



centre for
independent
living in kent

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Dear KCC member,

As a charity which represents disabled people of all varieties, CILK has to strike a balance between supporting those people to independent living and campaigning where this basic need is denied us. In an ideal world, there would be no need for our campaigning role, but sadly disabled people feel under attack as never before – for daring to exist and apparently being the cause of everyone else's high taxes.

We don't feel our wishes are unreasonable; we are not asking for six (or even five) figure incomes – or a life of luxury; we are merely asking for a life. Traditionally we are an easy target – as a disparate group of individuals all with difficulties, even if we do protest, social attitudes are such that we are doomed from the start. The collective umbrella of a disability charity is therefore crucial.

At present, we wish to express our deepest disappointment at our KCC elected representatives regarding the "fairer" charging policy for domiciliary care.

24,500 questionnaires were sent out for the consultation process; ignoring abstentions, proportions voting against these changes were in a clear majority. CILK feels sure that other correspondence beyond our own was received in the run-up to the debate, yet no opposition was even mentioned. Indeed, only two members of the scrutiny committee (notably opposition party members) even dared to speak up for disabled people at all.

Furthermore, of the two letters we sent all 84 members beforehand, only four (4.76%), were gracious enough to even reply. One of these proclaimed such disgust at our tone that he used it as an excuse to dismiss our cause completely. As an elected member, does this imply that his opinion carries more weight than our experience?

There is a fundamental dichotomy with the non-disabled deciding what is for the best for people with disabilities; at best they are well-meaning but naïve; at worst they are positively destructive. When the primary motivation is figures on a balance sheet, it is for the good of no-one. Calling it "fairer" does not make it so; it is comparable to the abuser defining abuse, whereas it is the person on the receiving end who has a better idea of this.

As rational, decent human beings, we can only assume you do not wish to directly hurt people – especially those who are already hurting for one reason or another. As elected members, you have it in your power to help people – yet you seem intent on making already difficult lives as miserable as possible – and robbing us of our meagre incomes to boot.

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We also suspect that you really do not understand the low incomes that disabled people are living on. As a rough guide, most disabled people have an annual income **well** below the tax threshold. Yet the increased charges we are being asked to pay far outweigh what KCC members are willing to yield from their allowances (which begins well **above** the tax threshold).

Despite protestations to the contrary, it is impossible to shake off the feeling that the entire consultation was farce and all decisions were taken months ago. Comparing it to an environmental consultation with the question "which of these four roads would you like?" the answer is actually none – though sorry, that's **not** an option. In this case we are getting all four roads regardless of our views! Introducing the four measures in steps, two in January and two in April in itself is discriminatory, setting different groups of disabled people up against each other and is surely in contravention of the Disability Equality Duty.

We are also extremely concerned that the reassessment process, now to be carried out on an annual basis, is already being disguised as the usual review from the past. At the very least we would ask for explicit clarity that it **is** reassessment from scratch.

Really – are we being greedy? You decide - this is what we would like:

- Some form of income to cover basic living expenses (without having the state grab it back).
- To be able to get up in the morning and go to bed at night.
- Good basic hygiene – not least to avoid the accompanying health problems that the opposite creates.
- Adequate nourishment.
- A bit more of a life than 18 hours per day slumped in front of the TV aimlessly and lonely.
- Autonomy over our own lives - to eat, sleep and go to the loo when we need it, not when someone else is willing to let us. Autonomy to make our own decisions about what's best for us – not to have someone else dictate what they think is "for our own good".

What we are asking for, therefore, is what non-disabled people take completely for granted. "Independent living" does not mean that we fail and lose all autonomy, reasoning and awareness because we need others to help us achieve these things; it does imply that these matters are **our** choices and not those of a remote third-party.

To prove you are being truly transparent, please could you supply answers to the following queries under the Freedom of Information Act:

- The total cost, including staff time, of this consultation process.
- The true cost, including staff time, of the annual reassessment process.

I believe under customary FOI processes you have 28 days to supply this information to us.

Very few disabilities improve over time and the increased amount of stress you will be creating to disabled people is likely to cost everybody much more in the long run.

Yours sincerely,

Allen Jones (Honorary Chairman)