

Gwenda Thomas AC/AM

Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Wasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LF/GT/42/09

Angela Burns AM
Chair, Finance Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

g/k
December 2009

Dear Angela,

Proposed Social Care Charges (Wales) Measure

Thank you for your letter of 26th November regarding the above. I was grateful to you for highlighting the Committee's report in relation to the financial implications of this proposed Measure.

Following the Committee's particular recommendation at paragraph 28 of its report, you ask that I provide a clear statement on the transitional arrangements for the two existing grant schemes which are to be used to provide funding for the First Steps Improvement Package. That Package we plan to introduce should the proposed Measure be made. I am more than happy to provide such a statement.

You will recall that when giving evidence on 8th October, I informed the Committee that we intend to redirect funding from the Joint Working Grant and the Promoting Independence and Wellbeing Grant to fund the implementation costs of the First Steps Improvement Package. This was on the basis that both grants were already due to cease at the end of the 2010-2011 financial year. It was also on the basis that neither of these grants had been made available as a substitute for core, front line statutory services. Both had been provided to support strategic and service development projects which authorities were expected to evaluate, and if appropriate mainstream, during the lifetime of the respective grant.

In relation to the Joint Working Grant this has operated for over seven years, an unusually long period for such a grant scheme. It was independently evaluated in 2008 and a one year extension of funding was agreed for 2009-10 to enable the implementation of that evaluation's recommendations. Following a more recent evaluation of projects funded by the grant, we have now agreed to its continuation for a further year in 2010-11 at its current value of £10 million in total. That said, joint working is clearly something that needs to become self sustaining and mainstreamed into local authorities' provision of services and not dependent on the ebb and flow of individual grant schemes. Consequently exit strategies have been explicitly required from grant recipients. Continuing the grant for this further year in 2010-11 will provide local authorities with a realistic timescale in which to integrate grant funded projects into mainstream services and we will be working with authorities to help facilitate this.

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The three year Promoting Independence and Well Being Grant was funded by utilising an under spend on the Fairer Charging Grant. That Fairer Charging Grant was originally provided as part of the £76m alternative package we introduced from 2006 to reduce charging for non-residential care services and to assist disabled and older people to live independently in the community. The Promoting Independence and Well Being Grant was only ever intended to be for a three year period in order to kick start projects and work streams, either in hospital or the community, that facilitate appropriate discharge from hospital of patients or which help assisted people to live independently in the community. Given this set period of grant, authorities have always been aware of the need to evaluate the projects the grant funded and to integrate these into their mainstream services, if appropriate, during the course of the grant. Authorities will, therefore, need to ensure this occurs for the projects they fund from the grant during its remaining time.

I hope that this provides the further information on the transitional arrangements for these two grants that the Committee sought.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gwenda".

Gwenda Thomas AC/AM