

Paper to Years Ahead Board from the Elders Council of Newcastle

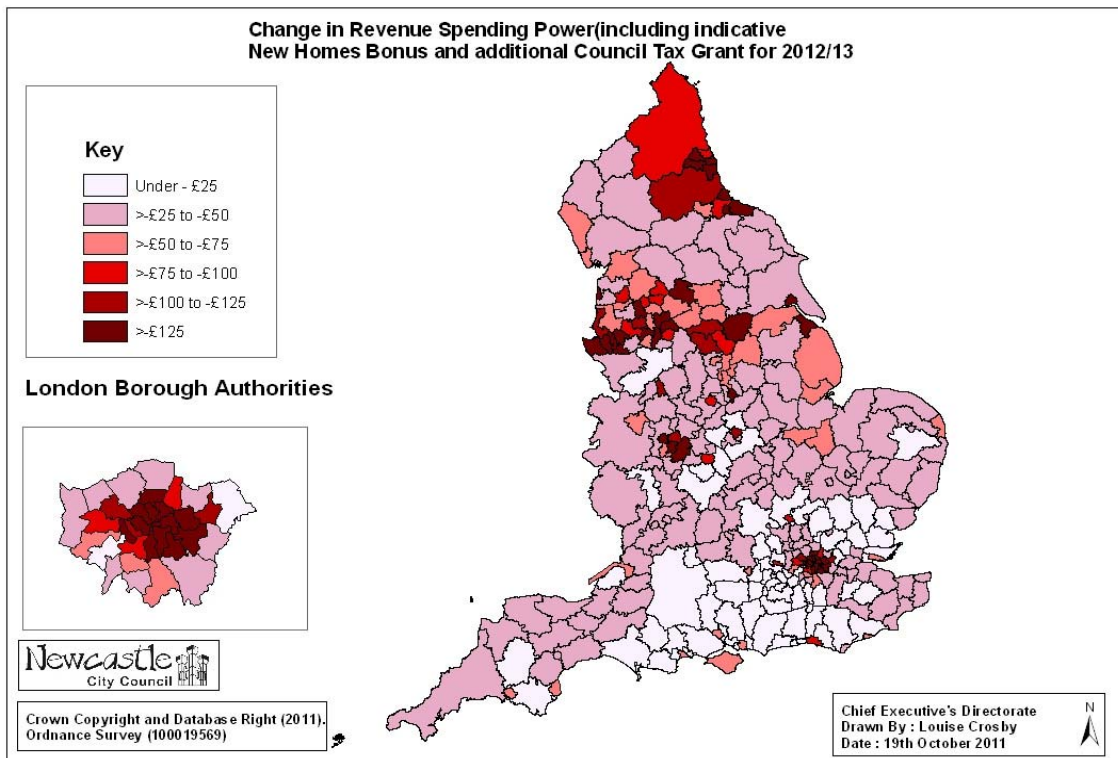
Introduction

In its discussions with Newcastle City Council on the current budget proposals the Elders Council of Newcastle has identified that the North East is disproportionately affected by the government's Comprehensive Spending Review and we believe that this will translate into a significant impact on the quality of life of older people in the region and their ability to maintain their independence. The Elders Council requests that Years Ahead considers the issues raised in this paper, based on our knowledge and understanding of the position in Newcastle, along with evidence from other forums in the region and takes the opportunity to raise this issue at the meeting of the UKAFA on 22nd February. This paper is a starting point, and the Elders Council is willing to work with Years Ahead and other forums to produce a submission for UKAFA.

Evidence from Newcastle

In the introduction to Newcastle City Council's budget papers, it illustrates how the North East, and urban authorities across the country, including many of the most deprived areas of the country, have been given much bigger cash cuts than many authorities in the rural areas and in the south as a result of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

Newcastle City Council has produced several 'heatmaps' which graphically show the difference in the reduction in spending power faced by councils around the country, shown in terms of the reduction per person in each council area of England. The following map shows the cumulative impact of spending power changes in 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13. It includes the reductions in grant, as well as the extra Council Tax Freeze Grant and an estimated increase in New Homes Bonus in 2012-13. The darker areas have the higher cuts in funding. Newcastle's spending power will have fallen by £144 per person over the period, which is much higher than changes in many other councils, particularly in the south and south east, where around 80 councils are facing reduction of less than £25 per person.



Source: Let's Talk Newcastle – a fair budget for a fairer city December 2011

What are the implications for older people?

Although Newcastle City Council has made a commitment to continue to provide services for older people with 'substantial' and 'critical' need (FACS criteria), in its analysis of the budget proposals, the Elders Council of Newcastle has identified that the **cumulative** effect of budget proposals will have negative impact on older people's ability to maintain their independence. Considered in isolation, a case can be made that any one of the proposals will only have a minimal effect (e.g. increase in the cost of meals at home from £2.50 to £3.00), however, taken together proposals start to paint a difficult picture, especially for those who are becoming frail and in need of support. We believe that it is likely that other authorities in the North East region are in a similar position.

Newcastle City Council has recently made a commitment to the Dublin Declaration on Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. This is part of the WHO's Global Age-Friendly City programme which recognises the urgent need to address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population. The Dublin Declaration recognises that:

What is needed is new thinking and practice, supported by evidence, that focuses on promoting quality of life and well-being, valuing the

contribution older people make in their communities, promoting their functional capacity, and removing the barriers which limit or inhibit their choice and ability to live life to the full.

An age-friendly city or community encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

It is the challenge of the community and its social organisations to promote more favourable conditions for the full development of all persons, including that of older people, avoiding or removing all causes that hinder or prevent such development.

It is difficult to see how these aspirations can be achieved in our current context. The issues that we have identified are as follows:

- The importance of independent and impartial information and advice services, in particular in relation to housing and care options and financial advice. Many of the ‘certainties’ in later life no longer hold true, and it is therefore vital that older people are given the tools to help them to make informed choices. The government’s decision to fund the national, independent housing and care advice service, *First Stop* is a step in the right direction.
- People should be able to take steps to delay the need to use care services. Improved housing, better transport, help to reduce loneliness and build up social contacts, and support to remain healthy and to manage long term conditions should all contribute to meeting this aim. There are risks that with pressure on budgets, we do not focus on the need for investment in prevention. One example of this is reduced investment in practical support services such as handyperson schemes. This is of particular concern given the evidence recently published in CLG’s Handyperson Evaluation report which cites that: *Investment in handyperson services leads to avoided costs elsewhere. In particular the biggest costs that can be avoided are with social services. Financial benefits of handyperson services could be significantly greater than this as the scope of this modelling has been limited to benefits for which a financial value can be attributed. Benefits such as improving older people’s independence, quality of life and sense of wellbeing can also be achieved, but are not quantified in the model. (page 2).*

- The importance of housing to the quality of life of older people. The Coalition's commitment to *'help elderly people live at home for longer through solutions such as home adaptations and community support programmes'* is welcomed. However, this needs to translate into a greater variety of new housing for older people, and the future proofing of the design of all new homes, in order to offer older people real choice. It also requires that attention be paid to housing support services. For example, changes in the sheltered housing officer (warden) support attached to sheltered housing may be needed, particularly in the light of the opportunities presented by new technologies, but it is important not to overlook the importance of human contact and support, especially for frailer and more vulnerable older people.
- Changes in care at home services which result in frailer and vulnerable older people being given less time from a care worker, and the potential implications for the quality of care and support they receive. Social care is too often seen as an emergency, task-orientated service, providing support on the narrow front of meals, getting people up or putting them to bed, helping with toileting, or administering drugs. This lacks any ambition to treat people as an individual and can lead to a lack of care and compassion. It means that other needs which improve people's quality of life such as support to leave the house or meet other people are often forgotten. This is particularly concerning given the findings in the recent EHRC report *'Close to home: An inquiry into older people and human rights in home care.'*
- Proposals to tender Care at Home services will also reduce choice for older people who may not want to take cash instead of care – ie older people who may not want the trouble of managing cash payments. This means a "two tier" system – older people should still be able to have choice and control over the care and support they need.
- Lack of capacity and resource to develop supportive communities and models of mutual support, which have been identified as an important component of lifetime neighbourhoods¹. There is also emerging evidence from the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Better Life programme of the

¹ *CLG Lifetime Neighbourhoods Bevan M. Croucher K. December 2011*

importance of these models of support and how they might be developed.

Recommendation

The Elders Council believes that it is important that we should take every opportunity to raise these issues with government and that we do not wait until it is too late and the impact of these changes has significantly blighted the lives of older people in this region. We recommend therefore that further work is done on producing a paper which can be presented at the UKAFA meeting on 22nd February on behalf of older people's forums in our region.

1 February 2012

Amended 9 February 2012