



Wales Safer Communities Network
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Fit Note Reform: call for evidence

Introduction

The Wales Safer Communities Network was established in January 2021 following the recommendations of the Welsh Government's Working Together for Safer Communities Review. The Network provides the strategic voice for community safety in Wales, working collaboratively to champion and support community safety partnership working, and influence the shaping and development of national policy and local practice.

Response

Whilst on review of the question we felt we would be unable to offer any helpful responses to the questions posed, we do hope that the following observations and feedback are helpful to you.

We would like to highlight that there is no mention of the devolved administrations throughout the consultation paper, given that Health is a devolved area of responsibility in Wales we would hope that any further consideration to amending the Fit Note Process would involve direct discussions with the Welsh Government.

Whilst we do appreciate that this is a scoping exercise, we are concerned by the overall tone of the call for evidence and the implication that people are taking advantage. Whilst we recognise that there will be some people who will unfortunately exploit the process, we would agree that health professions are indeed best placed to make these judgements, based on an holistic consultations with individuals. To suggest they are being issued inappropriately would question the integrity of the medical professionals issuing the paper, or perhaps that they do not have adequate



resources to address the demand in which case increased funding and resourcing ought to be addressed.

We are concerned that by placing additional barriers to gaining approved time off work, many vulnerable individuals will fear to seek medical support and will lose trust in their GP. There is a risk that people will return to work too quickly and make themselves more unwell or unwell for longer.

From a community safety perspective, if people are unwell they should stay away from work to protect themselves and others. Following covid-19 many organisations were able to set up homeworking, which can assist in the return to duties in a safe environment, but for those who need to attend their place of work, doing so too soon can cause a relapse or potentially spread infection.

Whilst we do not disagree with the suggestion of supported return to work, in reality this is not always something all employers can facilitate- depending on the nature or size of the business.

We would agree that there are many social and personal benefits of working, and we do not dispute that it can be difficult to return following long term absence. However, we would once again look to the health care professionals who would be best placed to understand the complexities of any given individual and their personal circumstances recognising that there may be many contributing factors that may mean return to work would be inappropriate for the wellbeing of the individual.

Should you decide you wish to look further into reforming Fit Notes, we would be happy to assist in ensuring you have appropriate and relevant contacts within Wales to help shape any future proposals.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Response submitted by:

Please note this response is on behalf of all of our members which includes the 22 Councils, 4 Office of Police and Crime Commissioners, 4 Police Forces, 3 Fire and Rescue Services, Probation in Wales, Public Health Wales, 3rd Sector, Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government.

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