Local Government and Communities Committee

Draft Budget 2018-19

Submission from RNIB Scotland

RNIB Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and to support the future developments of the local government and community budget.

As Scotland’s leading sight loss charity working with blind and partially sighted people and a key partner with a range of integrated eye-care and sensory services, we support those with a sensory impairment to live full and independent lives.

With a shift in preventative services, needing to shift resources towards more preventative activity, reduce reliance on reactive hospital-based care and provide the right care at the right time and in the right place, RNIB Scotland believes that this is the direction that is needed for the budget going forward.

We would like to see the Draft Budget 2018-19 manage eye health and community services coherently, ensuring better care and prevention strategies, recognising the interests and needs of blind and partially sighted people in order to deliver seamless services and better outcomes.

The consultation remit poses the following questions:

- We want to hear how spending is prioritised and resources are managed effectively, for instance through service redesign.
- We want to hear how national policies are impacting on local government spending, for instance how will increased revenue from the end of the Council Tax freeze and banding multiplier be used, and what is the impact of spending being ‘protected’ through national policy.
- We want to hear how fees and charges are being used, and how decisions are made on which service areas are affected.
- We want to know how local authorities assess the impact of increased charges and service redesign on different social demographics.
- Following on from evidence heard last year, we invite local authorities to provide an update on the use of General Fund Reserves.
- We want to hear your views on the transparency of the local government financial settlement, and how this could be improved.
- We want to hear your ideas on how local government finance, including revenue streams, may change in the future.
- We want to hear your view on the three year RPAs and how this will help local authorities to plan to meet affordable housing needs in local areas and also the Scottish Government’s 50,000 affordable homes target.
- We want to hear your views on any other aspect of the housing supply budget.
- We also invite views on any of these aspects of the Local Government and Communities budget 2018-19.
We want to hear how fees and charges are being used, and how decisions are made on which service areas are affected

Local authorities throughout Scotland routinely charge for a range of non-residential care services, from Home Care to Community Alarms. Scottish Government figures show that care charges throughout Scotland have risen by 12%\(^1\) on average and increases by some local authorities have been more than this\(^2\). There are also massive regional variations in charges. An October 2013 report by the Audit Commission found that charges for a single hour of home care varied between £8.56 per hour and £23.70 in different areas of Scotland, while day care for younger adults can vary between being free of charge and £175 per week.

RNIB Scotland is deeply concerned about the rising costs of social care which is putting additional pressure on their services, such as independent living skills and low vision assessments, to people who are blind or partially sighted. With council funding and budgets cut, this is impacting heavily on the third sector as a whole, but with increasing reliance on their services. Due to this, additional pressure on charity services cannot sustain the ongoing demands they have for social care support.

RNIB Scotland is aware of the need for more vision rehabilitation support. Just under half of blind and partially sighted people in touch with their council are not assessed for vision rehabilitation support. This means that the council doesn't have accurate knowledge of their needs, and some visually impaired people miss out on the support they require to live independent lives.

Recommendation

- To ensure that the third sector is directly involved in ongoing social care budget discussions
- To support the need for more vision rehabilitation services

We want to know how local authorities assess the impact of increased charges and service redesign on different social demographics

There are currently a number of inconsistencies and variances in how social care charging is applied from area to area and across age groups. This is affecting local authority contracts which help to support RNIB Scotland with service provision and staff costs. These reductions have implications on how many staff members they have to support the public, which increases waiting times.

The application of charges is subject to means testing which itself demonstrates a tremendous range of variation. For example, COSLA recommends that the minimum

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\(^1\) Scottish Government Finance Statistics – LFR3 2009-12

\(^2\) In 2015-2016 Edinburgh Council has increased the charge it makes for an hour of care at home by 14%; Midlothian Council has increased its charges for Telecare by 50%; East Renfrewshire has plans to double their charging income by collecting an additional £220,000. West Lothian Council has brought forward plans to increase their charging income by £750,000 - an increase of 300%.
income threshold – the level of income which a local authority believes that a disabled person should be able to live on – should be the Income Support level plus 16.5%\(^3\). However local authorities across Scotland set this at different amounts. For a single person under 60 it varies from £123 per week, in East Ayrshire, to £173 per week in neighbouring North Lanarkshire\(^4\) – both less than the poverty threshold for a single person with no children. Councils are effectively charging disabled people who are already living in poverty.

RNIB Scotland recognises that services need to be delivered differently in the future, with a whole system review necessary to achieve that. This is about refinement and working coherently with others to provide a service that is suitable. For example, RNIB Scotland strongly believes that coproduction is essential to supporting the third sector as a whole. For example, Lothian Sensory Partnership (LSP) is a joint working programme with Deaf Action and RNIB Scotland, supporting people who are blind or partially sighted and deaf.

**Recommendation**

- A service overview is needed in allow for more consistency which prevents huge strain on services in particular areas of Scotland

**We also invite views on any of these aspects of the Local Government and Communities budget 2018-19**

RNIB Scotland is concerned about the ongoing lack of understanding from procurement officers which is leading to inconsistencies and bureaucracy. The Scottish Government Procurement of Care and Support Services is too complex, with a lack of information about tenders and too much paperwork. With increasing pressures on third sector services, this increases the demand on staff time and services.

**Recommendation**

- For the Scottish Government to review the Procurement of Care and Support Services to enhance the understanding of tenders.

Laura Jones
Senior Policy Officer
RNIB Scotland

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\(^3\) COSLA, National Strategy & Guidance, Charges Applying to Non-residential Social Care Services  

\(^4\) East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Community Care Charges, Charges for non-residential social care services  