



Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) written evidence for Committee Stage of Welfare Reform Bill 2011.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) represents Directors of Adult Social Services in local authorities in England. As well as having statutory responsibilities for the commissioning and provision of social care, including the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, ADASS members often also share a number of responsibilities for housing, leisure, library, culture, arts, community services, and increasingly, Children's Social Care within their local authority.

ADASS welcomes the opportunity to present written evidence to the Committee on the proposed Welfare Reform Bill 2011, with specific reference to the Social Fund element and the ensuing responsibility on local authorities to use existing powers to provide an alternative source of support

Summary:

Given the backdrop of changes to the benefit system and the uncertainties involved in taking-on responsibility for financial support in emergencies, the proposals potentially significantly increases burden upon local authorities with no guarantee of additional or adequate resources being allocated.

The proposals create unnecessary tensions between applying the financial regulations / criteria in awarding Community Care Grants (CCGs) and Crisis Loans (CLs) and the holistic nature of social care, which looks beyond financial solutions to individual need and improved outcomes.

Arguments for local authority involvement

- It would align 'community care' aims more closely with other locally-led and administered services;
- Local authorities are better-placed than remote DWP regional offices to understand local and individual needs, for both community care and crises;
- Additional funding would enable some innovation in delivery, possibly involving voluntary sector partners;
- Local authorities could link payments into financial capability policies, such as helping individuals and families to learn how to budget or encouraging credit union membership.

Arguments against local authority involvement

- Lack of security over future funding after the initial transfer and adequacy of transferred sum;
- Lack of 'fit' with benefit system, especially the ability to recover loans from benefit claimants;
- Balancing transferred sums against competing demands and priorities;
- Difficult allocation within authorities (and with Health) between different services functions;
- Cost of administration, including face-to-face local contacts, reviews of decisions, and additional security measures;
- Supplying goods and services instead of cash payments, as the DWP have themselves considered, runs counter to the 'personalisation' and empowerment agenda that Social Services are following;
- There is no research to show what the overlap is between social care clients and CCG/CL recipients, but the measure would undoubtedly bring additional customers into the local authorities remit;
- Some local authorities have moved away from local office bases – meaning this service would have to be purely telephone based unless additional infrastructure costs are built back into the system;
- Staff safety and security could be compromised in local offices within local authorities, if payments are restricted or refused;
- By 2013, there will be numerous changes within the benefits system which will impact on household budgets of low-income individuals and families. This will increase demand for 'emergency' payments;
- Although expenditure on CCGs and CLs has risen in recent years, there is some evidence of considerable unmet demand e.g. from pensioners who make very few demands at present on the CCG budget. As social services departments have a significant elderly caseload, the transferred resources would have to be stretched more thinly to ensure equity and parity amongst all client groups;