

Event report

Local Welfare Provision: one year on and one year to go?

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An event held jointly with:

**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**



HOSTED BY



BREWIN DOLPHIN

VENUE

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This note reports on a meeting to discuss local welfare provision held with representatives of benevolent organisations and local authorities on 2 April 2014. The meeting was organised by London Funders with the Association of Charitable Organisations and Child Poverty Action Group, and kindly hosted by Brewin Dolphin.

Context

Since April 2013, the discretionary elements of the Social Fund, Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans have ceased to operate at a national level. Funding was devolved to a local level for each Local Authority to devise and implement a Local Welfare Assistance scheme.

The Association of Charitable Organisations, Child Poverty Action Group and London Funders have jointly organised a series of events, chaired by Patrick Butler, since before the funding was devolved:

- Social fund – delivering at a local level in June 2012
- The localisation of the Social Fund: countdown to change in February 2013
- The localisation of the Social Fund: the first six months in October 2013

It was recently announced that the £178 million local welfare provision grant will be abolished from 2015/16. This decision has been made without a full assessment of the local schemes and without consultation with Local Authorities. In order for schemes to continue, Local Authorities will need to find funding from their ever diminishing funding.

The aim of this meeting was to discuss what could happen next in light of this decision. Can funders or Local Authorities fill the gap that will be left by the removal of this funding? What can be done to highlight the impact that this cut would have for the most disadvantaged people?

Patrick Butler, The Guardian: Introduction

Patrick Butler, Society, Health and Education Policy Editor, will soon be publishing a story in The Guardian summarising research he has done into Local Welfare Provision schemes to date. There has been great variation in the success of different schemes across the country:

- 43% of funding had been spent up to the end of January 2014
- Around 60% of applications were successful, which is lower than Social Fund. This does not account for applications that are bounced at the initial screening system
- Spend varied considerably between councils: one council had spent just 1.2% of funding compared to Islington who had spent 80% of their funding and were on track to spend all the budget by year end

Patrick found that there was widespread lack of interest and awareness of this funding amongst politicians and decision makers.

Can funders or Local Authorities fill the gap that will be left by the removal of this funding?

Cllr Andy Hull, London Borough of Islington

Andy Hull, Executive Member for Finance & Performance LB Islington spoke about Islington's Resident Support Scheme. He discussed how their 2254 grants had helped ensure that Islington residents had the essentials they needed, such as flooring, beds, mattresses, electricity and food. Their scheme is jointly run with Cripplegate and other organisations, making use of the expertise that already exists in the borough. Along with grants and goods, they dispense advice, support and training to provide sustainable solutions for households. 46 different organisations have referred in to the scheme showing that there is widespread knowledge of the scheme.

Andy highlighted how difficult it would be for Islington to fund the scheme without central funding. They have lost 35% of funding over the last 4 years, and expect to lose the same again. They have been working with Cripplegate to campaign for funding to be reinstated. So far, they have achieved local and national press coverage and Steve Webb MP will be visiting Islington to meet residents who have been supported by the scheme. He called on others to join the campaign to ensure decision makers and the public understand the need for this funding.

2254 grants had helped ensure that Islington residents had the essentials they needed

Jason Tetley, RL Glasspool

Jason Tetley, Chief Executive of RL Glasspool, discussed the impact the localisation of the Social Fund has had on them as a grant giving charity. There is an overlap in eligibility for Local Welfare Provision and their grants and the challenge has been to complement and add value to over 100 local schemes. They saw a large rise in applications April – June 2013 driven by confusion about local schemes. They also saw a rise in applications from groups where there is the weakest duty of care – predominantly single people. They were often working with people who fell between the gaps for Local Authority support.

Glasspool identified the 20 worst schemes by looking at boroughs where applications to them rose by the most. In those areas, they have been campaigning for improvements to the local schemes. Jason highlighted the postcode lottery that exists across the country and the inconsistency of support provided. He felt that Glasspool was at risk of 'rewarding bad practice' as they gave more grants in areas where local schemes were failing, and wanted to instead reward good practice. He has seen big issues around residency requirements for grants which often do not fit individual's circumstances. He wanted to see an outcomes framework for the grant which would assist Local Authorities to create schemes that complemented existing Local Authority provision and strategies e.g. Supporting People, and met the existing demand.

A postcode lottery that exists across the country

Stuart Braley, Auriga Services

Stuart Braley, Chief Executive of Auriga Services, talked about his experiences in implementing schemes in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. Setting up a new system and getting staff in place ready for launch on 1st April was extremely challenging. However, this was achieved and the time limits for assessing application and dispensing awards has been achieved. After a slow start there was constant demand, but this did not reach the levels of demand that had been expected at the outset. In Oxfordshire, criteria were relaxed after six months including allowing cash grants to be made. After this, demand for grants

increased. Gloucestershire also introduced a £120k flood fund after the floods this winter that awarded grants of £1,000 to flooded households.

Oxfordshire have now pulled out of the scheme early. Despite local campaigning, the support scheme that had existed ended at the end of March. Stuart expressed concern about what was going to happen to the people in need that had been given awards, and whether the charity sector would be expected to fill this gap.

Megan Jarvie, Child Poverty Action Group

Megan Jarvie, London Campaign Coordinator at Child Poverty Action Group, spoke about the impact of welfare reform in London and how this increased the need for robust Local Welfare Provision. £2.9bn has been taken out of the welfare system in London, which works out to around £38 per week per household claiming benefits. All households have been affected by these cuts, either through direct cuts to their income, or by benefits being uprated below inflation making people gradually poorer over time. There is an increase in discretion and reduction entitlement in the system, reducing households' financial resilience and stability, particularly housing stability.

The full effects for households have not yet been seen as Discretionary Housing Payments and the ability to build up debt or arrears have enabled households to maintain a status quo. The reduction in households' and communities' incomes has impacted financial resilience making an emergency scheme essential. This is compounded by increases in homelessness and movement within the private rented sector and the needs for grants to enable these moves.

“There is an increase in discretion and reduction entitlement in the system, reducing households' financial resilience and stability, particularly housing stability.”

Discussion

Should we campaign on this issue?

- The people that receive support through LWP are often the most needy and voiceless in society. There is a need for us to help to get their voice heard.
- Given Local Authority's budget cuts, it is unlikely that boroughs will be able to continue this funding. The cuts have reached the point where councils have to decide what to keep rather than what to cut.
- Charities will not be able to meet the funding gap that will be left. The unmet need for individuals could create dire situations for individuals, and large costs for other parts of the system, for example, social care.
- Cripplegate have decided to campaign on this issue as they felt like it crossed the line as it was taking from people who are largely invisible. They felt it could act a lightning conductor to challenge additional cuts.

Is there awareness at a policy level and how could we increase awareness?

- It was felt that there was very little awareness of this issue amongst politicians, civil servants and journalists. The campaigning in Oxfordshire was felt to fall on deaf ears.

- The quality of Local Authority schemes has not correlated with the political party leading the council. Our approach should be cross party and encourage individual councils to speak out.
- There is learning from the Foodbank movement which has now gained widespread attention and awareness and is also looking at preventing destitution.
- Local Government Association and London Councils have raised significant concerns about the cut. London Councils will also be publishing a report in June looking at Local Welfare Provision.

What would a campaign look like?

- Central funding would need to be in place before Local Authority budget setting in the autumn, so it needs to be done by July.
- A campaign should focus on the people who have been supported out of dire need by these grants, putting their stories and voice at the centre of the campaign.
- We could use a rights based approach by showing that this funding enables people to have their basic rights – food, warmth, a bed to sleep in.
- The campaign needs to focus on a positive, simple message around saving the safety net and preventing destitution.
- Cripplegate are willing to lead a campaign and work with support from other organisations.

What improvements could be made to current schemes?

- There is still the possibility of achieving economies of scale by delivering schemes across a number of local authorities.
- Many local schemes exclude people who have been sanctioned from applying. Many felt that this approach meant that there was acceptance of destitution.
- There are a number of Local Authorities whose spending is dramatically below budget. There is the possibility of them working with more successful schemes to implement improvements to their schemes.

Next steps:

- Cripplegate invited attendees to join their 'Keep the Safety Net' campaign by visiting www.cripplegate.org or emailing keepthesafetynet@cripplegate.org.uk. We can also spread the word to other organisations that could be interested encouraging them to sign up.
- Patrick Butler is interesting in running future stories on this and said that case studies and data would help to make strong media stories.
- Work with LGA to encourage them to play a leading role in the campaign.

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Participants

Natalia	Perez	Advice UK
Chilli	Reid	Advice UK
Dominic	Fox	Association Of Charitable Organisations
Stuart	Bralej	Auriga Services (Speaker)
Richard	Knapman	AV Corporation
Sarah	Crombie	Bank Workers Charity
Katie	Higginson	BBC Children in Need
Madeleine	Thornton	Buttle UK
Ben	Jowitt	Buzzacott
Tony	Bates	Charis
David	Ashby	Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association
Alison	Garnham	Child Poverty Action Group
Megan	Jarvie	Child Poverty Action Group (Speaker)
Frances	Carter	Cripplegate Foundation
Kristina	Glenn	Cripplegate Foundation
Rob	Hull	Cripplegate Foundation
Tom	Jupp	Cripplegate Foundation
Paula	Kahn	Cripplegate Foundation
Shebneem	Emiroglu	Elizabeth Finn Care
Suzette	Gregu	Elizabeth Finn Care
Jill	Wheeler	Family Fund
Jason	Tetley	Glasspool Charity Trust (Speaker)
Sheila	Taylor	Hampstead Wells And Campden Trust
Jonathon	Graham	Homeless Link
Tonia	Haworth	Hospitality Action
Ben	Campbell	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Susan	Edwards	London Borough of Bexley
Kevin	Garvey	London Borough of Bexley
Jon	Zlotnick	London Borough of Brent
Alan	Porter	London Borough of Camden
Tony	Bristow	London Borough of Croydon
Andy	Hull	London Borough of Islington (Speaker)
Victor	Willmott	London Catalyst
Benjamin	Dixon	London Councils
Louise	Montgomery	Oak Philanthropy (UK) Limited
Theresa	Gilson	Prisoners Abroad
Melanie	Griffiths	Richard Cloudesley's Charity
Charlotte	Roffey	Save the Children
Patrick	Butler	The Guardian (Chair)
Evelyn	Strouts	The Officers Association

In attendance

Becky	Green	London Funders
David	Warner	London Funders

With thanks to Brewin Dolphin for their support in hosting this meeting and Megan Jarvie, Child Poverty Action Group for writing this report.

