

# Collaborative Supporting People Project for Service Users with Dementia



## Summary

Collaborative working across four local authorities has led to the launch of a floating support service to help people with dementia and older people with memory problems maintain their independence within the community. This is preventing people from losing their homes and avoiding the unnecessary use of more institutional forms of care. As a result, it is reducing pressure on social care and NHS budgets, plus in one area alone the new service has already generated savings of more than £170,000.

“The end result is that we have more efficient and effective services across four local authorities which are also of benefit to the service users and the relevant stakeholders. Also, working across four areas is allowing more flexibility for the provider to create a flagship service.”

**Suzanne Harris, Acting Partnership Manager,  
Somerset Supporting People Team, Somerset  
County Council.**

## Project Background

A collaborative tendering process took place to find a service provider for the cross local authority project. The aim was to provide a specialist housing related floating support service which would enable more people with dementia to develop or maintain their independence.

Somerset was already in the process of undertaking an independent tendering exercise for such a service in early 2007 when the South West Centre of Excellence invited funding bids for collaborative regional or sub-regional commissioning projects of strategic benefit. These had to lead to efficiencies and savings, meet service needs and involve service users.

Given this initiative, Somerset broadened and strengthened its work to also encompass three other Supporting People authorities – Poole, Bournemouth and North Somerset – to tender collaboratively for the specialist service.

Throughout the South West region the proportion of older people in the population is growing and a significant percentage of people over 80 will have some form of dementia or other cognitive impairment, typically causing memory loss or wandering.

Also, colleagues in Mental Health services had outlined the pressing need for a preventative service, supporting younger people with early on-set dementia (often caused by the adverse affects of alcohol or drug addiction).

The tendering process under European procurement rules saw collaborative working between the authorities involved to ensure the service specifications met their needs. From around 45 expressions of interest, 20 or so bids were evaluated.

Shortlisting involved both the Project Board, representing all four Supporting People authorities and Somerset County Council. The tendering process led to agreement for one joint contract with the mental health charity and service provider, Rethink.

The Somerset service launches on 1st January 2008 and, following the necessary recruitment, is due to start in Bournemouth, Poole and North Somerset in March 2008. The contracts will run for 27 and 24 months respectively, and will begin two weeks before the actual service starts to allow for staff training.

### Objectives

The aim was to commission a cost effective, housing-related support service for people with dementia and older people who may have other memory problems, across the four local authority areas. This would enable efficiencies and savings for social care and NHS budgets, plus bring major benefits for the service users. The key objectives were to:

- implement a citizen centred approach and fully engage people with dementia and older people with memory problems as partners in all aspects of service planning and delivery
- enable service users to maintain independent living for longer - reducing admissions to care homes or mental health accommodation, and facilitating hospital discharge
- allow effective crisis management to prevent admissions to higher forms of care
- promote equality of opportunity and diversity
- reduce social exclusion and isolation
- reduce fear of crime and protect vulnerable adults
- reduce health inequalities and poverty for those with dementia and older people with memory problems
- provide high quality, cost effective and joined up services, underpinned by Best Value principles and delivered by a skilled and competent workforce

The service offers seven day a week provision backed by a community alarm service, delivered between 8.30am and 6.30pm to people in their own homes. The service is linked to the person, not the accommodation, and is for anyone with dementia or for older people with memory problems. It is concentrating on those requiring five to 10 hours of support per week.

People requiring more support will be referred to another agency. Staff tasks will include assisting with finance (providing guidance, advice and prompting), utilities, security, diet, medication, hygiene, and community involvement to prevent social isolation.

### Role of the South West Centre of Excellence (SWCoE)

Funding provided by SWCoE covered the tendering exercise led by the Somerset Strategic Services Partnership team, consultancy fees to Ridgeway Associates for preparing the service specification and liaison with service users, and labour costs for the four Supporting People authorities.

### Benefits achieved

Quarterly reports from the service provider Rethink will highlight achievement against service targets. It is expected that at least 80% of service users will continue to live independently within the community while receiving the service.

Somerset previously spent £520,000 a year for a similar specialist older people with mental health needs service but, as a result of cost reductions generated by the collaborative tender, will only spend £350,000 in 2007/8 – thus already generating a substantial saving.

In addition, Somerset and the remaining three Supporting People authorities who did not previously have such a service, expect to generate savings for other local authority departments/NHS budgets as a result of improved outcomes. The service will lead to reduced admissions to hospitals, care homes or specialist mental health units.

The recent Dementia UK Report ('Impact of Dementia', February 07) estimates the annual costs per person with dementia in different settings is as follows:

- people in the community with mild dementia – £14,540
- people in the community with moderate dementia – £20,355
- people in the community with severe dementia – £28,527
- people in care homes – £31,263 (accommodation accounts for 41% of the total)

Therefore, cost savings will almost certainly be achieved across the four authority areas. The report also states that: "People with dementia can stay at home for longer with their families if the right support is put in place." This reinforces the rationale behind the floating dementia support service.

The service will provide support for approximately 65 service users in Somerset plus 44 new places across the other three authority areas. In addition to the investment by Somerset, its partner authorities have agreed to contribute funding: Bournemouth - £100,000, North Somerset - £100,000, Poole - £220,000.

#### **Critical success factors and lessons learned**

Effective communication is an essential ingredient for success when bringing together a number of different public sector organisations to create economies of scale by working together. It is necessary to allow an adequate timeframe, and to agree deadlines and stick to them.

The authorities started the process in January 2007 and had hoped to award the contract in early September. The timescale slipped to mid October because the amount of interest generated by the contract led to the evaluation stage taking longer than expected. Patience and realism are required when planning how long the process will take.

Attending meetings and communicating with everyone involved takes time, and commitment from all those involved is crucial. Somerset, North Somerset, Poole and Bournemouth were all keen to push ahead to enable the service benefits and savings to be realised. All found it beneficial to share their expertise, knowledge and best practice.

Recruiting the right staff for such a service is also essential. The four authorities were keen to agree a staggered roll-out of the service pending the necessary recruitment and training.

#### **Risks**

There are a number of risks, including not meeting the tendering timetable, a lack of ownership of the project by each local authority, and failing to reach a service specification which meets the needs of all the parties involved.

Staff involvement and communication both within and between authorities is essential in the procurement process to ensure that all are clear about what is being commissioned and are fully on board.

Different authorities have different ways of approaching and procuring services. Potential problems can be mitigated with a commitment on all sides to be honest and willing to negotiate. A fear of losing control has to be seen within the context of being open to new ways of working.

It is vital to ensure sustainable change for the future. The Project Board holds regular meetings and benchmarks have been agreed so that performance can be monitored.

#### **Transferability**

The principles of collaborative commissioning can be applied to a variety of other scenarios in the field. These include other floating support services in the community and accommodation-based services. If people want the process to work, it can be made to work.

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