible consequences as well as potentially greater costs of not having these services?
* Is this a general theme that affects all parent carers or is it specific to one group or area?
* How can participation support parent carers to get their voices heard in relation to the proposed cuts?
* Forums are pan disability, 0-25 years. Is the forum able to support specific groups to get voices heard, considering this remit?
* Have you been approached by LA/organisations when it comes to cuts or changes to service specifications?
* How do you get the message out to the widest group of parent carers for response?
* Can you work with other organisations to influence decision making around budgets?

Once you have reflected on these questions, it is for you and your Local Forums Steering Group to decide what the next step is and how can you ensure, taking into account your relationship with the LA (and or health), that parents voices are heard in a productive way through participation.

Here are some examples of the action that some forums have taken to influence decision making around funding;

* Attending meetings with LAs/organisations with parents who are directly affected to see what the next steps are and ensure meaningful consultation has happened.
* Support parents by doing a questionnaire to collect evidence about the impact of the proposed funding cuts so they can get their voices heard.
* Presenting summary of what parents have said to local Councillors to ensure they the full picture of the implications of potential cuts. Or getting parents to present their thoughts on this directly to local councillors.

The NNPCF Steering Group understands that the capacity of Forums to respond to proposed cuts or changes to services will vary across the country and that Forums may choose to take different approaches depending on local circumstances.

The role of the NNPCF SG is to provide a national picture and we have therefore raised our concerns about the impact of the reduction in Local Authority budgets with Edward Timpson recently. We particularly highlighted concerns about the reduction in social care funding for both children and adult services that is happening nationally and the negative impact that this will have on the success of the SEND reforms.

In response to this the Minister has asked the NNPCF SG to provide further information about these concerns. To inform this work we are requesting that local Forums formally share their experiences of proposed cuts in their local areas and the potential impact of these. We would also like to hear about any action that local forums have taken and how they have worked with Local Authorities to managed funding reductions positively. Please submit your contributions to the NNPCF using the attached proforma and return via our email info@nnpcf.org.uk by Monday 8th Dec 2014. In submitting this information you are confirming that you understand that the information provided about specific Local Authorities / health partners will be shared with the Department For Education to illustrate the challenges being faced at a local level and the potential barriers to the successful implementation of the reforms. The NNPCF will also be sharing the information provided with our partner organisations such as Contact a Family and EDCM who may use this to support future campaigns. If you are not happy for the information you provide to be shared in this way please do make this clear on your submission.

Thank you for your support and your on-going work.

 *NNPCF Steering Group*

**The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) was launched in 2011, and is funded by central government.**

We became a formally constituted Group in November 2013. The NNPCF membership is made up of Parent Carer Forums of which there is one in almost every local authority area in England. Each parent carer forum in receipt of the Department of Education participation grant is a member of the NNPCF.

The function of the NNPCF is to develop cohesive good practice and effective participation and a solution focused approach at all levels, locally, regionally and nationally.

The aims of the NNPCF are to:

* ensure that good practice, knowledge and shared expertise about parent participation continues to grow and strengthen.
* develop a cohesive and coherent structure to sustain and develop the effectiveness of parent carer forums across England.
* strengthen the pan disability, parent led model of local forums and boost our collective voice.

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