



Tony Lloyd: Community budget programme at risk

Greater Manchester police commissioner says local authorities should not view community budgets as a way to make fast cash

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At the LGA conference, Tony Lloyd told local authorities that community budgets are at risk of failure. Photograph: Christopher Thomond for the Guardian

The government's expanded community budget programme, bringing together public sector funding in local areas, will fail unless all the bodies involved are prepared to give up some control over their own budgets, local authorities have been told.

Tony Lloyd, police and crime commissioner for Greater Manchester, told an audience of councillors and officers at the Local Government Association conference that too many people saw community budgets as an opportunity to get extra money. "Everyone says to me, Tony, I've got some great ways to spend your money," he said. "We've all got to negotiate and take risks with our budgets. That is the single biggest challenge."

Communities secretary Eric Pickles has announced nine new areas that will run community budget programmes, following four pilot schemes. Analysis of the four pilot schemes by Ernst & Young suggested that if budgets were pooled around the country, the total potential savings could reach as much as £20.6bn over five years.

Donna Hall, chief executive of Wigan council, one of the four community budget pilot areas, said that whether the area got a place-based settlement or not, it would "crack on" with community budgets. "If we don't do this fundamental redesign, we are not going to survive as public bodies," she said.

While there is widespread acceptance that some form of pooling budgets, including money for health, policing and local authorities, is the only way to counter the big fiscal cuts in public sector spending, not everyone is convinced that community budgets will produce major savings. There is still some concern that local councils are making savings that will go into other bodies' budgets, particularly welfare.

"We all know that community budgets are the way forward, but how do we ensure that the money comes back to local government and doesn't just drift off to other organisations," said Martin Tett, leader of Buckinghamshire county council.

Dr Huw Charles-Jones, chair of the West Cheshire clinical commissioning group, one of the other community budget pilots, said it was easy to get frustrated about the seemingly slow progress on community budgets. "But if we pause and look back to three or four years ago, we have come a tremendous way," he said.

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