

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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WHO SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE?

On 1 January 2003 the Department of Health issued guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care:http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009653

To be implemented by April 2003, these changes in criteria were to ensure fairness and consistency. A needs and risk assessment was to classify people's needs as critical, substantial, moderate or low. The question 'should people be helped or not?' was to be at the heart of reviews which should be undertaken on a regular, routine basis by professionals. Resources available locally for adult social care were to be crucial to the setting of eligibility criteria.

In various local authority areas, social workers, often employed through agencies, are carrying out assessments on a regular basis. It seems that a very high percentage of councils in England have set their criteria at 'critical or substantial' for 2007-2008. Only two authorities are supplying care to people with low level needs.

Mencap requested the Commission for Social Care Inspection (www.csci.org.uk) to provide data on the picture of needs assessments, and this has now been published by the Learning Disability Coalition (www.learningdisabilitycoalition.org.uk/news/news_9.asp).

These and other organisations are understandably concerned about the lack of support for vulnerable people with learning disabilities who may have no-one else to whom to turn. However, people in other vulnerable groups are also affected – for example, elderly people and people with mental health problems.

A legal challenge was mounted in the High Court in December, on behalf of three service users, by The Public Law Project (www.publiclawproject.org.uk), against the London Borough of Harrow. The Court held the Council to be in breach of its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Council will now have to reconsider its new policy of providing services only to those with critical needs.

In January, Ivan Lewis, care services minister, announced a review of care service eligibility criteria.

What can churches do?

- Become aware of church members who receive social care.
- Find out when their routine needs assessment is to take place and offer to attend. (This will usually take place in people's own homes).
- Discuss what action should be taken if care is withdrawn (Proverbs 31:8-9).
- Consider what practical needs the church can help with (with due regard for health and safety issues).

Sheila Stephen

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Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

The Old Bank House, 17 Malpas Road, Newport, South Wales. NP20 5PA
Telephone: 01633 893925
Email: office@affinity.org.uk
Website: www.affinity.org.uk

affinity
gospel churches in partnership