Written Submission from Scottish Disability Equality Forum

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 improvement of waiting times standards from six months to 12 weeks 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.

Further, increased demand in this area should be anticipated, as 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 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.

Within the consultation, suggestions are invited 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.

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.

Triage approach – this can have its disadvantages, but some centres will delegate clients based on their presenting problems. Those clients with what might be considered more regular issues (eg., phobias, short-term anxiety, anger management) may be seen by a trainee, whilst others will be referred to professional therapists. A subsidised in-house triage approach may be worth consideration as a local pilot, with regard to reducing current waiting times and improving services to those in greatest need. This would allow for disability support

**Dementia Services**

We are delighted to see investment in improving Dementia services. This is a vital step as the quality of care for individuals – and especially those in residential care – requires far greater scrutiny. We would like to see funding provided to achieve a national standard in basic care training for care staff, and informal carers, which has equality, dignity and empowerment at its core.

**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 guests or house part-time carers. 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.

**Transport/Access and Tourism**

I am awaiting information from our Access Development Officer to provide a full report on both Transport/Access and Tourism issues, and expect to have a full report of this to you by the end of this week.

Scottish Disability Equality Forum
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