

From the Chairman of the Association
Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Dear Eric,

17 February 2014

LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT

I am writing regarding the ending of the £347 million specific grant for local welfare support in 2015-16.

I am extremely disappointed that the government did not consult councils prior to this decision being made public in the detail of the local government finance settlement.

This runs completely counter to the partnership approach with which we have approached welfare reform, and assurances that were given about the process through which a decision on future funding would be taken.

At a time when councils are contending with the biggest funding cuts in living memory, and wanting to do all that they can to support the most vulnerable people in society, they now have an additional funding pressure to meet from a grant cut, possibly associated with a transfer to baseline funding which, until a week before Christmas, they did not know about.

The early indication is that councils are more effectively targeting support to those in genuine need. Crucially, many authorities have expanded the scope from a purely reactive approach, where help is only available to people once they have reached a crisis situation, to a more proactive use of the money that targets support towards people at known pressure points and enables them to become more resilient and self-reliant. The fund is therefore making an important contribution towards enabling the government to achieve the overarching intentions of its wider welfare reforms.

A decision on the future of the fund needs to take into account a thorough analysis of the scope, demand, design and delivery of local schemes. We have raised our concerns in the LGA's response to the local government finance settlement and will be pulling together evidence and learning from councils' schemes. I urge DCLG to work in partnership with the LGA to review the fund with an open mind about the options for the future.

Yours sincerely,


Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell