Written evidence submitted by Lesley Sheldon (ATW0051)

I am deaf and I work as an Adult Practitioner [Social Worker] for Sandwell MBC.

I have worked for my present LA for 15/16 years in various capacities, such as Principal Social Worker for Children with Disabilities and Deaf Team for Children and Adults; Principal Social Worker for Deaf Adults and Manager of Deaf Centre and Services to being an Adult Practitioner in Adult Safeguarding Team and now in project work for high cost and Section 117 placements.

My deafness over the years has not really changed but my needs in order to fulfil my tasks as a professional changed significantly. ATW have been supportive and flexible to meet my needs. It has helped me greatly to have the flexibility and capacity to use my support hours for British Sign Language Interpreters and Note- takers. I need the continued flexibility and capacity in my support hours and not have this cut too close to what I currently use on a weekly basis. This is required due to changing nature of the work such as pockets of training, meetings and when my deafness is worse on some occasions than others. It is better to calculate on a yearly basis. As I am conscious of the cost to the tax payer, I make every effort is made where possible to keep the cost down for using support professionals.

But I did not get the support from ATW at a critical time in my career when I changed jobs. I am not aware if the system has changed since I first commenced with Sandwell MBC [15/16 years ago]. In my job previous to Sandwell, I was a Social Worker with Deaf People in Humberside. Prior to commencing the job in Sandwell, I was able to calculate with my new line manager to be, the amount of hours and type of support I would require in the new job. Despite giving this information to ATW well in advance, I did not get any ATW funding for the first 6 weeks as it was deemed to be a requirement to be re assessed. This was because I moved to a different area served by ATW. This had huge impact on me and my standing with the new team. As we know first impressions tend to have a lasting impact. As I was not able to function properly in the first 6 weeks, this weakened my status as a Principal Social Worker.

For me, the important point I wish to make is that once a support package has been set up [ such as BSL interpreters, specialist equipment] that this should be as an interim measure, transferrable until the re assessment and funding kicks in. There should also be interim measures in place where employers and ATW agree on any particular additional funding and support being provided if it cannot wait. Or better still if we can be assessed wherever we are prior to the job move and this assessment & budget is transferrable, so there’s no lottery by postcode. This way we would follow the ethos behind “In Control” or Individual Budget.

I also need to be sure that any prospective employers will not be penalised for employing me or other deaf/disabled people. This will put off prospective employers and there are enough barriers as it is in society without this. I object to any suggestions of employers being expected to contribute to the cost of support services. I also object to any suggestion that I put interpreters/note takers on my employer’s payroll. Interpreters and notetakers are freelance and their skill range and availability of these professionals are so variable that I need to have the continued flexibility to use them in a freelance capacity. They also need to have the flexibility in order to keep their skill set up to sufficiently meet my needs.