

**Barnardo's Scotland comments to the Community Care Grants  
and Crisis Loans for living expense – successor Arrangements  
in Scotland**

Barnardo's Scotland strongly believes that the proposed £25million earmarked for the fund is not enough to effectively deliver this scheme in the context of the inevitable rise in demand caused by changes in the welfare system and the current economic climate.

We believe that substantially more money needs to be made available in order to ensure that very vulnerable people are able to get the support they need in a crisis or to support them to live independently right throughout the year.

The only way £25million would be sufficient would be if the eligibility criteria are incredibly tight and stringent. We fear that such a regime would result in many very vulnerable people being left in crisis with little support to help them.

We are also concerned that once Local Authorities run out of funds there will be no further available funds to support eligible vulnerable people throughout the rest of the year. This would be unacceptable to Barnardo's.

**Do you agree with the core purpose of the successor arrangements?**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the movement to a grant scheme, rather than loans. However, we are concerned that a grant scheme would be in much greater demand than a loan scheme and that by putting aside a relatively small amount for crisis element of the fund the demand will very quickly outstrip the available resource.

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the proposal to make it a national fund with national criteria.

However, we are concerned about some of the terminology used. For example care appears to be used to mean both social care and children looked after by local authorities.

Care-leavers are identified as a likely user of the scheme but it is not clear how they would fit the stated purpose. Ceasing to be looked after

is not an emergency, or an immediate threat to health and safety. While they do need support to live independently, this is not necessarily to "prevent institutional care".

The use of language needs to be made abundantly clear.

The opportunity to access Community Care Grants is vital to young people leaving care moving into independent living and it needs to be clear that the new fund will provide the same support for people setting-up and staying in homes.

### **What eligibility criteria?**

We put forward a set of criteria in response to the consultation on the devolution of community care grants in November 2011 which are still relevant.

1. The system should allow applicants to apply for the grant prior to securing accommodation. Successful applicants would receive their grant on receipt of the keys to their accommodation to ensure no waiting time.
2. The application and approvals process for the new scheme should ensure that applicants are not unnecessarily rejected or systematically forced to go down the route of appeal.
3. Rules and criteria should be clear and consistently applied across Scotland.
4. Grant awards must be of a sufficient level to allow applicants to properly furnish a home.

If the fund is designed to support young people ceasing to be looked after, then the Government should consider having specific criteria for young people in this situation, rather than creating a set of general criteria which will attempt to cover all the groups of likely users set out in the paper.

It is also crucial to ensure that the eligibility criteria aren't designed to fit the available budget, but designed to reflect the vulnerable people who might be in need of the support.

We support the concept of nationally set criteria. However, these criteria must be sufficiently clear to allow for universal interpretation by the local authorities administering the scheme. If they are open to considerable interpretation then there is a chance of a postcode lottery emerging.

The Government must also develop award guidelines so that local authorities award similar levels of grants depending on criteria achieved in each local authority, otherwise there is a risk of a postcode lottery of awards too. This happened frequently under the previous system.

### **Impact of restricting crisis payments to applicants in receipt of DWP payments**

Barnardo's has a major concern with this, if it means that people who have been 'sanctioned' for breaching the conditions of their Universal Credit (UC) agreement or those that are not in receipt of the UC will not be able to access crisis payments.

People who have been sanctioned may be in the most need, and to deprive them of access to this source of support would leave them with absolutely no recourse.

There may be an instance when those not in receipt of UC may need to access a crisis grant, for example, a woman escaping an abusive relationship. It is essential that the new system ensures that all those that are in crisis can access support.

### **Equalities issues**

It must be recognised that equalities issues due to age cover the young, as well as the old. This means making sure that the eligibility criteria must be designed not to discriminate against young people, who may not have a track record of interaction with the DWP or benefits departments. Young people may also be seen as less likely to require institutional care than the elderly if they are not supported to live independently.

### **Independent review**

The most important issue is not who conducts the review, but the speed of the process. Access to crisis support should be on a 'same day' basis, and those applying for community care support should be assessed and awarded their grant speedily.

Overall, we believe that the application and approvals process for the new scheme should ensure that applicants are not unnecessarily rejected or systematically forced to go down the route of appeal. The

fact that over 50% of Community Care Grant applicants were rejected last year is an indication that something is wrong with the current system.

If an appeal is required a decision must be reached quickly and applicants must not have to wait significant periods of time as they currently do.

**What should it be called?**

Barnardo's Scotland is happy with Community Support Fund as a name for the transitional fund.

We are worried by the proposal to treat it as two schemes, since neither of the two purposes fit the needs of young people leaving care.

**For Further Information Contact:**

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