

CONSULTATION RESPONSE BY THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

WELFARE FUNDS (SCOTLAND) BILL

1. We are in favour of the Bill. It achieves the Scottish Government's aim of providing assistance for short term need and community care.

2. Officers from The Highland Council have been involved in the discussions regarding the Interim Scheme and this was very useful. The Bill has built upon this learning from day 1.

3. No

4. The nature of crisis grants is such that they are unlikely to have other than a short term impact on inequalities, although community care expenditure should help disadvantaged persons have a more secure future over a longer timescale.

5. Yes to both questions, because Councils should have the discretion locally to decide what is best in their particular circumstances.

Benefits could be efficiency savings although the rationale behind the Interim Scheme was that responsibility for administration should rest with local authorities as the organisations having the infrastructure on the ground, possibly knowing the client(s) already, and being best placed to refer them without delay to their basket of existing services (social work, housing, money advice, benefit maximisation etc.); the aim being to ensure that clients would be assisted to improve their lot going forward.

Drawbacks might include some remoteness from the local authority with determination of claims by others who in many cases would require to consult Council Services anyway. Also there would be a need for ongoing contractual, control, review and reporting arrangements.

6. No reason why this shouldn't continue.

7. Yes, but is this a sledgehammer to crack a nut? There is a risk that this may introduce a disproportionate administrative burden for local authorities with no associated increase in administration funding.

8. No concerns about this. No.

9. Our experience is that the costs attributable to the running of the fund are at least 20% higher than forecast. The set-up of the SPSO, however, may overestimate the necessary funding for Second Tier reviews. These funds (£60k-100k 2014/15 and £250k to £400k 2015/16) may be more effectively used to address the funding shortfalls for local authorities' administration arrangements.

10. No further comments.

General

1. Are you in favour of the Bill and its provisions? Do you think the Bill fully achieves the Scottish Government's aim of providing assistance for short term need and community care?
2. The interim SWF scheme has already been running for two years. Do you feel that the Bill has suitably taken on the learning from this time?
3. Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill?
4. Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups?

Administration of Welfare Funds

5. Do you agree with the proposal that local authorities have the option to outsource the provision of the fund to a third party or jointly administer the fund across local authority boundaries? What are the benefits or drawbacks to this approach?

Review of decisions and the SPSO

6. What are your views on the proposed internal local authority review process?
7. Do you agree that the SPSO is the appropriate body to conduct secondary reviews?

Further provision - regulations

8. What are your views on the level of detail that will be contained within the regulations? Is there any aspect which you feel would benefit from being on the face of the Bill?

Financial Memorandum

9. Do you think that the costs attributed to the running of the fund and the set-up of the SPSO to administer secondary reviews are realistic and proportionate?

Other provisions

10. Do you have any comments on any other provisions contained in the Bill that you wish to raise with the Committee?