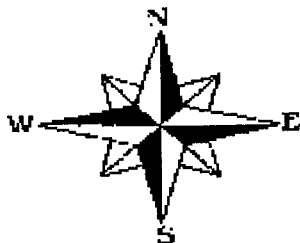


COUNTY DURHAM AND DARLINGTON MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

*Promoting Positive Mental Health for Service Users
In County Durham and Darlington*



C/o Waddington Street Centre
Waddington Street
Durham
DH1 4BG

10th June 2010

Dear Councillor Todd,

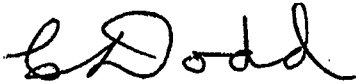
Thank you for your letter dated the 28th April. I have now had the opportunity to discuss your letter with my colleagues at the County Durham and Darlington Mental Health Forum which took place on Monday 7th June.

We appreciate the reasons for the decision not to table our report at the last adult wellbeing and health overview and scrutiny committee meeting. However we would like to point out that we were not given adequate time to respond to the report produced by Officers of Durham County Council. Kate Harrington informs us that she received an e-mail on the morning of Friday 16th April from Stephen Gwilym with a copy of the Durham County Council report enclosed. Kate then sent this out to some of the members of the forum so by the time we had received it and managed to discuss this as a group we had very little time in which to respond for the meeting on the 26th April, in fact we had less than five working days. We are disappointed that we were not given sufficient time to consult with our members and send an appropriate response in a timely fashion. This raises some important issues about how service users and carers are involved in the scrutiny process and we feel this issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible for any future involvement to be meaningful.

We would expect any future reports to be sent to us at least two weeks before an overview and scrutiny meeting so that we can adequately consult with our members and provide a representative response. We would like to point out that we are not paid workers, we are volunteers and many of us do not have access to e-mail. In fact in a recent survey conducted by the Mental Health Involvement Service, 67% of service users and carers in County Durham did not have 'easy access to a computer'. We would also like to point out that we have an agreed set of standards for involving mental health service users and carers in meetings. These have been agreed with Durham County Council and NHS County Durham and Darlington. I have enclosed a copy for your information.

At our last Forum meeting it was agreed by members that Rosemary Hassoon and Peter Irving would represent forum members at the next scrutiny meeting on the 23rd June. We are glad to hear that you are aiming to ensure a balanced view of the progress in the reshaping of Adult Mental Health Day Services is considered and that the views of the people who use this service contribute to the process.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Dodd', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Carol Dodd

Acting Vice Chair, County Durham and Darlington Mental Health Forum

Cc David Haw, County Durham LINK

Recommendations for Workers when involving service users and carers in meetings.

These recommendations have been put together by the service user and carer forums in County Durham and Darlington. Please note that service users and carers appreciate that many workers are already following these good practice guidelines. These recommendations were developed to support involvement and ensure that it is a positive experience for all.

- Clarify the reason for involving or inviting service users and carers and ensure everyone understands the purpose of the work or activity.
- Discuss, agree and make clear the roles, responsibilities and expectations of everyone involved. Clarify the authority of any decision making. Produce role descriptions and specifications to recruit people.
- Involve service users and carers at the earliest opportunity of a project or programme and ensure they have equal influence over its direction and the way it is carried out.
- Have an open, democratic and transparent process when inviting people to be involved. Be clear about any application and selection process.
- More than one representative should be invited to attend, best practice guidelines recommend at least two representative should be invited to attend meetings
- Be clear about what skills and knowledge you are expected to have/what will be expected of service users and carers?
- Be clear about what you expect from a service user/carer representative
- Provide service users/carers with a full, detailed, clear explanation of the purpose of the meeting.
- Provide service users/carers a copy of the agenda in advance of the meeting.

- Ensure that all papers are provided with enough time to consider all points and information. Papers should be provide at least 2 weeks in advance of the meeting
- Clarify points/summarise actions at end of meeting giving service users the opportunity to query anything that has not been clear.
- Keep people informed of developments during and beyond the project or group.
- Check how people like to receive information sent to them (for example email, post, through an organisation, in large print) and follow their wishes.
- Ensure the Chair is well briefed about who is in the group or meeting and offers encouragement to enable all voices to be heard.
- Please consider all of the points below when organising meetings which involve service users/carers in meetings
- Timing of meeting.
- Venue/access.
- Expenses/transport provision.
- Give plenty of notice of the meeting
- Provide juice or water in case service user or carer representatives need to take medication
- Service users and carers have the right to leave a meeting for any reason, if this is necessary it should be done as quietly as possible.
- Meetings should be jargon free.