

March 2013

yourvoice

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Why are disabled being singled out?

There is mounting evidence to suggest that the Government is deliberately victimising the disabled and chronically ill under the guise of welfare reform. On pages 4 and 5 we summarise some of this evidence, but what most justifies the allegation are two particular items:

- 1, the Government's continuing refusal to carry out a Cumulative Impact Assessment into the effects of its reforms on individuals and families, despite repeated requests from all sides.
- 2, Statistical evidence that shows benefits and local authorities (which are critically important to welfare provision) are the two big losers when it comes to cutbacks.

The big question has to be: Why? What have the disabled and the chronically ill done to deserve the vicious treatment they are receiving? What other European country is treating its disabled citizens in such a way? Few would disagree that as a nation we need to make cuts in spending, but the cuts in care and

welfare are out of all proportion to the percentage of national spending for which the ill and disabled account.

The material we have assembled on pages 4 and 5 blows away the spurious nonsense about everyone having to suffer their fair share

because of tough economic times. And it also blows away claims that the 'worst off' (defined how?) are being protected from the heaviest cuts. These are precisely the people who are being hit in the cruellest way. When did Europe last have an elected government that sank this low!

I know the answer to that!

Veteran pub quizzers and mere beginners will all feel at home when SDN holds its first ever intellectual extravaganza at The Crown, in Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, on Tuesday 26 March.

Manager of The Crown, Steve Davies, is very kindly holding that evening's quiz night on behalf of SDN, plus a raffle. He is also going to organise the questions and help

with the publicity. (With landlords like that, it's enough to make you turn to drink!)

So SDN members, rise to the challenge! You will soon be getting a tap on the shoulder from Ruby asking you to start or join a team of three or more.

Don't wait – get started now. Line up family and friends to have a go!

Quarterly Meeting to be held at new venue

The Pub Quiz is just part of a busy month for SDN. On 13 March we have our quarterly meeting with one of our guest speakers being Jackie Jeffrey of Citizens Advice Shropshire. The venue is a new one - Mears Group in Monkmoor are great supporters of SDN and are lending us their conference room for the meeting, which runs from 11.00 - 1.00. Please don't miss it! On 15 March is our night of magic and fun - see page 3

Among the rest of the news ...

- Disabled made to work for free - page 6
- What's an LTB? Find out on page 8
- 59 charities protest at 1% benefit cap - page 10
- Carers 'near breaking point' warns Mencap - 13
- MPs on all sides slam Atos over deaths - 15
- Shropshire Council answers SDN members' Blue Badge questions - pages 16 and 17



See and Hear is back again in May

The See and Hear Exhibition 2013 will showcase products and services relating to sight and hearing loss, with special presentations, the Bionic Ear, the Sensory Tunnel and much else.

This year exhibition is being held at Sundorne Sports Village, in Sundorne Road, Shrewsbury, on Wednesday 15 May from 10am - 4pm.

The Bionic Ear Show, which was a big hit last year and is set to be a major centre of attention again, is an interac-

tive presentation on how the ear works by Tobin May of Deaf Research UK. You can get a sneak preview at www.bionicearshow.org

Visitors to the Sensory Tunnel walk through the pitch black tunnel and experience a taste of life without sight. People can smell freshly mown grass and hear traffic and countryside noises.

Under their feet, they can feel a surface that simulates grass and a Braille pavement. They are also able to

feel walls made of brick, grass, wooden fencing and wire fencing.

See and Hear also includes complimentary eye screening by the Shropshire Local Optical Committee.

BSL & deafblind Interpreters are available during the day, and a free shuttle bus will run every half hour from Shrewsbury train station, with the first bus at 9.30

For further details visit: <http://bit.ly/AhQEuv>

Sight Loss? Hearing Loss?



See and Hear Exhibition 2013
Wednesday 15 May
10am - 4pm
Sundorne Sports Village,
Sundorne Road,
Shrewsbury, SY1 4RQ
For more information or to book a stall, please contact Pauline on 01584 871420
Email: Pauline.rose@shropshire.gov.uk



Complimentary Eye Screening Prevent Avoidable Sight Loss



Don't miss this great opportunity to check the health of your eyes! Complimentary Eye Screening using the very latest OCT scanner by Topcon will be able to detect early signs of potential problem in a way not previously possible. Shropshire Local Optical Committee will be offering a unique opportunity to visitors at See and Hear

'Safe Place' plan to aid victims of hate crime

A new approach to help victims of hate crime is being developed in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, involving the Police, Mencap, SDN, both local authorities and several welfare agencies working together.

The new approach is already proving highly successful in some other parts of England, including Hampshire and North Yorkshire. Shropshire already has an effective scheme in place being run by Shropshire Council and supported by West Mercia Police, who see the new approach as an ideal way to build on what they already do. Initial meetings have been held to start planning but the partners involved say it is still early days and the scheme will not be fully operational for several months.

'The new scheme aims to do two things,' explained Sergeant David Braid, of the Antisocial Behaviour Unit based at Police headquarters in Monkmoor, Shrewsbury. 'First, it will help vulnerable people who are

victimised or who become anxious or concerned while in a public place by providing them with a refuge in an identified local shop or other business. This safe place will enable a phone call to be made to a trusted friend or family member, who will either collect the person or advise them on what they should do.

'Second, it will help people report hate crimes. Reporting Centres, which may or may not also be Safe Places will be established in every town in both local authority areas. 'We know that hate crime is hugely under-reported. There are many reasons for this, and Reporting Centres are an attempt to encourage people to report hate crime by providing an environment where they feel safe and comfortable and can choose how they want to proceed.

'For instance, some people would not be comfortable going to a police station to report a hate crime, others would feel daunted by having to fill in complicated forms, yet others would

feel they were drawing attention to themselves. Reporting Centres will try to be reassuring for the victims.' Places that are initially being considered as Reporting Centres include libraries, housing trust offices and Citizens Advice offices.

Each Safe Place and Reporting Centre would have a distinctive sign to identify it. 'Progress on implementing the scheme will be as rapid as possible but there is a lot to do so it will be some time before it is up and running,' said Sgt Braid. 'In the meantime the partners developing the scheme would be very grateful to hear the views of the public.

'We would be particularly pleased to hear from any business that would like to know more about becoming a Safe Place or a Reporting Centre. It will not be onerous or time-consuming work but could offer great benefit to the victims of hate crime.' Email SDN at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net if you would like to get involved or find out more.



30 metres will leave thousands stranded

Last month the Government released details of how the qualification for the enhanced mobility rate for the new benefit PIP had been changed - and there was a brutal shock for disability charities.

Previously proposed criteria stated that people with physical walking difficulties, but who have no difficulty planning and following a journey, would qualify for the enhanced mobility component if they were unable to walk more than 50 metres. But this distance was slashed to 20 metres in the final criteria.

There was no prior indication that the change was being considered and none of the consultation

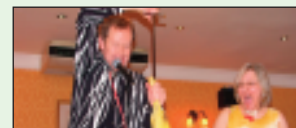
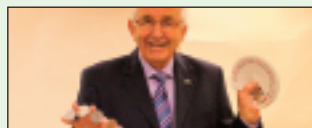


responses proposed it. The MS Society, as part of the Disability Benefits Consortium, says it is strongly opposed to the 20 metre limit and is calling for safeguards to ensure that people are assessed for their ability to complete tasks safely, reliably, repeatedly and in a timely manner.

This would take into account the impact of pain and fatigue when considering conditions like MS. It has written to the Minister for Disabled People to raise its concerns. The letter can be read in full on the MS Society website.

MS success - see p7

An Evening of Magic, Music, Comedy and Impersonation with Paul & Geoff Ray



FRIDAY 15 MARCH 2013 at 7.30 pm

BAYSTON HILL MEMORIAL HALL
Lyth Hill Road
Bayston Hill
Shrewsbury

Bring your own drinks, we will provide nibbles, tea and coffee.

Why not join us for a great evening of fun & laughter!

TICKETS £7.00 each - call Ruby 01743 340832
(also from Magic Snips 58 Ennerdale Road
Shrewsbury and various outlets in Bayston Hill)

Cheques should be made payable to
Shropshire Disability Network
Registered Charity Number 1148256

All proceeds for the work of
Shropshire Disability Network



A powerful collective voice for disabled people in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, run totally by volunteers

Cancer sufferers owe '£2.8m for fuel'

Rising fuel bills are forcing cancer patients into fuel poverty, according to Macmillan Cancer Support. The charity says 27,000 cancer patients struggled to pay fuel bills this winter, and owed utility companies as much as £2.8m.

Cost rises for fuel have added extra pressure to those on standard energy deals. Two years ago, customers on standard dual fuel tariffs

were paying up to 23% or £221 a year more than those on the cheapest deals, but the latest round of increases has increased the price gap to 30% or £312, according to Confused.com.

Macmillan said it had paid out £216,453 in the final week of last year, a third higher than the weekly average for 2012. It urged the Government to do more to help cancer

patients struggling with the rising price of fuel.

A spokeswoman said that many are living in cold homes, anxious about how they are going to cope with rocketing fuel bills.

'The Government is revising its fuel poverty strategy this year and we are calling on it to offer real protection to cancer patients.'
[Telegraph 23 Jan.2013]



A Cumulative Impact Assessment, as the term suggests, is the analysis of all effects on any given subject as they accumulate over time. CIAs are used in many areas where one-off analysis is simply not enough to give a clear long-term picture of consequences. That seems to be a good reason to do one for the effects of cuts on the disabled, unless of course the Government has something to hide.

Cuts targetted on disabled and poor

The Government aims to reduce the level of public spending in the UK by an overall cut of £63.4 billion by 2015, a reduction of 10.8%. However, not everything is being cut. The NHS and Pensions are protected. No. 10 and No. 11 have increased their own budgets by over 240% and the level of cuts to other services varies considerably.

If we exclude the areas of growth and protected services, there are in fact cuts of £75.2 billion.

Of these cuts more than 50% fall on just two areas, benefits and local government, despite the fact that to-

gether they make up only 26.8% of central government expenditure.

Most people do not realise that local government's primary function (over 60%) is to provide social care to children and adults.

In other words, the cuts are not fair but targeted, and they target people in poverty, disabled people, and their families.

The Government seems to have made no effort to understand the cumulative impact of its cuts on minority groups, especially those with the greatest needs. It has rejected calls for a Cumulative

Impact Assessment of the cuts despite the obvious fact that those with the most severe disabilities now face the combined impact of:

- Social care cuts
- Benefit cuts
- Housing cuts
- Regressive tax increases

For this reason The Centre for Welfare Reform, on behalf of the Campaign for a Fair Society, has done its own analysis - *A Fair Society?* - showing how the cuts target disabled people.

[Taken from www.centreforwelfarereform.org, a free on-line resource from The Centre of Welfare Reform Limited © Simon Duffy 2013]

Demands continue to grow for a cumulative impact assessment by the Government of the total effect its draconian cuts are having on the lives of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in society.

Pat's Petition has become a focal point for pressure to get a CIA and many thousands of people have signed it.

Despite everything, the Government keeps saying No, with the latest pathetic defence coming from Lord Freud in a House of Lords debate. Rejecting calls for a CIA, he said it was too difficult. 'I have looked at doing it, and you do not know what to put in and what to leave out. No

What can be achieved with half a bottle of gin!

one has done it in the past; it is not possible. Doing it year by year, as we do, is the best we can do - and it gives a fair view of what happens in a particular year.'

However, Baroness Hollis replied that she, 'with the help of Citizens Advice and Landman Economics, were able to work out pretty

precisely - to within tenpence or so - the total cumulative effect, since 2010, of the benefit cuts and tax changes' for a typical low wage family with two children.

'If we can do it over a weekend with wet towels and half a bottle of gin, I am quite sure that the Government can do it with the numbers of staff that they have in the Treasury,' she told the House.

'The answer is that the Government are not choosing to do it. They do not want to be shamed by us and others as to the effect of what they have done ... There cannot be any other reason why ... the Government continue to duck the consequences of their action.'



Why do 8% of the population carry 29% of all the cuts?

Members of the Disability Benefits Consortium and the Hardest Hit coalition are backing calls on the Government to publish information on the total impact of cuts to the benefits and support disabled people rely on.

The recent restriction of benefit rises to 1% a year for the next three years is the tip of the iceberg for disabled people who have already seen massive cuts to their benefits and support services, including – by 2015 – £18 billion from the benefits budget and £8 billion from social care.

With disabled people already twice

as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people, these changes represent a serious threat to the independence and quality of life of millions.

Disabled people make up 8% of the population but are being hit by a massive 29% of all cuts being implemented.

They and their families feel they are being 'squeezed' from all sides and are worried about losing some or all of the support they get and how they will live without it.

In 2012, the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) reported that

its inquiry into disabled people's right to independent living 'received evidence that impact assessments of current reforms were not adequately carried out, and did not take into account the likely cumulative impact of reforms on disabled people. We therefore argue that the Government should publish a unified assessment of the likely cumulative impact of the proposals on independent living.'

Yet the Government still refuses to seriously look into how the many different cuts will together affect disabled people.

[From Carer Watch:

<http://carerwatch.com/reform/?p=1442>

Headway backs calls for CIA

Headway, the brain injury charity, is supporting the work of 'Pat's Petition' - a call to the Government to 'stop and review the cuts to benefits and services which are falling disproportionately on disabled people, their carers and families.'

Headway says that every day it receives calls to its helpline from people desperate for support, fearful of how they will continue to live in the face of cuts. Many callers report receiving poor treatment during the claims process for key disability benefits such as ESA and DLA. Despite the attempts to improve the ESA claims process and the Work Capability Assessment, people still get stuck in a distressing cycle of failed applications, successful appeals, then reassessment.

If 'Pat's Petition' gets enough signatures there must be a debate in the Commons on cuts in benefit. It says in part: 'We the undersigned would like the Government to review the Welfare Reform Act and amend its contents in a fairer and more socially acceptable format.' The link is: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/41122>. Please go there!

'There has never been a greater need to pause' says Act Now for Autism

By Carole Rutherford on behalf of Act Now for Autism

The Welfare Reform Bill is impacting in a negative way within the autism community both financially and emotionally.

We fully support the team at Pat's Petition. There has never been a greater need to pause before continuing with measures that are having a catastrophic impact within our community.

Adults and families living with autism are finding it harder to cope with the changes every day. We were told that the reforms would ensure that those with the greatest needs would be taken care of. This is not what is happening.

We are hearing from adults with autism on a daily basis who are terrified about the prospect of a face to face assessment without anyone to enable them to commu-

nicate effectively. Adults with autism do not have the 'historic' evidence or otherwise that we are hearing will be necessary.

The bedroom tax is set to have a massive impact on families who cannot safely allow a child with autism to share a bedroom with their siblings. Families are going to be penalised for having a child with a disability.

It was once said that the moral test of Government is how that Government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the disabled.

Our Government is morally bankrupt. We need to be assured that Labour will not show the same lack of care and understanding towards the sick, needy and disabled.



Disabled made to work free for private firms

Private companies can now get free labour provided by claimants in the Employment and Support Allowance work-related activity group on the orders of Jobcentre Plus advisers or Work Programme providers. Refusal to agree means claimants will lose £71 a week from their benefit.

Although the rules say such work must be for the benefit of the community, cases of flagrant abuse have come to light.

On 12 February BBC Television's main evening News reported that a disabled young woman was forced to work for nothing in Poundland, with no training or prior discussion.

The Department for Work and

Pensions is yet to explain how being exploited by a multi-million pound business like Poundland qualifies as 'working for the community.'

There is no time limit on how long claimants can be forced to work, although the DWP claims that it will 'generally' only be for two weeks.

Providers are supposed to take into account a claimant's health problems and disabilities when deciding on a placement.

Private sector companies now have enormous power to threaten and bully claimants, something which is not mentioned in the oily words on the DWP's website, which include: 'The work placement has to benefit the community and must be appro-

priate to claimant's health condition, including location, hours of attendance and placement content. Any work-related activity is discussed fully with the claimant and consideration is given to their health problems or disabilities to ensure that any activity is appropriate to their personal circumstances.'

Mark Hoban, Minister for Employment, said: 'Some people on sickness benefits haven't worked for a long time or may not have had many jobs, which will make it harder for them to find work in the future.'

'Work experience is a very good way to increase someone's confidence and get them ready for their move into a job when they are well enough.'

Greens join benefits criticism

The Green Party has added its voice to criticism of the Government's changes to disability benefits, calling them insensitive to the real needs and concerns of disabled people.

It points out that the switch from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) this April will coincide with tougher rules on who can claim the top rate of support, which includes access to lease cars and specially converted vehicles.

Under the new rules, only those unable to walk more than 20 metres would qualify for support, but the previous distance was 50 metres.

Green Party spokesman Jonathan Bartley, who is also co-director of the Ekklesia think-tank, said: 'The new rules on the qualifying distance for the enhanced mobility rate completely undermine what

the Government claims the Personal Independence Payment will achieve. 'It will create greater dependence, not independence. It will mean exclusion rather than inclusion. Instead of saving money it will cost money through huge numbers of appeals, fewer disabled people being able to work and the detrimental impact on Motability related industries.'

'It is now also clear that the changes aren't targeted at those in need. They also fail to reflect the views of disabled people themselves. The fact that there has been no parliamentary debate on the new rules - something so fundamental and which will have such as devastating impact on so many - underlines how unrepresentative the changes really are. 'The way that the Government has tried to sneak the changes in at the last minute makes it clear that the Government knows this.'

Monkmoor Carers

The Monkmoor Evening Carers Group meet on the last Thursday of each month at the Monkmoor Hotel, in Monkmoor Road, Shrewsbury, from 7.00 – 8.30. All adult carers are welcome, and can meet one of Shropshire RCC's support workers. For more information contact Angela Evans at Shropshire Rural Community Council on 01743 341995

Holiday info

A website designed to give disabled travellers information on accessible holiday accommodation, attractions, activities, and related important issues is <http://www.disabledholidayinfo.org.uk/index.htm>

[From Shropshire ME Group Newsletter Feb]



Too little ... and still a long wait on care costs

Pensioners with savings of up to £123,000 will receive state support with their care costs under new government plans. But don't hold your breath, nothing will happen before 2017.

In a long-awaited announcement, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said the 'assets threshold' will rise (on a sliding scale) from the present £23,250 to £123,000. The Dilnot

Commission – which was appointed by David Cameron to make recommendations on the issue – had proposed a £100,000 assets limit.

The cap on costs that people pay for care is likely to be £75,000, more than double Dilnot's recommendation of £35,000.

But all this is based on 2017 prices, which is when the reforms come in.

It is not explained how anyone knows what 2017 prices will be. Under the Government's announcement, pensioners will have to pay care home accommodation costs up to an annual limit of £12,500.

While Dilnot's package of proposals would have cost the Treasury an expected £1.7bn a year, the trimmed down Government version is expected to cost £1bn.

MS action forces change by Government on new benefit

Action by the Multiple Sclerosis Society and its supporters has forced the Government to make a key change to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), making assessments fairer for people with fluctuating conditions.

PIP assessors will now be required by law to consider whether claimants can perform activities 'to an acceptable standard, safely, repeatedly, and in a reasonable time period.'

The campaigns officer at the MS Society, Samantha Kennedy, said they had been overwhelmed by the

support this campaign received. A total of 4101 people signed a letter to the Minister and 2732 people wrote to their MP – reaching a total of 624 MPs or 96% of the House of Commons. In the event, 28 MPs signed the letter.



Campaigners 'marched' the symbolic 20 metres to hand in the letter (Being able to walk 20 metres, the length of two buses, is all that is needed to condemn you in the cold eyes of PIP assessors).

While this is a step in the right direction, the MS Society remains extremely concerned about the strictness of the mobility criteria for the benefit.

'We are urging the Government to look at this again,' said Samantha Kennedy. 'We've proved that there is strength in numbers and we hope more people will support the campaign.'

That can begin by sharing this video - <http://youtu.be/7UKfgC3ZMLg>

[We are indebted to SDN supporter Martin of Wem for this invaluable information]

Inspired by blue, a new Oswestry group

Inspiration Blue is a new group formed by Kathleen Jones of Oswestry. Through personal experience of depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) she has won backing from national charity Depression Alliance and from Age UK, enabling her to form the group. It meets each Monday at Betty's Bazaar and Tea Rooms in English Walls, Oswestry, between 10.30 and noon.

Inspiration Blue is for anyone who suffers from SAD, depression, or is bereft or just 'feeling blue'. Kathleen says: 'I manage to cope for much of the year but then at Christmas SAD takes hold of me. Many people keep going on adrenalin until Christmas and then New Year kicks in and they start struggling.'

For further details, contact inspirationblue@hotmail.co.uk or call Kathleen on 07593 198802. She hoped in the future to start an evening group and this will happen when demand dictates.

Loo problems

The Bladder and Bowel Foundation has produced a card called 'Just can't wait' which states the holder has a medical condition and needs to use the toilet quickly. Most places you visit are willing to help out on production of the small card. A payment of £5 is requested. Contact the charity at 01536 533255 or visit www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org [From Shrewsbury MS Newsletter, Feb]

Micro-site offer

Smaller organisations can register with Charity Choice and get their own micro-site, an online space to share news and photos, publicise appeals, receive legacy pledges, advertise for goods, find volunteers and raise money. For info visit www.charitychoice.co.uk [From VCSA]



The great disability scam?

On paper, Linda Smith's job was to help the long-term unemployed, many of them disabled, to find jobs and move off benefits.

The reality, she said, was a corporate culture that saw staff in training sessions referring to those same people as LTBs - code for 'lying, thieving bastards.'

'That is how they are referred to,' she said of the clients of Triage, which is a key player in the Government's ambitious plan to pay private companies to move people from benefit into work.

There are 2.5 million long-term sick and disabled unemployed people in the UK. The cost to the taxpayer is £13bn a year. But the Government's £5bn Work Programme has identified 68,000 disabled people in receipt of incapacity benefit who it believes can work.

To achieve that, 18 main providers have been contracted to do the work and are paid in stages - when the clients are referred and when they find jobs. A further payment is made if they stay in work for two years. It is

Our headline
is the title of
a recent
BBC TV
Panorama
programme
- read on to
find out why

called payment by results.

Mrs Smith said the firms earn more money from taking on the disabled as clients because they were more difficult to place.

But once those people were on the books, and an initial fee paid, the company told its staff to spend as little time and effort as possible on helping them find jobs.

She said the practice is known as

'parking.' Four other former Triage employees told the BBC similar stories of being told to 'park' clients rather than actively help them find work. They also confirmed the use of the term 'LTBs' to describe their clients.

'They would be put on telephone interviews... just to make sure that there was this contact made so they could tick a box to say, "Yeah, they're still on the Work Programme",' Mrs Smith said.

In response to the allegations about parking, Triage said in a statement: 'It is standard practice, particularly for those clients that are sick or who have otherwise been unable to attend, to telephone them to check on their progress and maintain contact. Triage's delivery structure of the Work Programme does not allow for "parking".'

'The compliance requirements of the programme demand a frequency of contact and this together with our own commitment to excellence and meeting client needs means that "parking" is not an option.' Triage also said the term LTB referred to an 'isolated incident.'

'It's a disaster' - charity's view of Work Programme

Mrs Smith's concerns about the attitude of some Triage staff comes as a survey of charities and other organisations recruited to back up the 18 main providers conducted by the BBC found that many do not feel the Work Programme is delivering.

In the survey of 348 organisations listed with the Department for Work and Pensions, so-called 'third party' providers, 184 answered a series of questions about their involvement in helping the long-term sick and disabled to find work. The survey found:

- 77% of organisations with specialist expertise to support disabled people believe that expertise has not been correctly used by the main provider

- 80% had fewer referrals than they expected
- 40% had no referrals at all

And 40% said they were not actually part of the Work Programme, therefore should not be on the DWP's list.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People was one of the organisations that did sign on to help big companies to get the visually impaired into work. Steve Winyard, head of policy and campaigns, said the programme has failed to deliver the promised support.

'It is a disaster. The latest data that has come from the DWP shows that

there have been zero successful placements in work for blind and partially sighted people. That's meant to be the core outcome and it is just not delivering.'

Justin Urquhart Stewart is a financial analyst who examined the Work Programme's payment-by-results financial model. He said it was designed in a way that encourages companies to cherry-pick the people who are fairly easy to move into jobs. 'Sadly, if you do not have the experience, if you do not have any training and maybe you are disabled, then you're going to be left behind.'

[From Panorama: The Great Disability Scam? shown on BBC One, 28 January]



A page of bits and pieces about PIP, Atos and others. You can decide whether to laugh or cry!

PIP date change

The migration of many DLA claims over to PIP has been delayed until October 2015. The revised PIP introduction timetable will mean new claims by those in the trial post-code areas from 8 April this year, followed by new claims throughout the country in June. Reassessment for children reaching 16, for those whose circumstances have changed or for those whose existing DLA award comes to an end, will be this June. But reassessment of all other DLA claims, for those aged 16-65, will now start in October 2015.

Protection, but ...

Transitional protection under the Universal Credit system will be available to protect those who move over from the old system, for example ESA. However this protection will be eroded over time as it won't be uprated with inflation.

And it will end altogether if a claimant's circumstances change significantly - ie, a partner leaving or joining the household; a sustained (three-month) earnings drop beneath the level of work that is expected according to their claimant commitment; the Universal Credit award ending; and/or one or both members of the household stopping work.

Once transitional protection has ended it will not be applied to any future awards.

But one small scrap of humanity ...

Since January, new regulations have applied for Employment and Support Allowance. As well as some smaller changes to the descriptors (and exceptional circumstances rules), the new rules affect those receiving cancer treatment and no longer differentiate between non-oral and oral chemotherapy. The old rules meant claimants receiving radiotherapy lost out as they were often placed in the Work Related Activity Group for ESA.

The new evidence gathering process will see claimants with cancer being directed to a dedicated part of the ESA50 form, meaning they don't have to complete the whole questionnaire. Supporting medical evidence will be required from a relevant healthcare professional, which could include the claimant's oncologist, GP or, where appropriate, a specialist cancer nurse.

Atos abandons claimant in fire panic

Atos staff have been accused of taking a claimant in a wheelchair to the second floor of an assessment centre and then abandoning him when the fire alarm went off. According to the claimant, who has early onset Parkinson's: 'The doctor held the door open for us to come out but then ran down the stairs and left us there. We weren't allowed to use the lift and asked a security guard for help - he said he'd send someone but no one came. Eventually another security guard came past and stayed with us, even though he had been told to evacuate.'

Recording rules are probably illegal

It has emerged from an inquiry under the Freedom of Information Act (which cannot be ignored) that the DWP was advised in 2010 that obliging people to hire a sound engineer to record their medical was likely to be unlawful.

According to the DWP document, claimants should have the right to a recording not just of ESA medicals but of all medicals, including those carried out in their home. So, the fight is now on to get DLA and PIP medicals recorded. Capita has said it will do so for PIP in the area of the country for which it is responsible, but what will Atos do?

Secret lie detector tests

Capita has used lie detectors on claimants without their knowledge or permission. It is using Voice Risk Analysis software - originally created by Israeli intelligence for use on terror suspects - to check on council tax claimants in the London Borough of Southwark. See The Telegraph at: <http://tinyurl.com/cc94dv>

By making space available for paid advertising SDN hopes to offset the costs of the printed version of YourVoice, which is proving a great asset to readers who do not use computers.

This is a basic advertisement space - 98mm by 66mm. It costs £10 per issue, and advertisers get a free design and copywriting service. Their product or service will be seen both by our print and online readerships. It's a bargain! Interested?



PIP likely to hit Blue Badge holders

The Department for Transport has finalised rules that apply to PIP and the Blue Badge disabled parking scheme. They will give automatic eligibility to those who score eight points or more in the 'Moving Around' activity of PIP.

But there is a risk that many claimants will no longer qualify when they are reassessed under PIP. The new rules will affect existing badge holders when a current badge expires

and they need to apply for a new one. About a third of Blue Badges are currently issued to people who receive the higher rate of the mobility component of DLA.

Under PIP, if an individual does not automatically qualify for a badge, he or she can apply directly to their local authority under the 'with further assessment' criteria, the main one of which is for those who are unable to walk or have very serious difficulty in walking.

Charities unite to protest at 1% benefit cap

A total of 59 charities have spoken out against the decision to limit working age benefit increases to just 1% a year for the next three years. This includes ESA, with the exception of the support component. This cap will be imposed regardless of how much the cost of living increases in reality, pushing more and more disabled and ill claimants into debt and poverty.

Writing in The Observer, the charities said that Chancellor George Osborne's autumn statement had 'marked a watershed in our welfare system, breaking the long-standing link between benefits and either earnings or prices. The policies announced are a bitter blow for hundreds of thousands of low-income families struggling to make ends meet in the face of overwhelming austerity.

'Economic analysis of the Government's announcements shows clearly that the poorest have been hit hardest. 'Plans to cap increases in benefits and tax credits at a mea-

gre 1% for the next three years will far outweigh any gains from increasing the personal tax allowance. This will hurt children, leaving a damaging legacy,' the charities say.

'While the chancellor paints a picture of so-called "strivers" and "skivers", our organisations see the reality: families scraping by in low-paid work, or being bounced from insecure jobs to benefits and back again.

'The truth is that the vast majority of those who rely on benefits and tax credits are either in work, have worked, or will be in work in the near future.

'They and their families are making their contribution to society and are entitled to genuine security, as Beveridge intended.

'As we mark the 70th anniversary of the Beveridge report, which laid the foundations of the welfare state, we risk losing the very safety net that he intended. It is a punitive, unfair policy and must not happen.'

Workshops on health strategy

Shropshire Together is holding workshops in early March to train people in the skills needed to conduct community focus groups. They will concern the Health and Wellbeing Strategy outcomes and aim to identify priorities and activity that will allow these outcomes to be achieved.

The first step towards involving communities in helping develop health and wellbeing priorities from the patient/public perspective is to train people within local communities to conduct focus groups. Thus the workshops in early March.

They will be held on Tuesday 5 March from 2.00- 4.00 and on Thursday 7 March from 6.00-8.00. Both will be at Shirehall in Shrewsbury.

If you would like to take part, email your preferred date to karen.higgins@shropshirepct.nhs.uk or call 01743 277 593 [From VCSA]

Charity digital conference

A digital conference organised jointly by the Get Shropshire Online project from Shropshire Rural Community Council (RCC) and Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership is being held on Wednesday 6 March in Craven Arms. It will be full of ideas, resources and advice especially useful to the the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, but also of interest to others such as statutory organisations. Book through the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership. [From VCSA]



Shropshire chosen as pilot for new Health Partnerships

Shropshire has been chosen as one of 12 areas to be a pilot learning centre for Building Health Partnerships.

The programme will seek to improve health outcomes by supporting development between Clinical Commissioning Groups and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

Twelve areas will receive up to £50,000 each to support the Building Health Partnerships programme. It will be delivered by partners includ-

ing the National Association of Voluntary and Community Action, Social Enterprise UK, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and the NHS Commissioning Board.

Sonia Roberts, chair of Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA), said: 'Based on the track record of transparency, wider community and voluntary sector engagement and involvement of the Assembly and more recently the Shropshire Providers Consortium, we have been viewed as the ideal organisation to carry out

this piece of work in Shropshire. 'This is a significant milestone in the continued development of an inclusive VCSA Partnership for Shropshire, and its recognition amongst Health and Wellbeing Partners.'

Sarah Dodd, co-ordinator of the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly, will be leading the VCSA partners' team.

For more information visit www.commissioningboard.nhs.uk/2013/01/30/learn-sites/

Pooling skills will boost small local groups

New consortium to access opportunities for small organisations that are beyond individual reach

An organisation has been launched to support Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector groups and organisations. The Shropshire Providers Consortium is a community interest company, newly established by the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) to help small organisations bid for work from the public sector.

It will enable organisations to pool skills and experience to access opportunities they would not be able to reach alone. Membership of Shropshire Providers Consortium is open to any member of the VCSA. Any VCS group or organisation based in Shropshire (or delivering services/support in Shropshire) may join the Assembly for free.

More than 50 people attended the launch at the Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury, including voluntary organisations that have already signed up to the new consortium, public sector commissioners and individuals interested in knowing more about this innovative model of working. Clive Wright, Director of Operations at

Shropshire Council, spoke of the challenges ahead and the need for Shropshire Council effectively to commission the voluntary sector to deliver local services to local people.

Sonia Roberts, Shropshire VCS Assembly chair and also chair of SDN, said: 'Shropshire Providers Consortium has not been developed to deliver services itself or to compete with any existing organisations. Its purpose is to support Shropshire's voluntary and community sector to access new opportunities by working together and to ensure local organisations are best placed to deliver services for local people.'

To find out more about Shropshire Providers Consortium and its members email:

shropshireprovidersconsortium@gmail.com

or visit:

<http://www.shropshireprovidersconsortium.co.uk>

To become a member of the Shropshire VCS Assembly email

VCSAssembly@shropshire.gov.uk.

More details are available on the website:

<http://vcsvoice.org>

New research into pain of CFS/ME victims

A three-year study is being funded by the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Research Foundation into why around three quarters of people with CFS/ME suffer pain. The study will be conducted by scientists at three London institutions and will use a special method of imaging the brain to examine the pain matrix. They will also examine whether pain in CFS/ME is primarily due to problems in the muscles and joints or more due to the way the brain and spinal cord process pain.

The work is expected to improve understanding of how certain brain chemicals are involved and will give doctors, scientists and researchers reasons to test some currently available medicines as treatments for CFS/ME. Full details will be posted on the CFS Research Foundation website [From Shropshire ME Group Newsletter Feb 2013]



Brain injury: How social work helps with survival

Why do people who have suffered brain injury need social work support? Many brain injured survivors experience cognitive, behavioural, psychological and physical disability and subsequently exhibit degrees of impaired social competence, including disinhibited speech, impulsivity, poor social skills and judgement.

They can be egocentric, appearing (often unintentionally) selfish and self-centred. A scenario of vulnerable relationships and breakdown followed by the inability to forge new relationships is all too common.

Consequently, many brain injury survivors experience social isolation, low mood/depression and poor quality of life. When combined with barriers to returning to work or gaining work, resulting in reduced income and/or reliance upon the benefits system, the outcome for many can be very poor indeed.

Social work support can prevent or

reduce the impact of this downward spiral. What does a specialist brain injury social worker do?

The Sheffield brain injury social work team support survivors through the three main components of the brain injury care pathway: the acute stage, sub-acute stage (involving inpatient rehabilitation) and into the community.

Family members become incredibly distressed at the scale of impairment, disability, behaviour and personality change that emerge following brain injury. For many it will be catastrophic, others may downplay their loved one's level of disability and will remain unrealistic in potential goal attainment and recovery. Mutual adjustment can be delayed in these cases and it is the brain injury social worker's role to confront these issues, offering a solution-based empathic intervention.

Offering support to families is essential as, in many cases, they will be

the brain injury survivor's only life-long support network following rehabilitation discharge. Social workers offer families brain injury education to aid adjustment by raising awareness and providing behavioural management strategies, supported by the appropriate multi-disciplinary team members.

The brain injury team provides information, emotional support, onward referrals, signposting and community care assessments of need. The psychosocial goals-focused intervention provided by Sheffield head injury rehabilitation centre works to maximise the brain injured survivor's potential, whilst supporting ongoing adjustment.

The brain injury social worker is an integral element of this process and represents a positive example of health and social care working together.

[This is an extract from an article in Community Care online magazine, Feb 2013, by Simon Eggington, an advanced practitioner in the Sheffield brain injury social work team]

Big Debate presentations now available

The Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly, along with CLASP and Shropshire Disability Network, recently hosted 'The Big Debate' on the welfare reform changes.

The four speakers provided a lot of important information and there was a great deal of interest among the large audience in having a written record. PowerPoint presentations given on the day are now available from the VCSA at

<http://vcsvoice.org/2013/02/big-debate-report-and-presentations-now-available/>

They include the introduction to the debate; Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - Colin Smith of the

DWP; Universal Credit - Kairen Francis, Job Centre Plus; and Welfare Reform - Damien Carter, Shropshire Council. SDN carried a report in the February YourVoice, which is available on our website.

Tesco Charity Trust

Children with disabilities are among those who can benefit from Tesco Charity Trust Community Awards, which fund local projects supporting the welfare of children and education projects. The maximum grant is £4,000 and the minimum is £500 from a total fund of £600,000. Applications can be made between 1 May and 30 June. [From VCSA]



You are not alone

Going to our site is all it takes to meet others who understand what you are going through:

www.shropshire.gov.uk/community.nsf

Shropshire Self Help Groups Telephone



'Near breaking point'

Mencap has issued a warning that carers of people with a learning disability are 'at breaking point' as already inadequate short breaks provision is cut back and many are denied the assessments to which they are entitled.

A survey of 264 carers of learning disabled children or adults found that 80% of family carers were at breaking point while a similar percentage said their short breaks provision was insufficient. Half had not received a short break in the previous six months.

The survey was conducted from October to December last year.

Spending on short breaks for carers of adults with learning disabilities fell by 4% from 2010-11 to 2012-13, according to data obtained by the charity from 112 of England's 152 councils. It also found that there had been a 22% reduction in the number of adults receiving short breaks from 2010-11 to 2012-13, based on data from 76 councils.

Mencap said its findings showed that the situation had not improved for carers since a similar report into short breaks provision, *Breaking Out*, published in 2003; this also found that eight out of 10 carers had reached breaking point.

Besides cuts to short breaks provision, the charity found that 62% of carers had never had an assess-

Carers of those with learning disabilities can't take much more - Mencap

ment of their needs, despite most apparently being entitled to them.

By law carers should receive an assessment if they provide substantial and regular care. Among Mencap's survey respondents, 90% were providing 10 hours or more of care a day. Some 20% had been refused an assessment.

Some carers also reported that access to short breaks fell in the transition from children's to adults' services and when their loved-ones moved from council-commissioned services to personal budgets.

One carer, Nicola, whose son and daughter require 24-hour care, said: 'The stress, lack of social life and pressure on the wider family has made me feel like a failure and close to breaking point. Without short

breaks, I lose friends, lose my identity, and become isolated and unable to provide the care my children need.'

Mencap said the draft Care and Support Bill provides an excellent opportunity to provide carers of adults with learning disabilities with an entitlement to short breaks based on need.

Guidance published under the Bill should ensure that the threshold for an assessment was as low as possible and that councils have a clear system of determining need for short breaks.

It also called for transition to be strengthened so that 'adult short breaks services follow on as smoothly as possible from children's in terms of frequency, duration and location'

The Government has allocated £400m to the NHS to spend on short breaks for carers from 2011-15, and primary care trusts have been required to identify how much they are spending on breaks and ensure spending plans are agreed with councils. But Mencap said allocating funds to the NHS had disadvantaged carers of people with learning disabilities as the health service focused on carers of people who required specialist medical interventions or could benefit from rehabilitation. [From Community Care 13 Feb 2013]

Showcase chances for VCSA members

Shropshire Council is offering Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly members the opportunity to showcase their services using display and promotional materials, and help to advertise services and projects.

Under the plan, display material can be moved around larger council sites as a 'display of the week' and afterwards leaflets can be added to the council display racks in many venues. At larger council sites there will be a table display of leaflets, information sheets and contact details, with banners or displays if an organisation wishes. VCSA members won't have to staff the displays.

Shropshire Council's Customer Services Face to Face Team Leader has offered to schedule rolling dates so that any interested VSC organisations knows where services will be advertised and when.



Forced mental treatment hinders recovery - study

Many people with severe mental health needs feel that being subjected to compulsory treatment under the Mental Health Act has hindered their recovery, research has found.

A study of more than 80 service users' experiences of the Care Programme Approach (CPA) - a Department of Health policy meant to boost coordinated care for people with complex mental health needs - revealed that most participants with experience of forced care felt it had damaged their recovery.

The use of compulsory treatment under the Mental Health Act continues to grow. Last month the Care Quality Commission revealed that 17,503 patients were detained under the Mental Health Act in England in 2011-12, a rise of 5% from the previous year. Some 4,220 people were subject to community treatment orders, up 10% from 2010/11.

Some participants in the user-led study, which was conducted by the National Survivor User Network and the Mental Health Foundation, told

researchers that compulsory treatment was 'discriminatory, punitive' and a breach of human rights.

A minority of participants reported positive experiences of compulsory care, often because they felt 'sectioning had kept them safe' or helped them regain control, the report found.

While 59% of respondents felt that prescribed medication was supporting their recovery 'a lot', 18% said that drugs, when prescribed, never aided their recovery.

One participant, who was on a community treatment order, said he felt 'coerced and threatened' into taking medication that adversely affected him.

Researchers at the National Survivor User Network said they had found some evidence of good practice in the implementation of the CPA. But they warned that feedback from service users had exposed a number of perceived shortfalls in care, including reports of:

- A disproportionate focus on risk

management by professionals harming many people's recovery.

- Professionals' over-reliance on psychiatric diagnoses alone had often undermined service users' hopes for a whole person approach to care. Some 23% felt that professionals never acknowledged alternative ways of explaining mental health issues than psychiatric diagnoses.
- Professionals had threatened service users, with some voluntary patients told they would be sectioned if they tried to leave wards.
- A sexist approach to care in some services. Specific concerns included a failure to address issues such as childbearing or physical changes in female patients, such as the menopause.
- Racist treatment in some services had damaged the recovery of people from African and African Caribbean communities.
- Budget cuts had already made it difficult to obtain adequate support.

See more at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/articles/12/02/2013/118903/compulsory-mental-health-act-treatment-hinders-recovery-service-users-warn.htm?cmpid=NLC|SCSC|SCEUP-20130212-GLOB|news#sthash.wmm2mlee.dpuf>

[From Community Care 12 Feb]

Channel 4 wins rights to para-games

The International Paralympic Committee has awarded the UK television rights for the Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016 Paralympic Games to Channel 4, following its ground-breaking London coverage last year. The station's coverage of London 2012 broke UK viewing records for paralympic sport and reached 69% of the population.

Channel 4 will screen more than 45 hours from the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games, the most ever by a British broadcaster. In the lead-up to Rio 2016, it will show major international para-sport events including the IPC Athletics World Championships in Lyon and the IPC Swimming World Championships in Montreal.

For Rio 2016 Channel 4 is planning round the clock coverage with a commitment to screening a minimum of 200 hours including live coverage, highlights and the return of 'The Last Leg'.

Funding opportunities

Shropshire Rural Community Council (RCC) administers a number of grants to the voluntary sector for individuals, groups and established organisations. Grants are administered by different teams within RCC who can help guide you through the different requirements of individual funders. The deadline for receipt of applications is noon on Friday 15 March. Among the schemes currently available is the Shropshire Community Fund which can offer grants of up to £750 for health-related or wellbeing projects. For more information about this or the three other grants currently available contact Jan Dodd on 01743 342171 or email: jan.dodd@shropshire-rcc.org.uk



Bipolar charity faces financial crisis

A series of services for people with bipolar run by charity Bipolar UK face closure due to a combination of falling income and rising demand for support during the economic slump. The charity supports more than 65,000 people each year,

It has launched an appeal for donations, but a range of services, including a national information and advice service and a series of self-help groups, face closure unless a boost in income is found quickly. Although core funding is at crisis point, several projects run by the charity that are financed through grants, will not be affected. These include a three-year pilot project for young people with bipolar and some mentoring schemes.

Some 80% of Bipolar UK's funding

Small and medium size charities are 'squeezed on both sides'

comes via donations, fundraising events and grant awards from trusts. Less than 10% is from statutory grants.

Suzanne Hudson, Bipolar UK's chief executive, said that income has fallen over the last 18 months. At the same time some of the charity's services are seeing a year-on-year increase in demand of up to 40%,

as a combination of economic hardship, cuts to benefits and services, and greater awareness of bipolar have an impact.

'We're being squeezed on both sides and it's now becoming unsustainable. We want people to understand the pressures being faced by small and medium sized national charities,' she said.

'Demand for information and advice has gone through the roof. That is often resulting in emergency interventions, and a situation where the first time people contact us is at the point of crisis. The huge resources that go into that support and also working with the emergency services is absolutely core and it would be a travesty if we're not able to provide that anymore.' [From Community Care]

MPs on all sides strongly criticise Atos over deaths

Atos, the private contractor which administers the Government's work capability assessments, has come under sustained criticism from MPs as they told stories of constituents who had died shortly after being ruled fit for work by the firm.

During a powerful Commons debate that united politicians from all parties, MPs gave emotional accounts of how very sick individuals had been incorrectly assessed and told to return to work. Some of them later died, they said, and MPs told of others who had killed themselves or become suicidal following such decisions.

Labour MP Michael Meacher described the death of a young man with epilepsy shortly after he was classified fit for work and saw his benefit cut by £70 a week. 'A month

after he died, the DWP rang his parents to say it had made a mistake and his benefit was being restored.'

The Government's own figures revealed that 1,300 people had died after being told they should start preparing to go back to work, and another 2,200 had died before their assessment was complete, he said. Atos was paid £110m a year and a further £60m was being spent on administering appeals, because so many decisions were contested.

Conservative MP Heather Wheeler asked whether Atos reviewed the cases of those people who died within three months of being told they are fit for work. 'At what point do we say that this isn't working?' she asked.

Caroline Lucas, the Green party MP,

condemned the 'humiliating and demeaning' process which 'makes sick people even sicker.'

Labour's Pamela Nash described seeing constituents developing mental health problems as a result of the stress the Atos process caused.

There was unease about the language that was increasingly used to describe benefit claimants, and one MP said claimants were 'made to feel like they are on trial for benefit fraud at their assessments.'

Mark Hoban, the employment minister, said considerable progress had been made in improving a process that was introduced by Labour. He said it was unhelpful to 'demonise' the system with 'adverse media coverage.'

[From The Guardian, 17 January]



Blue Badge answers

First, some general comments:

The Blue Badge Scheme is governed by Regulations approved by Parliament. The Scheme is administered by Local Authorities who act as Agents on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT) and as such we are subject to their Legislation and qualifying National Criteria which all English Local Authorities have a duty and an obligation to abide by.

In January 2012, a new type of Blue Badge was introduced by the DfT in England. The new style badge is manufactured by one company for England, Scotland and Wales and is sent directly to an applicant/badge holder. No local authority is legally allowed to produce these new-style badges.

From 1 January 2012 a new database of all badge holders was introduced. In addition to many security marks, the new-style badges also have a barcode which allows enforcement officers in conjunction with Blue Badge Teams to carry out checks as to whether or not a badge is being misused.

Questions and comments

Wants more, and clearer, explanation as to how to display the badge.

Instruction on how to display the badge is provided at the time of issue and renewal. Page 9 of the DfT leaflet 'The Blue Badge Scheme: rights and responsibilities in England' provides very clear instruction, with a picture demonstrating the correct way of displaying a badge in a motor vehicle.

If badge was blank on one side, then it would be clear which side to display

Badges issued from 1 January 2012 show the following details. The badge is endorsed in bold lettering 'Front – Display This Way Up'. The front of the badge provides the de-

In a very helpful talk, Grania Miller of Shropshire Council's enforcement team spoke at SDN's December meeting about how the council implements the Blue Badge scheme. She was asked a lot of questions and, although she answered many, Grania also promised to ask the Blue Badge Co-ordinator to provide written responses. And here they are...

tails of the issuing country, ie UK; the issuing authority, ie Shropshire Council; the expiry date of the badge; and the individual badge number. The reverse of the badge shows the expiry date; the photograph is produced twice on the badge; the badge number is repeated; and the surname and fore-name of the badge holder; and is endorsed in bold lettering 'Back'.



The new style Blue Badge

If expiry date was on both sides, there would be no confusion
See answer to Point 2

Could put information of how to display the badge and where they can/can't park on one side and all important info on other
See answer to Point 1. The DfT Leaflet has 34 pages of information which include details on the responsibilities of the individual badge

holder; where a badge holder can park; badge for organisations; travelling in London; travelling abroad; and toll concessions. It would be very difficult to reproduce all this very relevant information onto a badge.

Write to all Blue Badge holders and identify the problems we are having with Blue Badge parking issues and show them how to display the badge correctly

See answers to Points 1 and 2. It is the responsibility of the individual badge holder to make her or him-self aware of the rules for displaying and using a badge correctly, and it is also the badge holder's responsibility to ensure that if they are a passenger in a vehicle that the vehicle driver is also aware of the rules.

Ensure that the booklet is sent to all Blue Badge recipients

See answer to Point 1.

There is confusion as to whether Blue Badge holders can park on double yellow lines

The answer is on pages 15 and 16 of the DfT leaflet.

There is confusion as to whether Blue Badge holders need to pay in pay and display locations

Shropshire Council does charge Blue Badge holders to park on its car parks as Blue Badges are issued due to a person's disability and not their financial position. However we do allow Blue Badge holders an additional hour parking time on the pay and display ticket as some activities may take a disabled person longer than an able-bodied person and we would not want a disabled person having to pay more because of the time it may take them to complete a task. Disabled Badge Holders are able to park free in on-street pay and display bays or limited waiting bays (bays on the side of the road) providing their Blue Badge is correctly displayed.

Continued next page



Blue Badge answers

continued

Shrewsbury is doubly confusing due to restricted parking zones not showing double yellow lines.

Restricted Parking zones were introduced to improve the look of the locations and reduce the amount of maintenance required for their upkeep. They have signs at the entry point and exit point to advise motorists that they have entered or exited the zone, and then also within the zone there will be repeater signs and bay markings to identify the restriction at that exact point within the zone. The best advice we can offer Blue Badge holders who are unsure of the restrictions is to try and always use a dedicated disabled bay or on-street pay and display bay within the zone

One member had been penalised (allegedly) as their Blue Badge was in their sun visor not on the dashboard – felt this was petty

Page 8 of the DfT leaflet states: 'When using the parking concessions you must display the badge on the dashboard or facia panel ...'

The tax disc advises that car is registered to a disabled person – why can't this be checked in situations of uncertainty?

This only applies where the vehicle owner receives road tax exemption (disability). There are only two ways that a person is able to receive this tax exemption (1) receipt of the Higher Rate of Mobility Disability Living Allowance, or (2) receipt of a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement. Receipt entitles the recipient to use their allowance to obtain a vehicle through Motability and/or obtain Road Tax Exemption.

However, a person in receipt of these allowances does not have to be a driver as there are times when Motability cars may only be used by, or for, the benefit of the disabled person. The disabled person does not need to be present when it is used. The car may be used by any named driver without the Disabled Person,

eg the customer's spouse may use the car to travel to work, go shopping and other routine activities from which the disabled person derives an identifiable benefit.

It would therefore be difficult to confirm that the Blue Badge holder is travelling as a passenger or not unless the badge is being correctly displayed. However, regulations state that disabled parking spaces are for the benefit of Blue Badge holders.

The booklet is too long and complicated – wants a one-page summary of where can/can't park and how to display the badge

See answers to Points 1 and 4.

Can disabled people use their Blue Badges in taxis? ie, can the taxi wait for them, using the Blue Badge, while they go shopping

Yes

Provide information for relatives etc, not just for the badge holder

See answer to Point 5. A further copy of the DfT Leaflet can be obtained from the DfT website at www.dft.gov.uk/topics/access/blue-badge or by phoning the Blue Badge Service on 0345 678 9014.

Grania Miller said her team had been doing considerable work on enforcement issues. They had recently conducted a successful prosecution for the misuse of a Blue Badge and have started 'Enforcement Days' with officers spending time in specific locations talking to drivers using a Blue Badge, providing advice, checking badge details, ensuring it is being used correctly and generally getting a message out about correct use of the Blue Badge. The first of these was in Oswestry and her team received some very positive comments, so it will be extended to other locations.

Council warning over Blue Badge misuse

A Shrewsbury woman has been fined more than £500 for using a family member's Blue Badge to avoid parking charges. She was ordered to pay £537 by Shrewsbury Magistrates after admitting misusing the badge in the town centre.

After the hearing, Frances Darling, Shropshire Council's public protection service manager for safer and stronger communities, said: 'Whilst we have prosecuted in this particular case, ultimately we do not want to take this level of enforcement action against individuals.'

'However, we have a duty to protect genuine Blue Badge holders, and consequently we will give serious consideration to prosecuting where we find evidence of improper use by people who are not entitled to use a Blue Badge. Shropshire Council officers are committed to patrolling the streets across the county to ensure that

the Blue Badge scheme is not abused, and we will take enforcement action where this is necessary.'

Steve Charmley, Shropshire Council Cabinet member responsible for public protection and enforcement, said: 'Blue Badges are issued to assist the holder by allowing them, or the driver of the vehicle the holder is travelling in, to park closer to amenities. 'Whilst people who park in designated spaces for people with disabilities when they are not entitled to do so may feel that they are doing nothing wrong, they are committing an offence; but more importantly, they are also preventing a genuine person with disabilities from using that space. I strongly encourage everyone who has access to a Blue Badge to bear this in mind, and only to use it when they are legally entitled to do so.' [From Shropshire Star 06 Feb]



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Names and numbers that might help

If your organisation or cause is not listed here please let us know. Email the editor at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net or write to him: Peter Staples, 8 Gorse Lane, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, SY3 0JJ

Shropshire Council Disability Services -
www.shropshire.gov.uk/disability.nsf

Telford & Wrekin Adult Social Care Directory - services available and how to access them
http://www.telford.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.aspx?fileID=116&categoryID=100010

A4U Disability Advice Centre - Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury SY3 8HQ; 01743 256218; advice@a4u.org.uk

Autonomy - self-help and social for Aspergers in Shropshire, Telford and Borders - autonomyschropshire@yahoo.co.uk

Care Farming West Midlands - www.carefarmingwm.org.uk; stewart.scull@carefarmingwm.org.uk or Mobile: 07957 839634

Carers Direct - 0808 802 0202
www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx

Community Council of Shropshire - www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk/
4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park, Shrewsbury, SY2 6LG; 01743 360641; fax: 01743 342179

Community Directory for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/community.nsf>

Disability Arts in Shropshire - 01743 272939/271676; www.dasharts.org

Disability Directory - Information, aids and mobility services
www.ableize.com/Disabled-Groups-and-Clubs-by-County/Shropshire/

Disability Football Directory 01952 407198
<http://www.disabilityfootball.co.uk/Madeleysports.html>

Disability-friendly holiday accommodation
www.friendly-places.com/categories/disability-friendly/disability-friendly.asp?Location=Shropshire

Disability Resource Centre, Lancaster Road, Shrewsbury, SY1 3NJ
01743 450 912; robin.durham@shropshire-cc.gov.uk
www.the-svab.org.uk. RNIB:
www.info.rnib.org.uk/exe/Agencies/Details.pl?480

Disabled and Wheelchair Athletics Directory
www.apparelyzed.com/disability-directory/adaptive-sports/disabled-athletics/

Enable - supported employment services for people with disabilities in Shropshire and Telford, Unit 4, Owen House, Radbrook Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 9SR enable@shropshire.gov.uk. 01743 276900

Headway Shropshire (brain injured and families)
Holsworth Park, Oxon Business Park, Shrewsbury, SY3 5HJ
01743 365271; www.headwayshropshire.org.uk/

Landau - supported employment services for people with disabilities, 5 Landau Court, Tan Bank, Wellington. TF1 1HE, 01952 245 015, admin@landau.co.uk

Listen Not Label - User Led Organisation for disabled and carers in Telford and Wrekin (Tina Jones, manager), 01952 211421
Meeting Point House, Southwater Square, Telford, TF3 4HS

Parent & Carer Council Shropshire

www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups
PACC provides an index of support groups for children with disabilities in Shropshire. The following groups are listed on the PACC site. Where possible we list direct contacts, but refer to the PACC site for full details)
Allsorts (South Shropshire, for behavioural conditions) 07813043841
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/71-allsorts
Bridgnorth Buddies (Parent-led, Special Needs) 07968 544182 or 07790 780631; email Buddies20@yahoo.co.uk
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/72-bridgnorth-buddies
Haughton School, Telford, drop-in for parents of pupils with more complex special needs) 01952 387551 or 01952 387552; www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/83-haughton-school-drop-in
Onevision (visual impairment) 01952 385269
[/www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/77-onevision](http://www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/77-onevision)
STACS (Aspergers, 16+) 01952 254594 or 01939 260273; email louise.griffiths@carerscontact.org.uk
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/76-stacs
Autistic Supporters (if you suspect your child is autistic, or has recently been diagnosed) 01743 356298
www.shropshireautisticsupporters.co.uk/?q=node/2
Deaf Children's Society 01952 770019; email: nat4sdcs@aol.com
www.ndcs.org.uk
Down's Syndrome 01743 233802, 01948 880110 or 01588 640319
www.dsa-shropshire.org.uk
Dyslexia Association 01743 231205; www.thesda.org.uk
Wheelchair Users 01743 350460 or 01952 252243
SKiD (Shropshire Kids Insulin Dependent, associated with Diabetes UK) 01743 873724 or 01743 364366; email: home@morkot.go-plus.net
SPECTRUM (Autistic Support group) email: netgriffiths@fsmail.net
www.spectrum.t83.net/
Telford STAA (supports parents/carers of children with ASD, ADHD, and challenging behaviour) 01952 457439 or 01952 617758; email: julie@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk or lesley@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk
Steps (help for parents/carers, lower limb abnormalities) 01743 355363
PODS (Parents Opening Doors - Telford, forum for views on services) 01952457439; email: julie@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk

Marches Community Enterprise

01584 878402 or 07891094901

ME Connect - Helpline 0844 576 5326 between 10.00-noon, 2.00-4.00 and 7.00-9.00; meconnect@meassociation.org.uk

Motor Neurone Disease Association - MND Connect 08457 62 62 62
mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Multiple Sclerosis Society - 01952 250038;
www.mssociety.org.uk/telford

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx

Omega (National Association for End of Life Care) - www.omega.uk.net/

Parent and Carer Council (PACC) Shropshire - making parents and carers aware of developments that affect their children and giving them a voice - www.paccshropshire.org.uk; PO Box 4774, Shrewsbury, SY1 9EX; 0845 661 2205; enquiries@paccshropshire.org.uk

Parent Partnership Service - www.parentpartnership-shropshire-andtelford.org.uk/#/useful-links/4551168089

PODS - independent forum in Telford for families of children with disability or additional need; Jayne Stevens 0777 534 2092 or 07824 631 297; info@podstelford.org; www.podstelford.org

Primary Care Trust www.shropshire.nhs.uk/Get-Involved/

Scope (Cerebral Palsy) - www.scope.org.uk/services/shropshire

Shrewsbury Dial-a-Ride - Sundorne Trade Park, Featherbed Lane, SY1 4NS. Enquiries 01743 440350; Direct Line 01743 440744; Mobile 07891094901, linda@shrewsburydialaride.org.uk

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Shrewsbury Hard of Hearing Club - URC Church Hall, Coleham Head, Shrewsbury, SY3 7BJ; Contact Erica Horner 01743 873540, ericahorner2@googlemail.com

Shropshire LINK - EarlyWorld House, Darwin Court, Oxon Business Park Shrewsbury, SY3 5AL; 01743 343223; www.shropshirelink.org.uk; info@shropshirelink.org.uk

Shropshire ME Group - www.shropshiremegroup.org.uk; 07516 401097

Shropshire MIND - www.shropshiremind.org
Observer House, Holywell St, Shrewsbury, SY2 6BL 01743 368647

Shropshire Peer Counselling and Advocacy Service
www.shropshirepcas.co.uk/default.htm

Shropshire Volunteering Team - Promote your volunteering opportunities. <http://shropshirevcs.org.uk/site/volunteering/>

Shropshire and Staffordshire Heart and Stroke Network
Lambda House, Hadley Park East, Telford, TF1 6QJ
Email: yuen-ting.cheung@shropshirepct.nhs.uk 01952 228490

Telford & Wrekin LINK - Suite 1, Conwy House, St Georges Court, St Georges Road, Donnington, Telford, TF2 7BF 01952 614180

VCSA - Voluntary & Community Sector Assembly
www.shrop.net/shropvcsassembly

Voluntary Association for the Blind (linked to RNIB)

YV services directory

This is a 'bulletin board' of services to the disability community. Any service that is genuinely for the benefit of people with disabilities is welcome to up to 40 words free. If you have a logo or artwork we will try to include it, but can't promise. Email your text to the editor at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net or write to him: Peter Staples, 8 Gorse Lane, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, SY3 0JJ

Sign as you speak: 1Starfish - to become a better communicator learn how to sign as you speak. Total Communication Training Courses for private, public and voluntary sectors. Also Makaton courses. Contact Mandy at www.1starfish.co.uk or 01743 891885 or 07939 600126

Used medical and mobility equipment: The British Red Cross sometimes has donated medical and mobility equipment for sale for a reasonable donation. Call Christine Hunt on 01743 280073 for further information. The donations received help maintain the medical loan department, which is an invaluable service offered by the Red Cross.

Shropshire Handyperson Service: Small jobs at £15+ VAT per hour, no call-out fee, 01743 458 347 mhishropshire.enquiries@mearsgroup.co.uk

Mental Health first aid course

Shropshire Independence Advocacy Scheme is running a mental health first aid course on 12 and 17 April at The Redwoods Centre, in Somerby Drive, Bicton Heath, Shrewsbury. Sixteen places are available per course, for which the cost is £190. Sessions run from 9 am-4.30 pm. Parking is available as are lunch facilities in the on-site cafe/canteen. Contact Carys Baskeyfield at carys.baskeyfield@siasonline.org for more details.

Deaf film-makers get chance to star

Deaffest, the UK's leading deaf-led film and arts festival, is calling for deaf film-makers and film-makers who work with deaf people to submit their films for the 2013 Deaffest Gala Awards.

The winning entries in six different categories will be selected by a judging panel of high profile individuals with extensive experience in the film and media industry.

Shortlisted films will be screened during the festival weekend, with the winners being announced at a gala awards evening on

Saturday 18 May.

The six awards categories are best British film, best international film, best documentary, best director, best actress and best actor. Winners at Deaffest in previous years have gone on to success at other festivals internationally.

Deaffest 2013 is supported by the National Lottery through the BFI and Creative England. Deaffest is supported by Zebra Access, Zebra Uno and Light House.

More information can be found at www.deaffest.co.uk

Cinema showing for deaf

The Old Market Hall Cinema in The Square, Shrewsbury, is presenting a captioned screening of the emotive comedy *Song for Marion* at 5.30 on 19 March, a welcome acknowledgement that the deaf and hearing impaired can enjoy cinema. Let's hope that more will follow! The story centres around grumpy pensioner Arthur who cannot understand why his wife Marion would want to embarrass herself singing silly songs with the local community choir. But when he is coaxed into joining, Arthur finally dares to unlock his emotions and also begins to reach out to his estranged son.

The contact details are: mail@theatresevern.co.uk or call 01743 281281.

Events for carers

Wylldwoods charity, which is supported by Telford & Wrekin Council and Community Health Services, runs many events for carers. Wylldwoods is based at Dean Corner Farmhouse, Broseley, just off the B4376 Broseley to Much Wenlock road. Coming up are:

Wednesday 6 March: Springtime Ploughman's - herby scones, potted cheese, springtime relish

Tuesday 12 March - Carers & Cared For - Easter Traditions

Wednesday 13 March - Sketching

Tuesday 19 March - 'Spiritual spring cleaning'

Thursday 21 March - Male Carers - Green-wood working

Tuesday 26 March - Make an Easter wreath

Thursday 4 April - Young Carers - Creative art activities

Thursday- 11 April 2013 - Carers and Cared for - Relax and Unwind - a chance to meditate and have some peaceful time

north

New Century Court 01691 65825
Victoria Street, Oswestry, SY11 2BP

Stonham 01948 667868
35 Dodgson, Whitchurch, SY13 1EN

central

Beagle House 01743 359676
Exeate Road, Shrewsbury SY2 5QA

Stonham 01743 24532
62 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 8BQ

Brook House 01743 344103
133 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 8AQ

Upton Lane 01746 242637
Monksor, Shrewsbury, SY2 5QR

south

Bridgnorth HUB 01746 762015
58 St John's St, Bridgnorth, WV15 6AG

The Willows 01952 463195
Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8PL

Squirrel Court 01746 765178
Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV26 4BS

www.bromford.co.uk/partnership

Circle Support
Shropshire Local 1 service

Shropshire home group

Bromford Support

Transport solutions

Shropshire Support Partnership

advice and assistance with travel arrangements

www.bromford.co.uk/partnership

Designed to help people for whom lack of transport is causing serious work and inclusion problems, this is the outer page of a leaflet produced by Transport Solutions to explain the range of transport options that could be available.

Copies of the leaflet are free and are available from Ollie Wheeler on 01743 359676, mobile 07436 802469, email ollie.wheeler@bromford.co.uk or visit www.bromford.co.uk/partnership or sspartnership@bromford.co.uk

Canal holidays on your doorstep ...

If you're thinking of taking a break this year, consider a canal-based holiday with Shropshire's Lyneal Trust.

The charity, which has been providing narrow boat holidays for over 25 years, offers a unique opportunity to take a day, week, or weekend trips on one of two disabled-friendly canal boats.

The Trust is based on the Llangollen canal at Lyneal Wharf, three miles from Ellesmere, where a specially-adapted cottage (sleeps 14) can be hired separately or in combination with the boats.

The larger of the two boats, the Shropshire Lass II is a 70ft, fully equipped, disabled-friendly canal boat that sleeps up to eight people (including three wheelchair users). One upper bunk is hinged and can lift aside for easier access to the lower bunk.

Wheelchair access onto the boat is via a ramp at the stern, and access into the boat is via a hydraulic lift. Most areas of the boat have good access.

The Shropshire Lad is a disabled-friendly day boat. It carries up to 12 passengers and has fridge and galley facilities, including a hob.

Lyneal is the perfect base from which to explore the beautiful countryside of Shropshire, Cheshire and the Welsh borders. There are a few locks, miles of level tow-paths, occasional shops, and plenty of friendly and accessible pubs and there is all-weather cover on the boats. Rates are very competitive and further information can be found at www.lynealtrust.org or call 01743 252728

[From Alan Townsend]

Putting in (several) good words for SDN via social media

The world of social media is a dark and forbidding realm as far as the editor of YourVoice is concerned, but luckily for SDN there are braver souls who venture into such places – and it seems that we are doing rather well in getting our message across.

In fact, we recently reached more than 40,500 people on Twitter. Or, to put it in the language Tweeters speak: 'We continue to attract new followers on Twitter and regularly get RTs and mentions. One tweet picked up the blog "Blue Skies" (disability challenge) and this person put a link on Scoop It which immediately reached a 40,000 person audience.'

That was Ruby Hartshorn, our Twit in Chief, speaking, and she goes on to say: 'All in all, SDN reaches a wide audience with Twitter. In fact we recently set a new record for SDN. I put a message out about a BBC Panorama programme on disability and we quickly had 15 re-tweets on just that one message alone. Up until then the record was six! We are also getting more people clocking our messages as "favourite" and also more people are mentioning SDN in messages.'

Altogether, there are 332 'following' SDN and we have 305 'followers'. Says Ruby: 'On Face-Book we are now reaching over 21,000 people, compared with just 7000 in July 2012. Another hit was after the Big Debate on Welfare Reform in January.'