GP PREMISES’ CHAOS

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Practices looking to expand or improve their premises have been excluded from NHS England’s much-touted £1bn 'transformation fund' because cash-strapped CCGs cannot afford the subsequent rent increases.

NHS Leeds North CCG told practices that because of its poor financial position, it would not support bids for funding where it would lead to increased rents, because it could not afford the cost of increased reimbursements.

But a GP leader said this was another example of ‘short term’ thinking that NHS England has applied to the fund first announced by Chancellor George Osborne in 2014. The GPC has previously highlighted concerns that the fund was being underspent, with one in five approved projects at risk of collapse.

NHS Leeds North CCG Board Papers said: 'Due to financial constraints in 16/17, Practices were made aware that within any bids submitted, if there is development of new or expansion of existing General Medical Services (GMS) space, the CCG will not be in a position to provide practices with reimbursement associated with rent for this additional space.'

NHS England requires CCGs to support all costs associated with a successful bid to the fund and NHS Leeds North CCG said that they would, therefore, not be putting forward those where rent reimbursements would increase.

It said it would review this position for next year’s bids but that it had been important to be clear with practices when they were drawing up plans.

A spokesperson said: 'The CCG is supporting Practices to submit bids to access monies through the fund, but cannot currently afford to incur any related additional, recurrent, revenue consequences.

'NHS Leeds North CCG supports Practices entitlement to rent reimbursement. However, in 16/17 the CCG is unable to support bids to Estates and Technology Fund, which will result in an increase in revenue costs to the CCG as a result of increased rent reimbursement.'

But Leeds LMC assistant medical secretary Dr. Richard Vautrey, also deputy chair of the GPC, said the LMC was 'challenging the CCG on this point’.

He said: 'It undermines the viability of Practices, does not recognise the pressures of population growth or any plans for community development long-term with such a short term approach.’

He added: 'This is likely to be one of the reasons why the fund is not being spent - and why it needs to be rebadged so often - because the recurrent funds for practice premises have not been properly factored in to this investment.’

NHS England was approached for comment on the CCG’s position but had not responded.

**The £1bn Premises Fund**

The fund launched by NHS England in 2014 has already been rebranded twice in its first two years was intended to ’modernise’ general practice, and prioritised bids that would improve care for the elderly and extended access.

More than 1,000 Practices were given the green light for funding from the first year’s £190m slice of the fund, with 32 bids worth between £1 and £5m given the approval in principle in March 2015.

But the original scheme required projects to be completed, and funding spent, in year one and it was revealed how millions in pledged funding had been withdrawn from Practices by November.

This was shortly followed by an announcement from NHS England that management of the scheme had been handed to CCGs, and Practice bids would now have to be redrawn in line with local estates plans.

It has most recently been rebranded the Estates and Technology Transformation Fund, after having been re-hashed again in the *General Practice Forward View* published this April.