

Patient & Public Involvement Forums

National Association of Patients Forums

The Right Hon Alistair Darling
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
SW1A 2HQ

July 23 2007

Dear Mr Darling,

Financing of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs)

We are concerned about the financing of LINKs in 2008-2009. The intention is that the money given to the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) in 2007-2008 (the Commission's last year of existence under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill currently going through parliament) should, in 2008-2009, be given to local authorities with social care responsibilities.

Forum support organisations (mostly private contractors) paid for by the Commission, will cease to receive money on March 31st 2008, when the Patient's Forums (unpaid volunteers) they support cease to exist under the legislation.

Instead, the relevant local authorities will have to commission 'host' organisations under the legislation, presumably by a tendering process which may or may not be subject to EU legislative requirements. There is no time limit on this process.

When the contracts begin, the 'host' organisations will have to create a LINK in each relevant local authority area. Each LINK (separately constituted under a local agreement) will be made up of voluntary organisations interested in health and social care and individual volunteers. Again this is a process with no time limit.

The local authorities concerned will receive the money for payment to 'hosts' under the November 2007, local government financial settlement and will be required to account for it under the legislation.

In our view there is a significant risk that the money will be paid out to at least some local authorities before their LINKs is created.

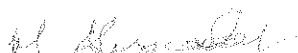
What is needed, we feel, is a strong incentive for local authorities to perform their statutory duty quickly, ideally by 1st April 2008, or as soon thereafter as possible. It is undesirable to give the local authorities this money if it is not going to be spent for its proper purpose or spent at all.

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One solution would be to require each local authority to certify to the Secretary of State that LINK has been created in its area before it received any money. That would deal with the basic problem, ensure that LINKs were created on time and provide a framework for some governance of the new arrangements. This could be combined with legislative provision that the existing Patients' Forums continue to exist until 'certification' was received. Some expenditure would be required for these forums – which could be kept relatively small (e.g. for support, travel and subsistence) – to be financed by the local authority as a charge on the money to be received in due course.

We should be glad to receive your comments.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Alexander
Chair
National Association of Patients' Forums

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