

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Continued Government support to help improve the health and lives of people with learning disabilities

Friday 4 March 2011

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Paul Burstow): I am today making a number of announcements confirming continued Government support to help improve the health and lives of people with learning disabilities.

The Department has today decided to extend its existing contract with the University of Bristol Norah Fry Research Centre (Norah Fry) for a further two years to March 2013 to carry out a time-limited Confidential Inquiry into premature and avoidable deaths of people with learning disabilities.

In parallel, I can confirm the Department has decided to continue to support for a further two years to March 2013 the provision of a time-limited public health observatory (PHO) service in relation to the health and healthcare needs of people with learning disabilities. This service is currently hosted by the North East Public Health Observatory (NEPHO).

I am writing separately to the project teams at Norah Fry and NEPHO to confirm the extension of their work with the Department, and the funding arrangements going forward, so they can plan accordingly.

I can also confirm I wrote separately on Monday 21 February 2011 to the Chairs of the National Forum of People with Learning Difficulties, and the National Valuing Families Forum, to confirm continued funding by the Department for their work in 2011-12.

In addition, I can advise the Department published on 1 March 2011 an updated version of its handbook *Positive Practice Positive Outcomes: A handbook for professionals in the Criminal Justice System working with Learning Disabled Offenders*. The handbook originally dates from 2007 and now reflects recent developments in the field. The handbook has been placed in the Library. Copies are available to hon Members from the Vote Office and to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office.

The Department is also preparing publication later this month of a suite of practical tools and materials that will help local authorities and other partners drive employment for people with learning disabilities.

All of this demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment to maintain momentum in delivering improved life outcomes for people with learning disabilities.

My announcements today on the Inquiry and PHO service follow an open competitive procurement process in 2009-10 that resulted in contracts being awarded on 23 March 2010 to Norah Fry to run the Inquiry; and NEPHO, leading a partnership involving the Centre for Disability Research at Lancaster University, and the National Development Team for Inclusion, to provide the PHO service.

Both these contracts were originally awarded for an initial period of 12 months, with the intention to extend them for a further two years until March 2013, subject to satisfactory evaluation of the work carried out in the first year and availability of funds. They took forward the Department's commitment to implement the recommendations in the report of the independent inquiry headed by Sir Jonathan Michael into access to healthcare for people with learning disabilities *Healthcare for All* to establish a Learning Disabilities Inquiry and PHO.