INTRODUCTION

Quarriers is one of Scotland’s largest social care charities supporting thousands of disadvantaged families each year. These families have been struggling to cope in the face of major reforms and stalled economy that has stunted opportunities. We support children, families, young homeless people and adults with learning disabilities from birth through to older age. Quarriers has been campaigning to improve the lives of people we support for over 140 years.

GENERAL

1. Are you in favour of the Bill and its provisions? Do you think the Bill fully achieves the Scottish Governments aim of providing assistance for short term need and community care?

Quarriers welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill. This has been a crucial support to many people Quarriers support who suffer from a combination of disadvantages such as poor housing, poor health, worklessness and so on as well as low income. Quarriers conducted a study between 2012 and 2014 in relation to families’ experience of multiple disadvantage in Scotland and found that low income to be a common thread running through most of the problems faced by families both as a cause and effect of people’s own mental and physical wellbeing and has a serious strain on people’s relationships with others. (Ties that Bind Demos 2014). Tackling such disadvantage therefore can never be left to one service alone to solve. The best services work with the complexity of family life. Improving outcomes may require working with children or a partner or problems being experienced by siblings. Policy often does too little to take account of this sort of interdependence. We are delighted the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill allows for a more holistic linking of services which has the potential to build capacity of all services to respond to someone in need.

2. Has the Bill taken on the learning from the interim SWF scheme?

Quarriers welcome the fact that the Bill will put the SWF on a secure footing. We are delighted to see that sections 2 (1) (2) and (3) of the bill are wide enough to offer opportunity to access the support in a range ways. Quarriers practitioners report that most dealings with social welfare fund have been positive and respectful.

Universal Credit, the Bedroom Tax and changes related to replacement of DLA with PiP are all having an effect on people Quarriers support. Quarriers are concerned that the cumulative impact of welfare reform will lead to more and more people requiring both crisis payments and grants for essential items. This means that in times of Austerity pressures on funding are likely to increase. There is no flexibility
in the bill which accommodates the ups and downs of the market. Nor is there an increase or decrease in the funding which accompanies this variability.

3. Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill?

No.

4. Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups?

Quarriers support a large number of people with disabilities and for those individuals, applying for grants can be very confusing. Raising the profile of the SWF through easy read information materials is essential.

Other people Quarriers support have needed help to access the SWF -

Single mum from local area with 3 children, boy age 2, girl age 8 and boy age 11. Her house is in poor condition and has damp. Due to this she disposed of beds and bedding which had been affected by damp. Her application to social welfare fund for new furniture was rejected as it was not deemed urgent. Her appeal was refused as it had not been submitted within time limit. They are now willing to reconsider case following advocacy by worker from the family centre.

Individual situations can be fairly unusual and very unique which can cause delays. For example; Quarriers have had some difficulty accessing the fund on behalf of someone we support who does not have capacity. This lady was being discharged from a long stay hospital and needed palliative care and because of a delay remained in a hospice longer than she needed to.

Quarriers have also found that funding is very limited in relation to people with a disability moving into independence and seldom covers what is required. We have often found advocacy on behalf of people we support is essential but can slow down processes.

ADMINISTRATION OF WELFARE FUNDS

5. Do you agree with the proposal that local authorities have the option to outsource the provision of the fund to a third party or jointly administer the fund across local authority boundaries?

A Demos report commissioned by Quarriers (Ties that Bind January 2014) illustrated that local services are not joined up.

“We also find that many of the systems that ostensibly help support people are often not experienced as ‘supportive’ in any real sense. People frequently complained about the complexity of the welfare system, were worried about the consequences of recent reforms, exhibited a chronic lack of trust in social services and in rural areas in particular, felt that statutory services were abandoning them altogether.”
Quarriers would hope that local authorities administering the fund offers the opportunity for the connection between funds and services.

Quarriers believe that the timescale for processing Crisis Grants should be reduced to 24 hours and should include out of hours provision. If an application is received by a Local Authority on a Friday payment at the end of the second working day is not an effective response to meeting the needs of people in crisis. Some of the young homeless people Quarriers support have applied for crisis grants because they are in need of food or electricity and delays can cause significant distress. Previously under DWP, decisions and payments were made in the same day.

**REVIEW OF DECISIONS AND THE SPSO**

6. Local Authority Review Processes

Quarriers agree with the characteristics of the review process as set out in the Bill. Quarriers believe that applicants, particularly those people with a disability should have access to advocacy and advice in relation to the review process.

7. What are your views on the proposed internal local authority review process?

Quarriers welcome the decision that second tier reviews are undertaken by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman rather than local authority panels. This allows an administrative solution to be made by through a scrutiny of the process. Quarriers welcomes section 4 (4) of the Bill which gives the SPSO the power to make alternative decisions.

**FURTHER PROVISION – REGULATIONS**

8. Views on the level of detail?

Quarriers believe that there is the right balance between discretion and regulation.

9. Financial Memorandum

Quarriers acknowledge the difficulty in planning in relation to SPSO undertaking reviews. The interim SWF gives a good guide in relation to the number of reviews therefore costs should be estimated accordingly.

Quarriers
28 August 2014