At Dimensions, we support people with learning disabilities and people with autism to make their own choices and decisions to live the lives they choose. A longstanding national provider with solid foundations in the sector, Dimensions supports around 3,500 people and their families across England and Wales.

We provide support for people living in their own homes or in shared housing, behaviour support, supported employment and opportunities for learning and participating in the community.

The quality of our service is based on a commitment to person-centred support, tailored around each individual and underpinned by a team of well trained staff. Whilst we are a large organisation, we pride ourselves on our ability to stay connected personally, engaged locally and active nationally.

In drafting our submission to the health inquiry we contacted people across the organisation to ask them for their input. They were able to provide us with specific examples of what they had experienced in the last five years and what they expected to happen in the future.

The Spending Review announced four key things which will have an impact on social care funding. We will share our views on each of these in turn.

The Social Care Precept

The Government estimates that £2bn can be raised by allowing all councils to increase council tax by 2% a year to fund social care. There is no guarantee that councils will choose to raise council tax by the full 2%, every year for the next four years which means the £2bn the government have estimated will be available for social care is likely to be much lower.

There is an immediate and urgent need to fund social care to prevent a crisis. The (maximum) 2% council tax increase will not be enough to fund the gap and will not be available fast enough.

“The council tax precept will provide flexibility for local authorities but are unlikely to raise as much as the government suggest and could disadvantage deprived areas with low tax bases.” The Kings Fund.

Dimensions believes that many deprived areas will lose out due to regional variations in the amount of money the council tax precept will raise. “The level of public service funding must be commensurate with the level of expectation and legal requirements. A 2% council tax increase (at the most) will not provide this, particularly in poorer areas.” Steve Scown, CEO, Dimensions.

We want to know how this money will be fairly distributed across the country.

Increase in the Better Care Fund

The Government has announced an additional £1.5bn a year in cash terms for the Better Care Fund to be provided by 2019/20. Many in the sector welcome this increase, but believe it is far from
enough to prevent a full blown social care crisis. The Kings Fund estimates that the social care funding gap is somewhere between £2bn & £2.7bn.

The money from the Better Care Fund is backloaded, which means it will not begin to come though until 2017/18, with the full £1.5bn not being delivered until 2019/2020. With social care already in the brink of a crisis, and a heightened risk of provider failure, the Better Care Fund needs to be front loaded, in a similar way to the funding that is being provided to the NHS. The back loading of the Better Care Fund will mean further reductions to services and the unmet needs of individuals will increase.

“As the NHS struggles to cope under the weight of a failing social care system, the paltry figure has been made available through the Better Care Fund will not help against the irresistible tide of pressures that are driving up costs. The focus on the NHS and the back loading of the Better Care Fund is short-sighted.” Steve Scown, CEO, Dimensions

Changes to local government funding from central government

“The changes to local government funding will see central government support for local authorities fall by 56% by 2019/20, on top of a reduction of 37% over the last parliament. Although the ability to retain some income raised through business rates will compensate for this, these changes will leave councils more dependent on their tax base, raising significant issues about equity given the wide disparities in income-generating potential.” The Kings Fund

This assessment by the Kings Fund is concerning. Dimensions believes that a social-care system based on the local authorities ability to raise revenue through selling assets is not sustainable, and will not raise enough to ensure needs are met. Include this with the potential increase of 2% in council tax, regional variations in funding will become even wider, with poor areas losing out again. Social care funding should not rely on local levels of property wealth and economic activity.

A commitment to integrate health and social care across the country by 2020

The systems and functions of the NHS and social care are so inter-dependent, by not addressing the social care crisis people will be forced to resort to hospitals for their care, putting more pressure on the already struggling NHS. We welcome this commitment but it needs to be backed up with a financial commitment to provide a fully integrated health and social care system.

“The Chancellor’s emphasis on achieving an integrated health and social care system by 2020 is to be welcomed. Any new models of care must be focused around outcomes for patients and the population, requiring the whole system to work as one. The challenges currently facing the NHS and social care cannot be solved by organisations working in isolation.” Steve Scown, CEO, Dimensions.

What are the implications of the spending review for social care?

On top of the announcements detailed above, the Department for Communities and Local Government also agreed to spending cuts of 8% a year for the next four years.

“Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020...Local government has led the way at finding
innovative ways to save money but after five years of doing so the majority of savings have already been made. Tragically, the government looks set to miss a once in a generation opportunity to transform the way money is spent across the public sector.” – Lord Porter, Chairman LGA.

Social care is not a protected area and we believe it should be. According to The Kings Fund public spending on social care as a proportion of GDP will fall back to around 0.9% by 2019/20, despite the ageing population and rising demand for services, total spending on social care services is over 10% less than in 2009.

Local government have been trying hard to protect social care from cuts over the last five years by focusing cuts on other areas. They now say they have nowhere else to go. The government’s lack of commitment to plugging the funding gap facing social care means support for people with a learning disability will become less dignified and more people will have their needs unmet.

Figures obtained by the BBC estimate the number of older people and disabled people receiving council help fell by 28% between 2009/10 – 2013/14. “Councils will potentially face an increase in lawsuits as they struggle to meet the levels of support required by law. We need the government to share in our vision of a future where those people, who need support, get support and that support is of excellent quality. It provides people with the opportunity to live independently, seek and find employment, have choice and control over their lives and be a valued member of their community. This requires increased funding.” Steve Scown, CEO, Dimensions.

Below we share some of our specific concerns following the Spending Review, and the impact it will have on social care across the country.

People with a learning disability

In learning disability support, much of the progress of the past decades is underpinned by our belief that people with a learning disability deserve a life like others – in particular, that having choice and control over one’s life is a basic human right. This is manifested everywhere: In supported living, supported employment and personal budgets. In all the endless ways support is tailored to the million-plus individuals living with a learning disability and autism in this country. This level of support costs money. Dimensions are increasingly concerned that local authorities will struggle to meet their legal obligations, let alone anything beyond that, without additional funding for social care.
Dimensions strongly believe that prevention and early intervention strategies are essential ways to support people with a learning disability to be active citizens. We believe these strategies save money in the long-term.

**Case Study**

Our Activate support model won the 2015 Innovative Quality Outcomes Award at the 3rd Sector Care Awards. Based on joint research with the Tizard Centre, Activate is a whole new model of support for people with learning disabilities and autism. Activate is how Dimensions plans to support people in the future.

By halving challenging behaviour and driving widespread improvements to quality of life, Activate presents an opportunity for commissioners to achieve step change improvement in quality of life, in outcomes and in funding. In the research, on all measures of quality of life, the people we support who were in the experimental group improved more than those in the control group services.

We are already seeing that these strategies are no longer a priority of local authorities, with many already gone through so called efficiency savings. Dimensions believes this is short-sighted and we are strongly against this type of commissioning.

“Cuts being made by many local authorities and CCGs are putting the financial viability of high quality support for people with learning disabilities on a knife edge with margins frequently below 2%. As a not-for-profit provider, Dimensions will not join a race to the bottom; we do not participate in tenders valued at a level that we believe will result in low quality support. The number of these tenders is on the increase and whilst there will always be bargain basement providers, budget setters must remember that you get what you pay for – or rather, local vulnerable people will get what you pay for.” Sinead McHugh Hicks, Regional Managing Director, Dimensions.

Assessment and Treatment Units are another area where savings could be made with initial investment from the government. The cost of supporting people in these units is extortionate. The average cost of looking after someone in an NHS facility is £177k pa. This drops by 20% to £140k pa for the same person in supported living. Not only is this a financial benefit for the NHS and local authority, it also means that person is safer and has a better quality of life.

The NHS has committed to reducing their use of these units by half over the next few years. However our concern is the lack of funding to do this and the thousands of people who will still remain in these units. The announcement that £45m will be made available over 3 years for community based support to replace these services is welcome, but is not enough.
We know that services like the Slieve are expensive to develop. The government expects to shift 1300 people out of long stay hospitals into community living over 3 years. If half of these end up living at homes like the Slieve, with the other half spending a year in such transition, we estimate that the country would need 300 new facilities like the Slieve, on a budget of about £150,000 each. In the current economic climate that is simply not going to happen. However we know that each individual supported into the community represents a huge lifetime cost saving. Our experience has shown that getting people out of these units as quickly as possible, or preventing them from entering them in the first place save local authorities a significant amount of money in the long run, but for this to work the local authority first has to commit to investing money in another system. Homes not Hospitals is a welcome starting point but it needs to be properly resourced.

Government should modify health and social care funding arrangements to incentivise moves from in-patient settings and discourage further ATU development. It should change the threshold of the dowry arrangement – whereby the NHS funding automatically transfers to the local authority for people who have been in an institution for five years – to two years. The five year qualification may become an unintended disincentive for cash-strapped local authorities. Most importantly, government must be more ambitious in respect of people currently incarcerated in ATUs. An ambition to get half of them out is not enough. We want to see a real commitment to developing local community based services, which will require more funding and visionary thinking to acknowledge that this will save money in the long-term.

National Living Wage

Dimensions welcomes any initiative that increases frontline pay. We have strived in recent years to keep our support worker pay above the National Minimum Wage, despite facing additional pressures from commissioners to make efficiency savings whilst always improving the quality of the support we provide.

Case Study

The Slieve is a brand new service developed in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Bromford Housing. Built on the site of a former care home, it is a transformative service to support people out of Assessment and Treatment Units and into the community. It provides a ‘step up/step down’ service for people with severe challenging behaviour.

The Slieve is a modern and effective solution for local authorities seeking to improve the support they offer to people who would otherwise be confined in a hospital setting.

Alongside high quality staffing, housing like the Slieve means that people won’t have to be kept in ATU’s, often far away from home. Giving people with learning disabilities choice and control, a home in the community and an active life is not more expensive.
This will change with the introduction of the National Living Wage. Initially only a small number of support workers in some parts of the country will see their pay increase. However as we move towards 2020 more staff will benefit. The cost of this will be significant. The Kings Fund estimate that Social Care will face an additional £800m implementing the National Living Wage.

Unlike private or for-profit providers who will be able to offset higher wage costs against a lower tax bill, charities and not-for-profit providers can’t. Where is the money to fund increased wages going to come from? At present providers can choose providers that put people before profit. It will be a dark day for people with a learning disability when this option is lost. Dimensions are very concerned that Councils are already debating how severe a person’s support needs have to be before they continue to receive funding, leading to many people having their support needs unmet.

**Extra pressures**

Based on estimates from the Law Commission, The Local Government Association predict that Councils will need an additional £172m a year to meet costs. As well as Councils having to fund the ongoing requirements of taking responsibility for people who were in receipt of the Independent Living Fund which cost £271m in 2014/15. There is a call for the government to boost council’s budgets by this amount to cover their added responsibilities. There are also no plans to assist local authorities in implementing their responsibilities under the Care Act.

**Provider Failure**

Dimensions is concerned that the pressures on Local Authorities without any additional funding from the government and a recognition of these extra pressures will force providers to cut services or force them to exit the market.

If providers fail, this will lead to increased pressure on the NHS and Local Authorities. It will also leave a lack of choice and competition.

**Conclusion**

Over the last two years many people supported by Dimensions have expressed fears over the future of their service. Their concerns arise from being told by social workers that their hours will be cut. “People are unhappy about being left out of decisions that significantly impact on their lives and don’t want to hear about the prospect of cuts from a professional. They tell us that they want to be a part of the discussion and the decision making process. Too often we are hearing ‘I don’t know, all I’ve been told is my hours will be cut.’ This is unacceptable.” Paul Pargeter, Best Practice Manager, Dimensions.

In the older person’s sector we are increasingly seeing a two tier system – one for those with adequate wealth to self-fund and one for those without such means who rely on their local authority. People with a learning disability and autism are not able to build up personal wealth and can rarely be self-funders. As providers fail and local authorities cut support, families will try to act as unpaid, untrained carers – but this comes at a cost to the domestic and national income. Providers will be asked to offer a restricted range of services because that is all local authorities can afford. Dimensions have already been asked to bid to run a 30-bed care complex. We did not submit a bid, as we do not believe this type of support provides the best outcomes for people with a
learning disability and autism. Unfortunately we expect that these services will become increasingly common, despite evidence showing they are not only the best form of support, but increase pressure on external services, as well as costing more in the long-term.

Dimensions wants to see real, effective, long-lasting change that requires comprehensive, far-reaching and innovative reforms, supported by appropriate financial investment.

The government’s 2015 Spending Review does not convince us they want the same.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the Health Committee inquiry into the impact of the Spending Review on health and social care and hope that the Committee continue to involve and engage with the sector.

Dimensions welcome the opportunity to be involved in all such engagement.

25 January 2016