Supplementary written submission from Scottish Disability Equality Forum

The Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) works for social inclusion in Scotland through the removal of barriers and the promotion of equal access for people affected by disability.

It is a membership organisation, representing individuals with any type of impairment, disability organisations and groups who share our values. It aims to ensure the voices of people affected by disability are heard and heeded. SDEF promotes access in its widest sense, including access to the built and natural environment and access to the same opportunities as are enjoyed by other people in our community.

Amidst the global budget cuts amounting to £1.3bn, we welcome the decision not to cut the Third Sector budget which will go towards maintaining services provided. However, the growing burden of responsibility put upon many voluntary organisations from cuts in other areas will impact heavily on what we can deliver within a budget allocated for the current level of demand, bearing in mind the real-term cuts of a frozen budget. DPOs expect a significant increase in disabled people requiring assistance and guidance from the Third Sector as the impact of the PIP and Community Charges come into effect. We would like to have seen a little growth built in to the budget to address this anticipated increase in demand.

However, we understand that the Scottish Government’s hands are effectively tied and do see - across the Budget as a whole – a commitment towards independent living with improved access to services, including health and housing with the resources available.

Mental Health

The proposed 18 week referral to treatment time is welcomed and we would like to see this improve still further – every day spent without help can seriously affect the long term prognosis of those requiring treatment.

Increase in Demand for Therapy Services

Further, increased demand in this area should be anticipated, and those most affected by the pending cuts are likely to be least able to pay for immediate treatment. We would like to see improved support particularly for those with a disability – many of our members have stated that without the basic quality of life that their current benefits afford them, they have no wish to keep living. The Mental Health Strategy intends to focus on suicide prevention, and we feel this
specifically should be taken into account during the development of suicide prevention strategies.

Suggestions are invited within the Mental Health Strategy Consultation on how to improve treatment on diminished resources. Whilst training up new therapists/mental health nurses will help in the long-term, we might first look at what we already have in existence by way of qualified therapists, trainee therapists and therapy centres as a cost effective means of providing treatment.

1. Existing Therapy Centres already have trained professional staff available. Part subsidisation of treatment could help bridge the immediate gap and improve prognosis (potentially reducing long-term – and costly - treatment) for many clients.

2. A growing number of individuals seek immediate treatment from trainee therapists. This is at a fraction of the cost and all trainees are monitored, supervised and insured under the training organisation. This works better with some types of treatment than others, for example, brief therapy, CBT which are structured treatments.

The improved referral to treatment time is expected to be achieved through what appears to be a ‘triage’ approach, providing both low – and high – intensity treatments decided at the time of assessment. In theory, this two tier system should allow for more complex issues to be dealt with more appropriately (intensive and more costly treatment), whilst less complex issues are dealt with more quickly, preventing them from developing into mental illnesses which may be more difficult to treat.

Adequate Assessment

Although there are advantages to the triage method, it should be noted that – particularly with mental health issues – a seemingly simple issue may just be the ‘tip of the iceberg’. For example, deeper investigation of a client presenting with a common phobia may uncover a history of mental illness or sexual abuse. Such issues may require intensive psychotherapeutic and/or chemical intervention and could be missed if assessment is not carried out by a mental health professional working directly in the Psychotherapy field.

The Mental Health Strategy does not specify by whom the decision will be made as to

- What level of treatment a client should receive.
- What type of therapy a client should receive

Accurate assessment pre-treatment is vital to achieving a good outcome for the client. The mis-diagnosis of a client presenting with an unremarkable issue but with a greater underlying pathology could result in a poor prognosis and increased cost to the NHS through ongoing treatment.
With many types of therapy available, assessment must include what is appropriate for the client. For example, whilst Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the treatment of choice for economical as well as empirical reasons, it would not be a cost effective choice if a client was not ready to embark upon the solution-focused approach of CBT.

**Inclusive Communication during Treatment**

It is vital that therapy services include adequate funding for inclusive communication. At the moment, access to assistance for individuals with, for example, a communication impairment can add many weeks to the waiting period for treatment. Whilst the provision of a community fund exists across NHS boards to supply communication assistance, this fund is inadequate for the current level of demand.

In light of the expected increase for treatment from those affected by the pending cuts, it is even more imperative that this gap in services is addressed: to fail to provide adequate means of communication during treatment is tantamount to providing no treatment at all. And to consider that those most in need of treatment may often be those least likely to afford it, this issue requires serious review to ensure improved access to services.

SDEF will be holding a members information event to gather further opinion in advance of the January deadline for the Mental Health Strategy Consultation. The report for this will be available in due course.

**Housing and Regeneration**

We are pleased to see a £600 million investment for new affordable housing, but the £80m to be spent on social housing, providing 3,300 homes pales in significance to the some 230,000 properties needed for disabled people across Scotland (GCIL). We urge the Scottish Government to attend to this need by making new homes adaptable from the outset – this means that necessary changes may be made quickly and easily without making fundamental structural changes at a high cost. We hope that this will be considered as part of its preventative strategy.

In the meantime, we hope that current endeavours to ‘map’ social housing need alluded to in the Social Housing Charter will provide greater clarity on demand, and provide an improved allocation service for the many disabled people impacted by poor or inadequate housing across Scotland.

Lastly, with regard to Housing, a further issue which our members feel should be allocated within the budget under concessionary measures is the pending Under-
occupancy Rule. This rule will penalise those with homes which are, or have become too large for their needs with the aim of ‘encouraging’ tenants to move to smaller homes. A result of this is that many disabled people will be faced with the choice of either staying in their homes at the cost of a reduced income, or moving to a smaller (and possibly non-adapted) home and being unable to receive family/friends, or house part-time carers or even necessary medical equipment. This will impact older disabled people particularly, not least because they may need to re-apply for fresh adaptations, but also as they may be unable to house part-time care staff.

We would have liked to see the budget include an under-occupancy exemption for disabled and older people alongside their commitment to build new homes of adequate size and accessibility as stated in the Draft Scottish National Strategy for Housing for Older People.

Social Enterprise

We are delighted about the Scottish Governments commitment to increasing Third Sector social enterprise involvement. Social Enterprises can result in an increased quality of service for those who are paying for it, as well as impacting the wider community through work opportunities – including people with a disability - and local area regeneration.

It is, however, important to remember that the majority of Third Sector organisations do not provide what would be regarded as commercial services, but rather provide a mix of humanitarian assistance and preventative support which has no immediate commercial value and which must remain dependent upon available funding.

We suggest that to sustain available funding for these organisations, those who may have potential for social enterprise should be more widely encouraged to focus on financial sustainability as a long-term goal, with better financial assistance and more accessible support than is currently the case.

We recognise that there is support available through the Third Sector Enterprise Fund grant and the Scottish Investment Fund Plan for organisations to extend a commercial arm to their activities. However, organisations should be assured that their endeavours towards sustainability will not cut them from future funding resources or assistance opportunities – this may be keeping many organisations from dipping their Third Sector toes in Social Enterprise waters.

Tourism

We have a few access panels working in their own areas with their local tourist committees.
At a national level SDEF were working with Visit Scotland and always met with one particular Director who subsequently left Visit Scotland and since that time we have been trying to re-establish that level of involvement but to date this has not been successful. We will continue to strive for an increase of the involvement of access panels with their local tourist committees but it is important that to achieve this as well as a wider approach to accessible environments in the tourist industry the re-establishment of our involvement at a strategic national level is paramount.

**Ayrshire Panels**

In the last year the four Ayrshire access panels collectively hosted a one day 'Best Practice' Conference where other panels were invited along with Designers, Architect, Building Standards Officers, Planning Officers, etc. The four Ayrshire access panels are planning a similar event this year again with the involvement of SDEF as the umbrella body for all access panels in Scotland. A similar event was hosted by Lochaber access panel and SDEF in Fort William; similarly this event was well attended and gave valuable information to the decision makers and Designers of Inclusive Environments.

**Dropped Kerbs**

From its conception we have been supporters of the Scottish Parliamentary Bill on pavement parking which includes the possible enforcement of dropped kerbs which are often the only means by where someone with a mobility impairment can gain access or egress to/from a pavement.

All access panels are regularly involved in the implementation of dropped kerbs by their local councils. It is common practice for councils to seek guidance to both the site of dropped kerbs and the standards by which they are built. SDEF has been involved and is still involved in Transport Scotland’s Good Practice Guide which is a working document that is constantly evolving with the input of many disabled people and organisations including many access panels.

**Forth Road Crossing**

SDEF has been involved from the beginning of the concept of the new Forth Crossing and have two members on the very knowledgeable but small FRC Access Forum. Form this forum we have and will ensure that all aspects of the new Forth Crossing and the upgraded road systems north and south of the crossing are accessible for all. We work in partnership with both Transport Scotland and the three members of the Consortium to ensure that all plans and any potential changes are supported and signed off by the access forum. This is a long term commitment by SDEF to the largest capital project ever undertaken in Scotland.
**Taxis**

SDEF in partnership with Healthy Working Lives Forth Valley and Falkirk access panel were involved in a pilot training programme for Taxi Drivers in Falkirk. We trained thirty Taxi Drivers in Disability Awareness and Lifting and Handling in four hours at a cost of only £5.00 per head; although SDEF supplied the Disability Awareness Training and Healthy Working Lives supplied the Lifting and Handling Training free of charge.

This was a very successful training day and the blueprint could be duplicated across Scotland as a method of 'Good Practice' for the training of Taxi Drivers. The accessibility of taxis is a constant item address by both SDEF as the umbrella body for access panels and all access panels in Scotland. As such we would like to see a more inclusive approach to training and a standardisation of training across Scotland.

**Paths for All**

SDEF has worked with Paths for All for a number of years and have been very active on the Access for All committee where until recently the secretariat was supplied by Paths for All. However, it has been some time since the Access for All committee met and we feel that in order to nationally address many of the problems regarding access to the countryside for disabled people that this forum must continue. As such we are in regular contact with Paths for All to find a way forward for this important initiative.

**Fieldfare Trust**

SDEF has worked with the Fieldfare Trust for a number of years and have supported a number of access panels who have been involved in the survey of paths with a specialised GPS system. Supporting panels in being involved in the 'Photo Trails' project which is a web based information facility developed by the Fieldfare Trust by where people who have used various paths and facilities in the countryside can take photographs and add them, with comments, to the website thus building up a proficient database of accessibility of different areas of the country that other residents and visitors who have a disability can access to assist them to decide if they are able to visit and enjoy specific countryside areas.

**ScotRail**
Along with other disability organisations SDEF has recently been involved with ScotRail in looking at their proposed new ticketing system and the machines involved. We have given advice and guidance on issues of accessibility on the new systems and look forward to further partnership work with ScotRail. A number of access panels have also been involved with ‘Railtrack’ in the design and building of new and refurbished stations and the relevant service facilities thereof. Most of the panels involved have been on the East Coast in Aberdeen and from Edinburgh to the Scottish Borders on the new borders rail network. SDEF as the umbrella body have, and continue to give guidance and advice on the design and management of these stations and facilities.

**ILiS – Coproduction**

The Network Development Officer attended a Fieldfare meeting on the 20th January 2011; this work was initiated in early 2010 when the proposal to include Access Panels in Fieldfare’s Inclusive Networks Project was put in place. The project continues to focus on Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Fife, with the access panel representation providing:

- advice to the steering group in guiding the project;
- a channel through which people with disabilities and their organisations can influence the project;
- feedback about the project to disability communities in the four relevant local authority areas and
- perspectives on pan-disability issues ensuring all perspectives are cover.

Work on this project has been good, with the launch of the Fieldfare photo trails website, which enables individuals to view the accessibility of some of the core paths in the four local authority areas. Fieldfare is keen to work with the NDP to deliver a networking and workshop based event to engage with other SDEF members and to provide the opportunity for individuals to access the website and gain knowledge of the skills required to contribute and use the technology on the website.

Scottish Disability Equality Forum
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