Best Value Statutory Guidance

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington, Conservative)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to implement the principles of the Best Value Statutory guidance in respect of *(a)* giving at least three months' notice to voluntary and community organisations and their service users when reducing or ending funding, *(b)* engaging with voluntary and community organisations and service users as early as possible before making a decision on the future of the service, any knock-on effects on assets used to provide this service and the wider impact on the local community and *(c)* making provision for voluntary and community organisations and service users to put forward options on how to reshape the service or project.

Paul Burstow (Minister of State (Care Services), Health; Sutton and Cheam, Liberal Democrat)

The Best Value guidance does not legally apply to central Government Departments or their Executive agencies. However, as the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Mr Pickles, made clear in his foreword to the revised Best Value guidance, central Government Departments support the fair standards set out in the guidance and have reaffirmed their commitment to the national Compact. The issues raised are covered by the Compact.

In January, the National Audit Office published "Central Government's implementation of the national Compact", a report which provides commentary on the implementation of the national Compact across Government. The Department for Communities and Local Government participated fully in the National Audit Office's review of the national Compact implementation and will be following up as appropriate the recommendations within the National Audit Office report in order to ensure that the Department continues to be a strong model of collaborative working between Government and the voluntary sector.

In health and social care, the Department of Health recognises that voluntary and community organisations play vital roles in delivering innovative, high quality, user-focused services, and achieving outcomes that can provide real social value. They have a strong track-record of designing services based on insight into clients' needs, and are often well placed to respond flexibly to those needs. That is why the Department is committed to strengthening the role of the voluntary and community organisations and make it easier for them to be at the centre of social change.

To that end, the Health and Social Care Bill proposes the establishment of health and wellbeing boards who will be under a statutory duty to involve people living or working in the area in the preparation of joint strategic needs assessments and the development of joint health and well-being strategies, which will underpin commissioning plans for local services. HealthWatch, which will be established as a new consumer champion at both national and local levels, will ensure patients and the public have a stronger voice in national health service and social care. Local HealthWatch will have a seat on health and wellbeing boards, ensuring that the views and experiences of patients, carers, other service users and the wider public are integral to the preparation of such assessments and strategies.

Hansard source (Citation: HC Deb, 27 February 2012, c134W)