

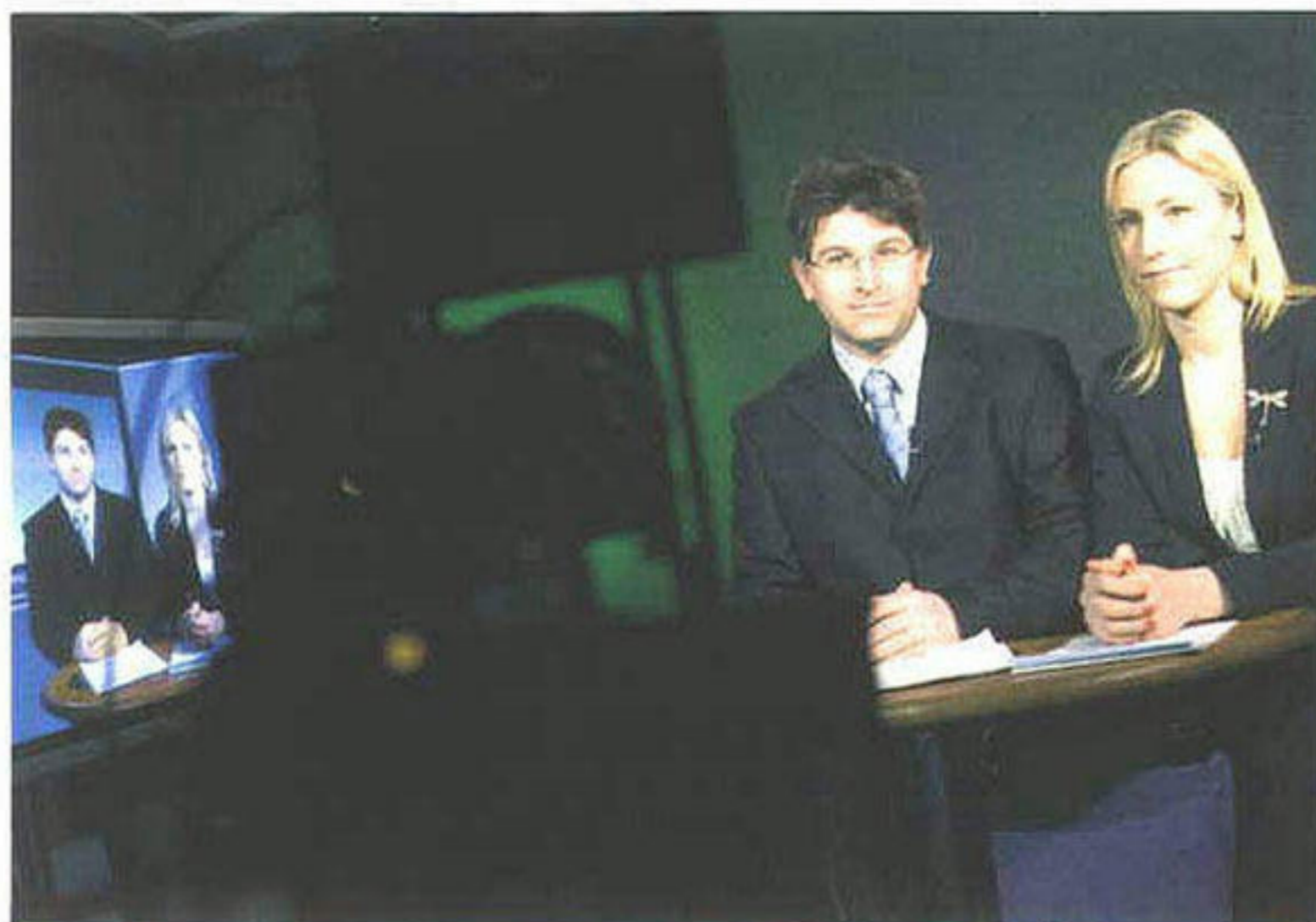
In brief

■ The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the National Collaborating Centre for Women's and Children's Health have issued updated advice on the care that should be offered to women during their pregnancy. Urging midwives and doctors to provide women with evidence-based information about the risks and benefits of screening tests, the guidance suggests that screening for Down syndrome should be offered to women when they have been pregnant for between 11 weeks and 13 weeks and 6 days.

■ A paucity of speech and language therapists in England could be affecting the provision of services to children and young people with speech, language and communications difficulties, according to an interim report prepared by MP John Bercow. The Bercow review was commissioned by the government last September, in a bid to improve services for children and young people from birth to the age of 19.

■ Increasing numbers of people with learning disabilities in Wales are featuring in adult protection cases, according an annual monitoring report from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). The report, which examines the performance of Welsh local authorities in relation to adult protection, suggests that rising numbers of adult protection referrals could be linked to an increased awareness among staff working with vulnerable adults and their concerned families.

■ A good practice guide on transition planning for young people with complex health needs or a disability was issued in England last month. Care services minister Ivan Lewis said: 'Young people and their families tell us of the uncertainty they face about their future support when they reach 18 years of age. All too often, they feel unsupported which is why we have made improving the transition experience of young people a government priority.' www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/TransitionGuide.pdf



News for you? ITN and Media Trust Productions have joined up with Mencap to produce a news programme with the working title of *Your News*. The programme, which received a premiere on the Community Channel at the end of March, has been developed for viewers with a learning disability. Initially a pilot, with plans for a weekly 15-minute news bulletin, the programme is co-presented by ITN On journalist Olivia Hill and Andrew Lee, director of People First (pictured).

Ombudsman criticises city council for 'woefully inadequate' care of woman

By Ian McMillan

A local government ombudsman has described the care that Birmingham city council delivered to a young woman who is deaf and has a learning disability as 'woefully inadequate'.

Criticising the way in which 'Miss D's' care was managed and supervised, Anne Seex urged the council to set up an independent audit, using a representative sample of adults with learning disabilities, to establish whether proper arrangements for them were now in place.

Ms Seex told the council to make the findings public and pay Miss D £5,000 in compensation, with the money being used to fund social outings and holidays. 'Mrs B', who complained on Miss D's behalf, should receive £1,250 and £1,250 should be donated to Mencap.

Though Miss D had moved out of the Birmingham area with her childhood foster family, she had remained in the council's care. When she was in her teens, Miss D was placed in another foster home by a private agency. At 18, Birmingham's adult learning disability service took over responsibility for her and Miss D remained with the second family.



Seex: 'Council's service in crisis'

During this period, Miss D was only seen by the social worker once and no signer was present, even though she required one to communicate. Reviews were undertaken by telephone, despite Miss D's disabilities.

Mrs B – Miss D's foster sister from her first foster family – complained about the placement, saying Miss D was obstructed from having contact with her first foster family and was not allowed to use sign language – her preferred means of communication. Miss D, she said, was also treated like a child, being sent to bed at 7pm, for example, and was prevented from developing a relationship that she wanted with a young man at her work placement.

Instead, she was encouraged to form an 'inappropriate relationship' with an older man known to the family.

Miss D was also punished for private sexual expression and was prescribed drugs to reduce her libido that made her overweight and sluggish.

Eventually, Mrs B was so disturbed by the situation and Birmingham's failure to respond properly to her concerns that she contacted Mencap and the local social services department, which initiated an adult protection investigation and Miss D was moved to a new placement.

Ms Seex states that Birmingham's adult learning disability service was 'in crisis' with two posts in three being vacant. 'In these circumstances there is little point in criticising the staff and management.'

In a statement, Birmingham city council acknowledged there had been 'serious failings' in its services over many years, but insisted that 'significant progress' had recently been made. This included the creation of new partnership arrangements with organisations such as Mencap, new advocacy arrangements and a new advocacy forum.