

Video transcript: Finance Network Chair Ewan Dewar on challenges and priorities

The role of the West Midlands finance network has really helped work[ing] across areas because sometimes finance is seen as a slightly different thing that might sit outside of the main aspects of social care.

But I think what the network enables the members to do is to work with other elements of social care linking up with our other networks but also contributing to wider things around policy etc – it's not just about the numbers.

I think biggest challenge going forward is understanding the financial impact of the changes brought about by the adult social care reforms. There's already been a number of announcements that will change the financial landscape for adult social care: increased numbers of financial assessments and changes to charging policies as well as systems that we need to use to record it.

Another significant challenge facing us is actually dealing with the fallout of the numerous grants that we've had this year relating to the Covid pandemic. As everyone knows, adult social care has been hit particularly hard by it, the whole sector. A number of grants have been paid out and there is a significant amount of administration to deal with around the reporting of those grants.

The West Midlands finance network continues to be really supportive to its members, not only in the meetings, discussing issues in a safe environment, but also outside of meetings. There's often email exchanges between the various members. Not everyone can answer all the time, but always there will be someone who can support you with your questions.

In 2021/22 we have been involved in engagement on adult social care reform and supporting each other to understand and interpret what information has come out. We share best practice and knowledge in relation to changing policies and use of resources reports, and basically just good practice on grant management and other aspects of finance.

Priorities for the next year are going to be the 'fair cost of care' work, and preparation of care market sustainability plans. The requirement to publish these by September remains a very challenging target, but we'll all come together with the Commissioning Network to achieve those deliverables to make sure we can secure the additional funding. Ultimately we'll need to work together to look at bringing in increasing fees in line with what represents a fair cost of care.

A second priority would be working with other West Midlands ADASS networks to test efficient and effective care cap tools. While the fair cost of care work is the first element of the reforms requiring completion, other elements that come into effect in October 2023 also need to happen in parallel and such as preparing systems, processes and policies to deliver these.

The third priority I'd say is assisting councils generally with preparations for the future assurance and CQC inspection in relation to financial issues and risks to providers. As we've already outlined, market sustainability continues to be a significant area of concern particularly following the pandemic, and supporting delivery of both of those plans and changes to fees will be key.