

Councillor Bert Proctor has submitted the following motion in accordance with Procedure Rule 12:-

This Council notes that:

- Cuts to NHS hearing aid services are being introduced by North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. This is the first CCG to decommission free NHS hearing aids.
- Staffordshire County Council's Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee has decided to support the CCG's introduction of a fee for the issue of hearing aids to patients who suffer from certain forms of hearing loss.

This Council believes that the introduction of a fee for hearing aids to patients in North Staffordshire with mild/moderate hearing loss will lead to a large number of problems, which could include:

- Many residents with hearing loss being confined to their homes, resulting in isolation and being excluded from society.
- The decision to charge for hearing aids to many residents who suffer a hearing loss, could impact on the mental health of these patients and their families. It is a well-known fact that hearing loss can trigger depression, anxiety, loss of appetite as one may feel discarded from society through no fault of their own. This would increase the burden upon other services of the NHS and this has not been taken into account. Therefore, the proposal to charge a fee for the issue of hearing aids would have a long-term effect, not only on NHS budgets, but on society as a whole.
- People with hearing loss who are in full time or part-time education would suffer. Thus educational attainments would decline, leading to a more unskilled workforce and increased competition for jobs at the lower end of the jobs market.
- People with hearing loss who are employed on zero-hour contracts would find themselves having to choose between caring for their families, or the 'right to hear'.
- Many families would have to seek professional guidance as the loss of hearing eventually manifests, and the true consequences of being unable to hear would impact, yet again, on the NHS and unsuspecting families.
- People with hearing loss may experience an increase in the fear of crime, and actual crime, resulting in all Local Authorities being unable to achieve one of their most important objectives.
- Withdrawal of this service may cause potential conflict between neighbours where radios or televisions are played too loudly by people who have been denied a free hearing aid.

The introduction of this policy by the CCG is short-sighted, ill-conceived and would have a lasting, long-term effect on society as a whole. Being deaf or suffering from a hearing loss is an invisible disability; the human rights of such vulnerable people in our communities should be respected. For all of the above reasons we cannot

support the decision of the CCG to issue a charge for the supply of hearing aids to hearing loss patients in North Staffordshire, and the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee's support of this policy. In addition this is the first CCG to decommission free NHS hearing aids which could lead to implications for all patients with hearing loss across the country.

This Council therefore resolves that:

- We write to the CCG asking them to reverse their proposal to introduce a fee for the issue of hearing aids to mild/moderate hearing loss patients in North Staffordshire.
- We call on Staffordshire County Council's Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee to reverse their decision to support the introduction of a fee for the issue of hearing aids to patients who suffer from any form of deafness.