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Charities Unite on Social Fund Changes

A group of charities from across the sector have united to condemn moves to abolish the discretionary social fund and replace it with a localised system of relief for families in crisis.

The charities have put down an EDM sponsored by Kate Green MP to highlight the issue in Parliament ahead of the committee stage of the Welfare Reform Bill due to begin on 23rd March. Charities are calling on the Government to rethink reform of the Social Fund whilst fundamental other reform of the welfare system, including the introduction of the Universal Credit, takes place. Charities are deeply concerned that families and individuals in crisis may be left without a welfare safety net.

Charities supporting the EDM include Family Action, Child Poverty Action Group, Citizens Advice, Community Links, Disability Alliance, Gingerbread, Homeless Link, RNIB, Shelter, Save the Children and Buttle UK (formerly The Frank Buttle Trust).

The charities main concerns are outlined in the EDM below:

This House Notes

The proposals to reform the Social Fund through the abolition of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses, and their replacement with a system of localised provision through non-ring fenced funding to Local Authorities, could restrict emergency financial support for individuals and families when they need it most; further notes that localisation at a time of substantial pressure on Local Authority resources could lead to severe reductions of access to any equivalent assistance at all if the money is not ring-fenced meaning vulnerable families and individuals face a postcode lottery of different entitlements in different locations; further notes that the Social Fund is a targeted intervention which can enable people to move to independent living after hospital stays, to successfully resettle following homelessness, and provides necessities for families to build a new home after a crisis; urges Government to heed concerns by organisations such as Family Action, Child Poverty Action Group, Citizens Advice, Community Links, Disability Alliance, Gingerbread, Homeless Link, RNIB, Shelter, Save the Children and Buttle UK (formerly The Frank Buttle Trust) that cuts to the Social Fund may mean that families have nowhere else to turn and existing welfare grants schemes could be swamped; calls on the Government to rethink reform of the Social Fund whilst fundamental other reform of the welfare system, including the introduction of the Universal Credit, takes place so as to ensure that people are not left without a welfare safety net at this time.

Family Action Head of Policy and Campaigns Rhian Beynon said: "We're concerned that the Government's slash and burn approach to welfare will hurt vulnerable families and leave them without the necessary safety net when they need it most. We're concerned about moves to localise the Social Fund, a lack of accountability about whether this money will be spent on supporting vulnerable families and the amount of funding the Government will make

available. We're calling for Government to at least maintain the existing level of funding and this should be a prerequisite for any reform. The Social Fund is a vital part of the system for families in crisis. It's a targeted intervention which can enable people to move to independent living after hospital stays, to successfully resettle following homelessness, and provides necessities for families to build a new home after a crisis. This simply isn't the right time to be making holes in this safety net. The Government needs to think again. I hope MPs will support this Early Day Motion."

Ends

Notes to Editors

To get comments from individual organisations please contact their respective Press teams.

For further information, comment or a case study from Family Action please contact Anthony McCaul, Senior Media and Campaigns Officer at Family Action on 0207 241 7632 or 0781 309 2040.

An Early Day Motion (EDM) is a formal motion submitted for debate in the House of Commons. EDMs allow MPs to draw attention to an event or cause.

The charities supporting this Early Day Motion include Child Poverty Action Group, Citizens Advice, Community Links, Disability Alliance, Gingerbread, Homeless Link, RNIB, Shelter, Save the Children and Buttle UK (formerly The Frank Buttle Trust).