Further to the concerns outlined in my paper to Cabinet members on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of June 2015, I am writing to draw attention to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), attached as appendix 3, to the Cabinet paper of the 23rd June 2015 titled: \textit{Review of Local Welfare and Crisis Support Schemes to Vulnerable Residents with options for the Local Emergency Support Service}. This EIA is an update for the Cabinet since the last EIA of February 2015 which the Cabinet considered on 16 February 2015 when voting to reduce the LESS fund that 3500 people a year rely on by 66%.

Paragraph 4.1 of the June 2015 report to Cabinet says, “The proposal is therefore to cease funding the LESS from the 30th September 2015”

Despite the Cabinet decision to cease the service, the June 2015 EIA only refers to the consequences of a \textit{reduction} in service; section 2 (2b) states, “This EIA is being conducted to consider the impact of a reduction of the fund, rather than a removal”.

The February 2015 EIA Action plan at Section 4 required a review and monitoring of the impact of proposed mitigation steps on these groups of the 66\% reduction in the LESS fund from 1 April 2015. This has not been carried out and the Cabinet on 23 June did not consider this.

Both EIAs in February and June 2015 identify at Section 3 that 78\% of people accessing the fund are of working age; a reduction in service will negatively impact on local children, the disabled, carers, all racial and ethnic groups (a significant proportion of the White British community also access the fund), the full range of religions and beliefs locally and LGBT communities. Both EIAs state that “a two thirds reduction in the LESS fund will have a negative impact on people on low incomes”

This leads to the conclusion that much of June 2015 EIA is in fact the one that was drawn up in February 2015 this year, when it was put to the Cabinet what the effect of the two thirds reduction in service, as then proposed, would be.

In addition Section 4, the June 2015 EIA Action Plan, is identical to the one presented in February 2015 when the service was to be reduced. It does not address the issues to be faced when the most vulnerable residents have \textit{no} access to support in a crisis. We fully accept that community checkpoints and BanD Routemaster might help local people to build resilience but neither the June 2015 report to cabinet or EIA explain how such pilot schemes will be effective in a crisis. The impact on vulnerable communities of a total reduction in the LESS Fund has not been considered.
A number of questions and requests for further information were sent to the author of the original Cabinet paper on 18 June 2015 which have not been responded to. We would like to hear from you as soon as possible.

Due to the significant concerns raised above we ask that the Scrutiny Panel ask the Cabinet to review their decision of 23 June 2015, that the February 2015 Equalities Impact Assessment be updated in line with the action plan set out therein. This will ensure that the Cabinet can be aware of the impact of their February 2015 decision to reduce the fund by 66% and their June 2015 decision to cease the service.

Further and finally, I would like to draw the Scrutiny Panel’s attention to a judgement of the High Court of Justice in February 2014: R(Christian Jump) v (1) The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and (2) Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government CO/1838/2014.

A link to the judgement can be found at:
http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/lwas-intervention

This Judicial Review was won by the Child Poverty Action Group and the DWP were required to “consider the impact on equality and discrimination” and “complete the ongoing review of local welfare provision” before they made a decision to cease funding Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. As a result the welfare scheme was funded for a further year.

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