



THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

December 2006

Message from Denise Smith, Chair, Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham (CILL)

I cannot believe it is December again and before the year closes I must thank everyone who has supported CILL during the year. We do not have huge resources or paid staff so our volunteers are important to us. In particular I would like to thank Jenny Spencer, the Active Life Projects (ALPs) coordinator, for getting the projects organised, Leah Noel, an advocate in the Deptford Advocacy project, for taking on all advocacy relating to direct payments (see Choices below), Kirsty Stalley who has given us her time and expertise, as a disability equality trainer and access audit consultant, throughout the year, Mark Smith for his work in setting up our website and Dudley Forbes for his staunch support and commitment.

Campaign Updates

'Equality for All' and the Disability Equality Scheme – Lewisham's DES has now been referred to the Mayor and Cabinet by the Council's Stronger Safer Communities Select Committee for consideration. The final version of the DES should be available shortly as the DDA says it must be published by 4 December. CILL has been promised a copy – further details will be given next month.

'Access for All' Equality Strategy Budget

A further £1m has been allocated by Lewisham for 2006/7 and over half of this has been committed to adaptations including: providing properties with either single or double power assisted door closers, video entry systems, accessible W.C. adaptations, an alternative type of stairlift at the Civic Suite, renewing the Council Chamber sound system, providing new sound systems & projection facilities to Committee Rooms 1 & 2, talk assist technology, Laurence House kitchen adaptation and low vision & dexterity kits etc. The remainder of the budget will concentrate on carrying out adaptations to the properties where the highest visitor attendance is experienced e.g. Laurence House, the Town Hall and the Civic Suite, Libraries, etc.

The programme is managed by Robert O'Brien of Kern Management Ltd and CILL had a meeting with him last week. We were a little surprised that both the Director and Chair of Lewisham Disability Coalition (LDC) had been invited to a meeting we requested without giving us any notice that they would be there, but as far as CILL is concerned information needs to get to as many disabled people and their organisations as possible.

Robert O'Brien will be providing full details of all the works to both CILL and LDC, but both organisations were concerned about the lack of consultation with disabled people. It seems that disabled people have not been consulted at all about how the money is spent or what their priorities really are. For example, it is all very well that work has been done to allow council chamber meetings to be broadcast via the Internet but is this a priority for disabled people?

Apparently, next year's budget is already earmarked for work to improve access to the Town Hall and Civic Suite but again there has been no consultation with disabled people. It seems that there is still in the region of £200,000 that has not yet been spent, but although we asked if disabled people could be consulted about how that is spent we were told that the preference was for just CILL and LDC to make suggestions. LCD's Director asked for consideration to be given to having a few, say three, large and fully accessible toilet and changing rooms, with changing beds and hoists, in different parts of the borough. Disabled people who need these facilities cannot travel far from their homes because at present they do not exist in any part of Lewisham. CILL supports this idea entirely, indeed we have argued for one changing room like this to be available in all leisure centres.

We also discovered that only one contractor is responsible for all the work.

CILL is very concerned about the lack of consultation, the grounds on which priorities were set, the use of one contractor and the operation of the budget. LDC shares our concerns and we were very grateful for their support during our meeting. We look forward to working closely with LDC to resolve the many worrying issues that were identified and we have asked them to take up these issues with LBL directly in their role as 'strategic partner'. CILL will be doing the same with the chair of the scrutiny committee.

If there is an issue affecting you and your independent living please contact CILL for advice and support.

Choices

Choices, the direct payments support service contracted by Lewisham Council, have gone into administration. CILL issued a press release from the National Centre of Independent Living (NCIL) and a statement from Lewisham a couple of weeks ago.

As it was unclear what level of service Choices were still able to provide, CILL made an offer to Lewisham to come in as an emergency support provider, given our direct knowledge and experience of direct payments, until a tender for a new contract was in place.

Despite Lewisham's statement that direct payment users will be contacted to offer them reassurance that they will continue to receive support it is unclear that this has been done. The only information we have is that Lewisham has identified another payroll service to provide payroll support and also that processed direct payment applications cannot go ahead as there is no support provider (apart from payroll) in place.

Despite our request, Lewisham has not identified the new payroll support provider and our suspicion is that this is not a user led organisation of disabled people. If this is the case then once again Lewisham has ignored Government guidance, the Association of Directors of Social Services Protocol and the views of local disabled people – all call for user led organisations to be contracted to provide these services.

CILL understands and supports the need to provide a payroll service to existing users so that care arrangements can be maintained, but support is about more than payroll and those services need to be provided by a user led organisation. Lewisham now has the opportunity to tender a new contract to community based, user led, not for profit organisations – that is organisations of disabled people with direct experience, knowledge and skills committed to empowering local disabled people to manage and control their own lives and who will create jobs for disabled people (getting disabled people into employment is another Government target).

This is not just about a contract this is about empowerment and participation, about disabled people's right to control their own lives, about showing what disabled people can do, about creating jobs for disabled people and beginning to change negative attitudes. Surely this is in the spirit of what Lewisham should be aiming to achieve with their DES? There is a chance here for Lewisham to begin a process where they can eventually be 'a best practice' London Borough for how they interact and communicate with their disabled community. It will not cost more but it will take commitment, support, and a willingness to work with disabled people. CILL waits to see how Lewisham responds.

Throughout this difficult situation CILL has acted responsibly and we have gone out of our way to give information to Lewisham Council. We are concerned about the Council's behaviour and we have written to Aileen Buckton Executive Director of Community Services.

CILL has been contacted by several direct payment users during the last couple of weeks who are having difficulties both with the support available and cuts to the number of assessed care hours. In an attempt to respond immediately, one of our advocates, Leah Noel, will be providing advocacy support to any user who needs it. If you have any issue about your direct payments that you would like support with please contact CILL at campaign@fsmail.net.

Gym Sessions at The Bridge

We can now offer a gym session with a dedicated instructor at Bridge Leisure Centre, Kangley Bridge Road, Lower Sydenham, London SE26 5AQ. The session is every Thursday from 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm in the fitness studio using the gym equipment with instructor Sarah Thorn. Numbers are limited and as an induction is needed we will be introducing people one at a time. The sessions are free but a valid Lewisham Plus card (see below) will be required as well as registration with ALPs (CILL's Active Life Projects). If you are interested please contact Jenny Spencer (ALPs co-ordinator) on 020 8697 7103/07956 835 442 or email: jenfilein@gmail.com.

Lewisham Plus Card

A surprisingly large number of people are not aware of the benefits of a Lewisham Plus Card. If you receive a pension or have a disability you are entitled to FREE swimming, fitness studio (apart from the cost of induction) and use of Ladywell Arena Athletics track. There is also 25% off a number of other activities. In addition the concession extends to your carer. You need: Proof of eligibility (Freedom Pass, DLA, other benefits), a passport size photo, £2.00 for the year per card and a completed application form. These are available from leisure centres covered by the scheme (Bellingham Leisure Centre is not yet in the scheme), at libraries and council offices. More details on the Lewisham Council website: <http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/LeisureAndCulture/SportAndLeisure/LewishamPlusCard/>

Once you have been along to the CILL gym session a few times we would hope you will have confidence to attend a gym at other times. With the Lewisham Plus card and the induction you can then use any of the other leisure centres in the borough that may be more convenient for you. They all have the same equipment. It may be worth while checking your local leisure centre as they may already be holding other suitable activity sessions. Please let us know if you find any.

CILL 30+/'Drop-in'

Friday 24th November. 3pm - 4pm "So You Want to Recycle?"

Paul Hurwood, Lewisham Council's Waste Education Officer, will be consulting to get some feedback as to the practicalities of recycling for disabled people in Lewisham so that they can aim to make improvements where possible

Friday 8 December 3pm – 4pm: Stella Agunabor from Lewisham Council will give us a short update on Quercus (the redevelopment of Ladywell Fields) as there have been changes to the plans in order to get Environment Agency approval.

Mail Scam to be avoided

Steve Cheesman, Membership Secretary, has brought the following to our attention. "A card is posted through your door from a company called PDS (Parcel Delivery Service) suggesting that they were unable to deliver a parcel and that you need to contact them on 0906 6611911 (A premium rate number). DO NOT call this number, as this is a mail scam originating from Belize. If you call the number and you start to hear a recorded message you will already have been billed £15 for the phone call."

Political Party Conferences - Edited from Disability Now,

Labour Party - Hundreds march over welfare reform - Elizabeth Choppin

The welfare reform debate came to the boil as hundreds of disabled people demonstrated outside Labour's conference in Manchester. The Coalition Against The Welfare Reform Bill protest involved organisations from across the country. Flanked by police vehicles, the group marched from the city centre to the conference centre chanting "New Labour, slave labour".

Simone Aspis, parliamentary affairs officer for BCODP, said the government's plans to move one million people off benefits could force disabled people into inappropriate work.

Protesters were also concerned that the reforms will hand "lucrative contracts" to "unaccountable" organisations in the private and voluntary sector.

But Anne McGuire, minister for disabled people, told the Labour Party Disabled Members Group fringe meeting that welfare reform was "not about cutting benefits". She acknowledged there were still many unanswered questions and said she expected many of those details to be "picked up and discussed" during the bill's committee stage.

Conservative Party - Hunt hints at single assessment system - John Pring

A Conservative government would move towards a single assessment of disabled people for all the services and benefits they receive. Jeremy Hunt, the shadow disabled people's minister, said a simplified process would mean disabled people would not have to go through a "plethora of assessments". But he said it would be difficult to enable different government departments to accept each other's information. He said simpler assessment procedures would mean "much more money goes into the pockets of disabled people rather than being spent on commissioning and assessment".

Mr Hunt said his party would not announce its new disability policies for another year, following a review process, but it would aim to remove disincentives to work from the benefits system. He wanted to make it easier for people with fluctuating conditions to "step in and out of the benefits system" and avoid losing the "benefits package they have spent months and months negotiating".

Liberal Party - Party backs independent living centres - Priya Kotecha

Liberal Democrats have backed a motion calling for user-led independent living (IL) centres in every local authority area within four years. The IL motion - the party's first new disability policy since 1999 - called for a social model perspective and "represents a long-term ambition to significantly improve the position of disabled people in society". And it backed individual budgets for disabled people to replace the "one-size-fits-all provision of services", and a removal of barriers to employment. The party also wants to see stronger minimum statutory standards for provision of services to disabled people.

The motion came as the party released a new paper that aims to set out a long-term framework for its disability policy*. Presenting the motion to the conference, Danny Alexander, shadow minister for disabled people, said "What the motion does do is commit the party to a radical progressive new policy framework which puts the rights of disabled people to live independently as equal citizens at the heart of our approach."

Dame Jane: Assisted dying is 'bill of fear' - Edited from Disability Now, Priya Kotecha

A leading disability rights campaigner has told Liberal Democrats the main reason people seek assisted suicide is because they "do not want to be a burden".

Jane Campbell, a DRC commissioner, told a fringe meeting that the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Joffe's assisted dying bill, which aims to legalise assisted suicide, was "a bill of fear". She told the meeting, organised by the DRC, Not Dead Yet and the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre, that she was aware the Liberal Democrats were "supportive of euthanasia".

She said the bill failed to secure the endorsement of any organisation of disabled people and "raises deep concerns about how we are viewed by society and especially health service professionals".

What is going on and How to contact CILL:

What and When:

What's On	When	Where
CILL 30+/Drop-in	24 November 2 - 4pm (Talk on recycling from 3pm.)	The Clubroom 21 Marton Close Off Firhill Road Bellingham SE6 3SS
Hydrotherapy	27 November 3.30 – 5 pm	Please contact CILL
Out & About	26 November 1 – 3pm	Ladywell Park Ladywell Road Ladywell SE13 (By the café)
Advocacy	29 November 1 – 4 pm	The Albany, Deptford
Hydrotherapy	4 December 3.30 – 5pm.	Please contact CILL
CILL 30+/Drop-in	8 December 2 - 4pm (update on Quercus from 3pm.)	The Clubroom 21 Marton Close Off Firhill Road Bellingham SE6 3SS
Out and About Jenny is away - 10th cancelled but 17th instead	10 December Cancelled	Ladywell Park Ladywell Road Ladywell SE13 (By the café)
Hydrotherapy	11 December 3.30 – 5 pm	Please contact CILL
Advocacy	13 December 1 -4 pm.	The Albany, Deptford

If you are interested in any of these events and would like to know more, if you need advice or support or advocacy or just have an issue about your independent living that you do not know how to deal with please contact CILL at campaign@fsmail.net or call 020 8776 6967.

"Independent Living is not a service, it is freedom; it is liberation; it is equality for disabled people"

SUPPORTED BY CAPITAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION – NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL UNIT

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