

Welfare Reform Division
4th Floor Fry Building
NW Quarter
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

21 November 2014

Re: Local welfare provision in 2015/16 Consultation

Dear Sir / Madam

YMCA was established in 1844 and there are 114 YMCAs across England serving over 530 different communities.

YMCA is there for all young people, supporting those going through difficult times, as well as providing activities for all young people in a community to enjoy. Each year, the YMCA intensively supports over 228,000 young people right across England.

This submission to the consultation is based on a consultation with YMCAs and sets out the current and anticipated impact of the Government's reforms to the local welfare provision.

Previously the Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans, and now the local welfare provision has a critical role to play in helping vulnerable people at their times of most need.

For those in supported accommodation, like the nearly 10,000 individuals YMCAs support each night in England, these funds have also been utilised to support clients moving back to independent living.

In line with the overall allocation to date, the support most commonly received by the young people YMCAs work has focussed on white goods, household items and food.

However, in replacing Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans with a local welfare provision, the Government has inadvertently made it increasingly difficult for young people to access this support in their time of need.

The local welfare provision has been poorly promoted, with many of young people not being adequately informed or directed to the schemes, even when they present themselves as being in need at local agencies (e.g. local authorities, Jobcentre Plus).

Even for those adequately informed of their existence, the pathways for accessing the local welfare provision and the criteria from who is eligible has too often been poorly defined and communicated to those needing support.

Rather than enabling support to be better joined-up locally, YMCA has seen examples where this has resulted in the pathway becoming 'muddled' and young people being pushed between different providers in seeking support.

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

SUPPORT & ADVICE

ACCOMMODATION

FAMILY WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAINING & EDUCATION

An example of this is the links between local welfare provision and hardship payments, with people being told that they need to apply for hardship payments from Jobcentre Plus before they are considered eligible for any local welfare provision.

Another example of where the pathway has been complicated is the introduction of 'local connection' criteria in many local welfare provision schemes. This has created yet another barrier for those who have had a more transient background, which is more common amongst people who have been homeless and young people who have experienced an unstable upbringing.

In addition to issues faced accessing the new local welfare provision, YMCAs have also seen a notable reduction in the amounts young people are able to receive when compared to the previous Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans system.

This difficulty people face accessing the same levels of support as under the previous arrangements is demonstrated by the Department for Work and Pensions own research published this month.

This research shows that "*almost all of the local authorities (80%) did not spend the whole of the funds allocated to them*", with only two thirds of the total local welfare provision budget spent in 2013/14.¹ While teething problems could be used to partially explain this significant underspend, this years projected spend is still only 86% of the overall budget.

While YMCA has significant concerns with how the process for localising welfare provision is being managed and implemented, it believes there is a clear and apparent need to retain some form of local welfare provision.

As research recently published by the YMCA demonstrates, the vast majority of YMCAs in England now have to send young people to food banks in order for them to be able to eat, last year referring in the region of 5,000 vulnerable young people.² Given that those being referred are largely people living in supported accommodation, it would suggest those facing greatest difficulties are not receiving adequate help.

The need for this support will be furthered evidenced in research that will be published shortly by YMCA, which demonstrates the increasing challenges individuals face when looking to move on from supported accommodation, which is in part due to difficulties accessing the funding and support Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans previously offered.

It is because of this recognition for the ongoing need and concerns for how local welfare provision is currently being run that **YMCA believe that all the three options presented in the consultation are unsatisfactory.**

All the choices presented in this consultation would appear to mean a cut to the local government budgets. YMCA would call on the Government to at least maintain the existing levels of funding provided to local authorities for the local

¹ [Local Welfare Provision Review](#), Department for Work and Pensions, November 2014

² [Food for thought](#), YMCA England, November 2014



welfare provision, and not require them to find this from other elements of their existing budget.

Recommendation: The Government should maintain existing levels of funding provided to local authorities for the local welfare provision.

Without wanting to create an overly bureaucratic system, YMCA would call on the Government to create an option which guarantees ring-fenced funding of the local welfare provision, while not forcing already strained local authorities to find this from their existing settlement.

Within the homelessness sector, in particular with Supporting People funding, we have seen first-hand the negative impact that the removal of ring-fencing can have, especially when local authorities are being pushed financially to find savings.

Having the ring-fence in place would ensure that unlike with Supported People, support remains in place for those in most need right across the country and while allowing for local differences, individuals would not be left subject to a postcode lottery of support.

Recommendation: The Government should ring-fence funding for the local welfare provision.

At the same as protecting the local welfare provision funding, given the vital support it can and is providing in some areas, it is important that the issues with how it is currently being delivered is looked at in more detail to ensure it is achieving its stated aim of giving flexible help to those in genuine need.

As the Department for Work and Pensions research brought to light – *“of those interviewed the majority have indicated that they have no formal success criteria in place”* – which YMCA believes is unacceptable for a fund worth in excess of £120million.³

The Government should undertake a more comprehensive review of how the local welfare provision is being spent and whether it is achieving its goal of helping vulnerable people at their times of most need.

Recommendation: The Government should undertake a full review of how local welfare provision is currently being delivered.

If you require any further information or have any follow-up questions regarding our response, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details included.

Yours faithfully



Denise Hatton
YMCA England
Chief Executive

³ See 1

