Local Government and Communities Committee

Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2017-18

Submission from NHS Health Scotland

About Us

NHS Health Scotland is a national Health Board working with public, private and third sectors to reduce health inequalities and improve health.

Our corporate strategy, A Fairer Healthier Scotland, sets out our vision of a Scotland in which all of our people and communities have a fairer share of the opportunities, resources and confidence to live longer, healthier lives.

Our mission is to reduce health inequalities and improve health. To do this we influence policy and practice, informed by evidence, and promote action across public services to deliver greater equality and improved health for all in Scotland.

Key Messages:

- Having a warm, dry, affordable house is fundamental to good health and is crucial to achieving the Government’s commitment to a fairer, healthier Scotland.
- NHS Health Scotland welcomes the commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years.
- Whilst being generally supportive there are a number of areas where further clarity is required e.g. how the funding will be allocated to ensure greatest impact; how the target will be measured and reported over time.

QUESTION 5: In particular we want to hear your views on:

How well the centrally managed funding programmes are managed, what outcomes they deliver and do they represent value for money?

To what extent are the innovative funding packages leading to a change in the way affordable housing is being delivered? (information on innovative financing is available on the Scottish Government website at this link.

The extent to which the centrally managed funds support development of the appropriate mix of affordable housing to meet housing needs (such as mid-market rent as compared with social rent or private rent)?

NHS Health Scotland welcomes the commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years. Having a warm, dry, affordable and safe home is fundamental to good health. Conversely poor housing is one of the root causes of ill-health and lies at the heart of social and health inequality. Housing conditions such as indoor air pollution, dampness, noise and overcrowding can affect health and living in a cold home has been linked with an increased risk of death and ill-health. People such as young children, elderly and unemployed individuals are more at risk of the health
effects of housing conditions as they tend to spend a higher proportion of their time in the home environment and are more vulnerable to the hazards. Housing interventions that improve housing conditions impact positively on health, especially if targeted at those living with existing health conditions and in poor housing.

A recent report by BRE\(^1\) estimated that the cost to society (including medical costs, lost education and employment opportunities) of leaving England’s poor housing unimproved is £18.6 billion. The annual NHS costs for the same homes were estimated at £1.4 billion, equating to 8% of the total cost to society.

The Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) in 2014-2015 reported that 2% (48,000 dwellings) of all dwellings fell below the tolerable standard (a minimum standard for habitability introduced in the 1969 Housing (Scotland) Act, and updated by the 2006 Act) and there were 35,764 homeless applications made in Scotland in 2014-2015. As such, the delivery of 50,000 affordable homes should have a significant impact on the public’s health, provided they are delivered in a way that meets local need/demand. The Government may wish to consider the extent to which a programme of work to bring existing stock up to an adequate level to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard might also make a significant contribution. It is not immediately clear and transparent how the Resource Planning Assumptions (RPAs) are calculated for each local authority area so it is difficult to comment on the extent to which the right areas of the country are being prioritised. For example which areas of Scotland have specific and urgent requirements in relation to social housing? What is the most appropriate mix of affordable housing and where should this be targeted to meet national housing need? The answer to these questions would be helpful in determining how the money will be targeted at areas where the demand is greatest.

**QUESTION 6:** To what extent do the Resource Planning Assumption and the Strategic Local Planning Agreements processes effectively enable local housing needs to be prioritised and resourced?

See comment above on RPAs. Once local funding has been allocated it seems reasonable to align it with the local housing strategies and Strategic Housing Investment Plans through the strategic Local Planning Agreements. The crucial element is how the local housing strategies and investment plans have been developed. Given the impact good housing can have on health (and in contrast the impact poor housing can have harming health) NHS Health Scotland would encourage the involvement of local public health teams in developing local housing strategies. Similarly housing is recognised as a key element of local health and social care integration. There are some good examples of housing being well integrated into Strategic Commissioning Plans; this work could be built on and replicated across each local authority.

**QUESTION 7:** We seek written responses on whether the increased subsidy levels will support new housing developments; and in particular whether the flexibility in subsidies will improve the provision of housing for older people or for people with particular needs.

---

Related to question 6 above, each Integrated Joint Board needs to develop a Strategic Commissioning Plan (based on a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) that sets out the current and future health needs of the local population. This could specifically include plans for provision for older people or people with particular need, for example families with young children and infants. This reinforces the need for housing to be really well integrated into the local Strategic Commissioning Plans.

**QUESTION 8:** Do you have any other comments to make about the outcomes the Scottish Government seeks from its Housing Supply Budget and how it delivers those outcomes?

NHS Health Scotland welcomes the commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss and support:

- The Scottish Government allocate the AHSP budget in a way that ensures that the areas where the greatest demand for affordable housing get the largest allocations.
- How progress in meeting the commitment will be measured and reported over the five years.
- Both of these issues might be usefully considered by the Home and Place Sub-Group of the Joint Housing and Policy Delivery Group.

Nick Hay  
Senior Communications and Engagement Officer