

Ending the charging system for non-residential care for Disabled adults in England

Research methodology

Through this research, Disability Law Service (DLS) wanted to examine how local authorities in England manage their home care charging policies, and how they are impacting local Disabled residents. We also wanted to explore what strategies have been employed by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F) to abolish home care charges, so that other local authorities could learn from this. To do this, we created a mixed method research design gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected throughout the research process using both primary and secondary research methods.

FOI requests

In September 2021, DLS contacted 40 local authorities seeking a response under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI 2000) to 7 questions related to how they charged Disabled adults for non-residential care (the FOI request). DLS selected these 40 local authorities (representing over 25% of the local authorities in England who charge Disabled adults for home care based on their geography, size and political leadership. This ensured the sample size was reflective of the country as a whole. 10 of these 40 local authorities were based in the London area and the remaining 30 in the rest of England.

DLS created a template table to assess each local authority's compliance with the public sector equality duty (PSED). The template provided prompts sourced from relevant case law and guidance. Certain prompts were factual, such as whether the local authority had made available information which demonstrated compliance with the PSED in the form of a written compliance record (WCR), and if so, when this document was dated.

Each local authority was also sent a FOI request with questions, for example the number of Disabled adults who were: (i) provided with non-residential care and support; and (ii) charged for such care. We requested data in each financial year or calendar year since April 2017. The relevant statistics collated from local authority responses were imported into a spreadsheet recording results by year. The results were then analysed and for some of the results, a set of graphs were produced.

In March 2024, we sent a follow-up FOI request to all 40 local authorities and the adult social care teams were contacted to ask whether there had been any significant changes to their policies since we first enquired in 2021. This data was then analysed against the same template previously used to assess their compliance with the PSED.

Questionnaires

DLS designed 2 questionnaires that were completed by a self-selected sample of 113 Disabled adults. The first questionnaire was completed by 96 Disabled adults in England who are currently charged for home care. The second questionnaire was completed by 17 Disabled adult residents in H&F who currently receive home care free at the point of use. The questionnaires were promoted through different platforms including the DLS website, H&F website, and by Action on Disability, a Disabled people's organisation in H&F. Participation was anonymous, although participants were given the option of providing their personal details. The first questionnaire consisted of 19 questions, the second 15. We asked introductory questions in both about their home care experiences and their general background. Subsequent questions related to Disabled residents' opinions on relevant statements. Respondents' possible answers to these questions ranged from 'strongly

agree' to 'strongly disagree', alongside the options of 'not applicable', 'neutral' and 'do not know'. Several of these questions ('statement questions') gave respondents the option to provide additional comments alongside their selected answer.

Respondents were able to complete the questionnaires over the period they were 'live'. The questionnaire of Disabled adults in the rest of England was live from the 28th February until the 28th March 2022. The questionnaire of H&F Disabled adult residents was live from the 6th May until the 6th June 2022.

Focus groups and real-life stories

DLS held 2 focus groups. The first focus group was held on the 27th April 2022 with a self-selected sample of Disabled clients and service users from local authorities across England (excluding H&F). The main objective of the focus group was to consider the impact of non-residential care charges on Disabled adults in England. Attendees were asked about the following: their experiences and thoughts on the home care charging system; the financial impact of home care charges; the physical, mental and emotional impact; whether Disabled people are consulted sufficiently when local authorities implement changes in the charging system; the changes they would like to see; and their opinions on the potential abolition of home care charges.

The second focus group was held on the 9th August 2022 with self-selected members of Action on Disability's Direct Payment Peer Support Group who are residents in H&F. The main objective of this focus group was to consider the impact of the abolition of non-residential care charges on Disabled people. Attendees were asked about the following: their experiences of care and charging prior to living in H&F; the physical, mental and emotional impact of home care charges; their experiences of care and the charging system in H&F; and the impact of the abolition of home care charges in H&F.

We also collected 9 real-life stories from Disabled adults in H&F and the rest of England to provide more qualitative evidence as to the effects of home care charges. The real-life stories were shared from people who took part in our questionnaires and focus groups and other non-project participants from H&F who came forward, wishing to share their story.

Secondary analysis

Secondary analysis was also conducted on data provided by H&F to assess how it abolished home care charges. This involved examining key strategic documents and financial information provided to us by H&F and other information and documents available via H&F's website. We also spoke with various staff members, including the Strategic Director of Social Care, the Strategic Leads for Co-production, the Head of Finance and councillors to analyse the process H&F undertook to abolish home care charges. The staff members were happy to answer any follow-up questions we had relating to their strategy.