

Health and Social Services Committee

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Date: Thursday 1 March 2007

Venue: Committee Room 2, Senedd, National Assembly for Wales

Subject: Criteria for Inequalities in Health Fund Projects

Purpose

The Committee has previously asked for a paper to note detailing the criteria used to determine the current portfolio of projects supported by the Inequalities in Health Fund.

Background

The proposal for an Inequalities in Health Fund emerged as part of work to review the Resource Allocation Formula – the method of allocating resources for health and health services. That work, and Professor Peter Townsend's report (Targeting Poor Health), gave rise to the 'dual strategy' approach, advocating strategic action inside and outside the NHS to improve health and tackle inequalities in health.

The Inequalities in Health Fund was subsequently set up in 2001 to stimulate and support local action to address inequalities in health and contributory factors including inequities in access to health services.

Core Criteria for Projects

- The involvement of primary health teams to enhance and expand their role in preventing ill health and in addressing inequalities in health.
- Action that reinforced partnership and joint working between organisations in the health, local government and voluntary sectors.
- Action that helps to address inequalities in health and the factors that cause it.
- Action that contributes to the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease.
- Action that is consistent with the evidence base.

Project Selection

A streamlined application process was designed to minimise the work involved in submitting bids while at the same time providing sufficient information for the assessment of proposals. The aim was to avoid the process becoming a test of an organisation's ability to put bids together; instead the emphasis was on capturing ideas to improve people's health in disadvantaged communities.

The response was very encouraging in terms of both the number of proposals received (120) and their quality. It demonstrated the commitment that exists throughout Wales to joint action to address inequalities in health and to reduce heart disease.

All proposals were assessed against the core criteria and ranked accordingly. An Advisory Group comprising officials and representatives of health, local government and the voluntary sector considered the results of the assessment and recommended projects for support.

The first tranche of 54 projects was announced in July 2001. A second tranche of 13 projects was announced in January 2002. The total portfolio of 67 projects was considerably in excess of the 20-30 that were originally envisaged.

The Fund's annual budget has continued to support the existing portfolio and it was never intended that it would be open to a cyclical bidding round for new projects.

Current Position

The Fund has a budget of £5.9m for 2006-07 and in line with previous years, the bulk of this has been allocated to projects via Local Health Boards to support the existing portfolio.

In recognition of their early achievements at grass roots level, and to compensate for delays at outset due to recruitment difficulties and the establishment of protocols, projects were granted a two-year extension in November 2003.

A further extension of one year beyond current end dates was announced in February 2006. The extension will enable the projects to continue developing services, gather more information of results and complete robust evaluations to allow informed decisions to be taken around roll out / mainstreaming of successes. Many of the projects will now go through to March 2008 and are engaging with their Local Health Boards and other lead organisations in relation to future service planning.

A position Report – The Inequalities in Health Fund: making a difference was published in February 2006 to coincide with the Fund's first national conference and highlights progress and achievements to date. The diverse action and services provided through the projects covers screening and risk intervention, lifestyle change advice, workplace health and cardiac rehabilitation programmes. This work is continuing to play a pivotal role in the drive to improve health and tackle inequalities in health. The Fund's projects are at the forefront of our commitment to Health Challenge Wales and also link with other policies and programmes such as Climbing Higher, Making the Connections and Designed for Life. The collaborative working practices fostered within communities are a prime example of how positive outcomes can be achieved.

Evaluation

Two evaluation contracts are in place. The first through a social research company provides advice and support to project teams on a day to day basis with their self-evaluation. The second has commissioned the Welsh Institute of Health and Social Care to undertake an over-arching evaluation of the Fund in its entirety. Final reports are due towards the end of 2007 and recommendations therein will be considered in due course.

Financial Implications

The Fund's annual budget (£5.9m for 2006-07) is fully committed in support of the remaining 62 projects in the portfolio. The 2007-08 budget is yet to be confirmed, but will take projects through to completion. The Health and Social Services Resources Directorate has seen and noted the contents of this paper (NG 2986).

Action Required

The Committee is asked;

- To note the core criteria and selection process used to determine the current portfolio of Inequalities in Health Fund projects.
- To note the current position in relation to progress and sustainability planning.

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