

HOUSING LIN POLICY BRIEFING

Independence and opportunity

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGY FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

This briefing gives an overview of the new Supporting People strategy, *Independence and Opportunity: our Strategy for Supporting People*¹, published by Communities and Local Government in June 2007.

BACKGROUND

The Supporting People programme began in 2003 as a way of funding housing related support for vulnerable people. The programme enables 1.2 million vulnerable people to live independently. The Government sees Supporting People as a successful programme, particularly as it allows a strategic and co-ordinated approach to service provision. It delivers real improvements on the ground and makes a positive economic impact and savings to the public purse². Authorities have begun to recognise how housing related support fits with health, care and other support services and the programme has highlighted the importance of having local preventative and early intervention services.

There have been challenges too. Funding issues have diluted the focus on the strategic use and development of services. Audit Commission³ inspections suggest that many authorities have not taken corporate ownership of Supporting People and have missed opportunities to make the use of services.

The services need to be more responsive to what service users want and allow more choice. The assessment of needs and the provision of services are considered not to be well integrated and services users can find they have to deal with more than one agency to get what they need.

In November 2005, the Government published a consultation paper on developing a new strategy⁴ for Supporting People and reported back on the responses⁵ in 2006.

¹ Available from <http://www.publications.communities.gov.uk/pubdetails.asp?pubid=2627>

² The Government has promised a report on this later in 2007.

³ See also Audit Commission, *Supporting People: National Report*, London, 2005

⁴ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Creating Sustainable Communities: Supporting Independence*, London, 2005. Available from www.spkweb.org.uk

⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Supporting Independence: Next Steps in Our Supporting People Strategy*, London, 2006

Respondents agreed that Supporting People services were essential to meeting the needs of vulnerable people and suggested some form of statutory backing for the programme. They were cautious about individual budgets and said that a focus on user needs was dependent on everyone having access to the right information. Respondents strongly agreed with the Government's proposal that the programme should move towards an outcome focus and called for the government to develop a national framework. They said that stability and visibility of funding was essential to the future of the programme, but wanted to retain the programme as a specific, protected grant. They were cautious about integrating Supporting People funding with the Local Area Agreement process. Respondents also wanted to retain a specified administrative framework through a commissioning body and endorsed a focus on minimising bureaucracy.

Respondents also agreed with the Government that the voluntary and community sector will remain important in delivering services, but were concerned that current practices around procurement and full cost recovery were putting these providers at risk. Respondents welcomed the existing Directory of Services, but saw enhancing its usability as a priority and were uncertain about the value and practicability of a national system for tracking service users.

The key messages are reflected in the Government's new strategy. It sets out what the Government will do to achieve the aims of the Supporting People programme, what the Government expects commissioners and providers to do and what service users will be able to expect from housing related support services. The Government's vision is that every citizen has the opportunity to live a fulfilled, active and independent life and one of the keys to achieving this is having a stable home. The Supporting People programme can ensure that vulnerable people have the life skills they need to live independently, support in finding and maintaining a suitable home, help to identify jobs and training opportunities, as well as help to access utility services, help to claim the right benefits and help to ensure that their accommodation is accessible and safe.

The strategy does not, however, address funding issues, which will be decided in the Comprehensive Spending Review due to be announced in the autumn 2007.

KEEPING PEOPLE THAT NEED SERVICES AT THE HEART OF THE PROGRAMME

Putting the service user in charge and getting more involved

The Government wants people to have services that are appropriate and responsive to their individual needs and expectations. It commits to work with local authorities to encourage the development of service user involvement plans and a national template for charters for independent living to provide clear and accessible standards for service users that will set down the standards that people can expect.

Joined up interventions and more integrated assessments

People might need access to a range of integrated services, of which housing related support is only one and they want those services to be joined up and

consistent. In particular, it is important to include Supporting People services within the wide health and social care assessment processes and the Government intends to explore the possibilities of including housing and related support in the work that the Department of Health is doing to develop common assessment frameworks for adult services.

Meeting the needs of mobile groups and individuals

It is important to ensure that local authority boundaries are not obstacles to choice and control, particularly for mobile groups and individuals. More collaborative planning is needed at regional and sub-regional levels.

Developing better communication and consultation with service users

Consultation responses showed that service users want the opportunity to give their views, but only if there is a genuine interest in what they are saying and only if they have an opportunity to influence change before it happens⁶. The Government proposes developing service user involvement plans and charters. Local authorities are responsible for consultation, but providers too have an important role to play. The Government has developed its own charter that will be published on the Supporting People website.

Exploring alternative service provision models

Through its public service reform agenda, the Government is committed to putting service users in control of services and individual budgets, where service users are offered the resources as a single, integrated funding package, are already being piloted. One of the pilots is on Supporting People. There are issues to be worked through for service users, funders⁷, commissioners⁸ and providers⁹.

Helping service users to make the right choice

To exercise choice and control over services, people to need access to information about the options that are available. There are already some excellent sources of information¹⁰. It is also important that support is available to service users who find exercising choice difficult or stressful. The Supporting People directory of Services¹¹ already provides information for people looking for housing related support services.

⁶ Work on independent living has shown that developing involvement mechanisms that work for service users and commissioners and providers is not always straightforward. See Gillinson, Green and Miller, *Independent Living – the Right to be Equal Citizens*, Demos, London, 2005

⁷ Hurstfield J, Parashar U and Schofield K, *The Costs and Benefits of Independent Living*, Office for Disability Issues, London, 2007 suggests that increasing independent decision making is at least cost neutral and probably more cost effective than traditional approaches

⁸ Managing risk is an issue for service users, commissioners and providers, but recent research suggests there are practical ways of handling this. See Better Regulation Commission, *Risk, Responsibility and Regulation – Whose Risk is it Anyway?*, London, 2006 and Department of Health, *Independence, Choice and Risk: a Guide to Best practice in Supported Decision Making*, London, 2007

⁹ Housing 21, a housing association working with older people, has begun research to develop good practice in using individual budgets.

¹⁰ See www.housingcare.org for instance for information about specialised housing for older people

¹¹ www.spdirectory.org.uk

The Government intends to enhance this service by building awareness and redesigning the site to include more links to other key sites.

ENHANCING PARTNERSHIP WITH THE THIRD SECTOR

The role of the Third Sector

The Supporting People programme built on a range of services already provided by the Third Sector. Since 2003, the relationship between Third Sector providers and local authorities as purchaser and manager of the services has developed, but some challenges remain. The Government's strategy sets out what is expected of service providers. The Government has also published a discussion paper¹² on its strategy for the Third Sector.

Expectations on providers

Providers will be expected to work with local authorities to involve service users in the design of their strategy and services and in performance management. Providers have been responsible for innovative services and it is important that they continue to work with local authorities to innovate, change and challenge service provision. They must also ensure that their services represent value for money. Partnerships between Third Sector organisations may help improve efficiency.

The right level of reporting, accountability and transparency

Local authorities also have a role to play in challenging and benchmarking processes and in identifying areas for further improvement. Authorities' checks on reporting and accountability need to be proportionate and providers need to make sure their costs are transparent.

Support and capacity building

The Government will continue to invest in support and capacity building and also expects local authorities to ensure that providers receive the support that they need. The Government will ensure that providers are represented on wider stakeholder groups and will continue to identify and share positive practice and support training.

DELIVERING IN THE NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT LANDSCAPE

Meeting community needs

Providing the right housing support must be a core part of how local authorities meet the needs of local people. The recent Local Government White Paper¹³ set out an intention to give local people more influence and power to improve their lives. Local people want choice and influence over the design and delivery of services and need to be consulted about the running of services and their quality. The Government plans measures to promote increased community ownership and management of local facilities and assets. The role for local government is one of strategic leader

¹² Communities and Local Government, Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government, London, 2007

¹³ Communities and Local Government, Strong and Prosperous Communities, London, 2007

and place shaper and the strategic vision will be delivered through a Sustainable Community Strategy developed with local partners through a Local Area Agreement including a single set of targets for improvement tailored to local needs.

Making the right links

Local authorities will need to consider how the Supporting People Programme can help deliver the wider sustainable communities agenda and consider the links and synergies between different programmes and strategies. Local authorities will need to plan for demographic changes and particularly the ageing of society¹⁴. The preventative services delivered through Supporting People may be particularly important. The link between the Supporting People strategy and local and regional housing strategies is vital.

Developing stronger, more effective governance

Oversight and governance of Supporting People will be with the commissioning body, an effective approach bringing together the local authority, Probation, Primary Care Trusts and, where relevant, district authorities. However, past experience has shown that corporate support within an authority and an understanding that Supporting People is a mainstream part of delivering services for local people is vital to the successful delivery of support services.

Integrating Supporting People into Local Area Agreements

From 2008-2009, all authorities will need to have a Local Area Agreement¹⁵ to reflect a new performance framework. Performance indicators will be changed and Local Area Agreements will be based on up to 35 improvement targets based on a national set of indicators and local targets. Supporting People must be properly integrated with this framework.

The Government will work with authorities to explore the possibilities of delivering Supporting People through the new area based grant and, in 2008-2009, will offer selected authorities the same freedoms that they would have if their funding was paid under the same power as the general Local Area Agreement Grant, effectively removing the ring fence. The impact of this will be analysed to inform future delivery mechanisms. The Government's aim is to deliver Supporting People through the Local Area Agreement Framework by April 2009. There is also potential for local authorities to collaborate through Multi Area Agreements.

Developing new Public Service Agreements and Developing a Supporting People outcomes set

The Government intends to move to a much smaller number of public service agreements¹⁶. These will be underpinned by a set of outcome based national

¹⁴ The Government will publish a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society in 2007

¹⁵ A three year agreement between a local area and central government. The agreement describes how local priorities will be met by delivering local solutions, while also contributing to national priorities. The agreement is negotiated by a local strategic partnership that brings together partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

¹⁶ Announced in Budget 2007

indicators that will be used for negotiating local improvement priorities and targets through the Local Area Agreement.

The Government has developed a Supporting People outcomes set around five high level outcomes:

- Achieve economic well-being
- Enjoy and achieve
- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe and
- Make a Positive Contribution

This set is not mandatory, although authorities are being encouraged to use it.

Performance will continue to be measured by the current Supporting People inspection, but this will end by March 2009, when the Comprehensive Area Assessment¹⁷ will be in place.

Introducing a stronger statutory basis for Supporting People?

The Government has considered having a stronger statutory basis for Supporting People and has decided that all the approaches considered raised concerns about reducing flexibility and affordability. New legislation around housing support is therefore not deemed appropriate, especially given the new performance framework and Local Area Agreement duties. Charters for independent living may also offer possibilities.

Promoting and sharing positive practice

Promoting and sharing positive practice is also important and the Government is looking to enhance current regional networks by appointing regional champions, who will act as expert points of contact, lead on specific topics and be aligned to the wider regional improvement strategy.

Funding and investment

Funding will be decided by the Comprehensive Spending Review. In future, instead of limiting any new investment in housing support to Supporting People money, the Government would prefer local authorities to consider how supported housing and housing support fit with delivering local objectives and priorities and then invest in housing support accordingly from across a wide range of local funds.

For regional services, the Government prefers local authorities to work collaboratively with regional assemblies as part of setting and delivering regional strategies. Joint analysis with the Housing Corporation and the Care Service Improvement Partnership Housing Learning and Improvement Network is considering how regional strategies have fitted with Supporting People and the

¹⁷ See Strong and Prosperous Communities

National Affordable Housing Programme. For schemes of national importance there is a case for direct Government investment.

INCREASING EFFICIENCY AND REDUCING BUREAUCRACY

The value improvement programme

Where local authorities continue to aspire to grow services, there must be a continuing emphasis on optimising efficiency. In order to stimulate and ensure further work around value for money and service improvements, the Government has put in place a national Supporting People Value Improvement Programme. This will build on the successes of the original value improvement projects, but the programme will be based on bids to the Government. A national value improvement manager has been appointed to lead the work.

Reducing bureaucracy

Local authorities need to be aware of the costs associated with information requirements and decide what represents value for money. The Government has already reduced the monitoring requirement on local authorities by not carrying out further service reviews. Any further Government requirements will be reduced to a minimum.

New Technology and business processes

Many providers and authorities have already tested the potential of new technology and others are encouraged to do so.

For further information on telecare and CSIP's programme to support the implementation of the Department of Health's Preventative Technology Grant arrangements, visit www.icn.csip.org.uk/telecare.

OTHER POLICY BRIEFINGS IN THIS SERIES

All documents are available from the Housing LIN website at www.icn.csip.org.uk/housing, under Briefings in the Resources section.

1. Department of Health's White Paper - Our health, our care, our say; a new direction for community services
2. Individual Budgets
3. Wanless Social Care Review - Telecare and older people
4. Long Term Conditions and the Wider Policy Context
5. Disabled Persons (Independent Living) Bill
6. Learning Disability & Housing
7. Local Government White Paper – 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'
8. Disabled Facilities Grant – Department for Communities and Local Government consultation
9. Mental Capacity Act: An Introduction
10. Commissioning Framework for Health and Well-Being
11. Prevention of Homelessness: the role of health and social care
12. Improving Access to Health and Social Care Services by People who are Homeless or Living in Temporary or Insecure Accommodation
13. New Health & Social Care Structures – What are the Opportunities for Housing?
14. Local Area Agreements: Maximising the Potential for Housing for Older People
15. Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable – Housing Green Paper 2007