



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021

## **HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**19<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at 4.00pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor Hudson (in the Chair)  
Councillors Astbury, Brasted, Furneaux, Robinson (substitute for Croft), Rudd,  
Wilson and Woodward.

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Julie Wilson (North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group)
- James Ledger (North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Margaret Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care)

### **SPH.16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillor Croft.

### **SPH.17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

## **SPH.18 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION - ALIGNING THE UPPER AGE FOR NHS PRESCRIPTION CHARGE EXEMPTIONS WITH THE STATE PENSION AGE**

The panel formulated a suitable response on behalf of the council to the above consultation following the resolution of Full Council at its meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

It was noted that with the agreement of the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, and as a result of Cabinet not meeting prior to the consultation deadline, this panel would respond to the consultation on behalf of the council.

The panel considered each of the five consultation questions in turn and commented as follows:

*Question 1 – Should the upper age exemption to prescription charges be aligned to the State Pension age?*

The majority opinion across the panel was to agree to this proposal. Councillors Wilson and Rudd wished for their strong disagreement to this proposal to be recorded in the minutes.

*Question 2 - If the prescription charge exemption age is raised to State Pension age should people in the age groups 60 to 65 at the date of change retain their existing exemption?*

The panel unanimously strongly agreed.

*Question 3 - Do you think there will be any unintended consequences that a raise in the upper age exemption could have on people, pharmacies or other organisations?*

The panel unanimously agreed that there would be unintended consequences. In addition to the unintended outcomes set out in the consultation document, the panel wished to note the following concerns:

- i) The potential impact on those who were dependent on other family members, particularly where finances were being managed by one of those family members, possibly leading to money for prescription charges not being made available and/or domestic abuse.
- ii) The potential impact on people who had to retire early due to ill health but were not exempt under the income related and medical exemption but were towards the bottom of the income distribution. This could potentially force people into poverty.
- iii) The additional pressure that this could place on pharmacies to check whether people were eligible for exemptions and associated fraud issues.

- iv) The potential impact on early identification of illnesses as people were put off visiting health professionals due to the potential charges for medication.

*Question 4 - Do you think that aligning the upper age exemption with State Pension age could have a differential impact on particular groups of people or communities?*

The panel unanimously agreed that there would be a differential impact and concerns were raised about the adverse impact on women, who often (as the consultation document set out) earn less and retire earlier. The differential impact on people with mental health conditions was also a concern, particularly with regard to difficulties managing budgets. The panel also felt that the potential impact on groups of people suffering from particular conditions (for example, asthma) that were not included on the medical exemption list should be an important consideration and it was suggested that there be a review of the national policy on what was included in the list of medical exemptions.

*Question 5 - Do you think that aligning the upper age exemption with State Pension age could adversely impact people from deprived backgrounds or between disadvantaged geographical areas?*

The panel unanimously agreed that there would be an adverse impact. It was felt that this would clearly disadvantage low income areas such as those to be found in North East Lincolnshire, which already had high housing costs to manage. Such low income areas had a tendency to include those towards the bottom of the income distribution who were also trying to save for retirement but were on the threshold of the income exemption. The impact of poor housing on ill health was a further consideration, inevitably leading to the need for an increased number of prescriptions.

RESOLVED – That a response based on the above comments be submitted, on behalf of the council, to the Department of Health and Social Care by the deadline of 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2021.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 4.36 p.m.