

SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

THE BEACON COUNCIL SCHEME ROUND 5 (2003)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMERY

1. The Government wishes to see the delivery of needs led high quality strategically planned value for money housing related support services. This involves understanding the need for support and the existing supply of support services. This is the fundamental element of the programme and the key driver taking it forward in its new focus and structure
2. There has been an enormous amount of planning and preparation for the supporting people programme during the last two. Additional resources were made available to LAs in order that the programme could be delivered effectively from 1st April 2003
3. Supply mapping has been completed and interim contracts between local authorities and providers are, in the main, in place and agreed. The budget has now been sized with the total Supporting People programme budget confirmed at £1.4b. Services will be strategically planned and jointly commissioned and each Administering Local Authority has established a Commissioning Body to deliver the partnership approach required at senior levels with representation from the relevant local authorities, health service providers and Probation.

All services funded through Supporting People will be subject to scheme reviews to assess their quality and appropriateness. Administering Authorities should already have established their programme for reviews. Once a service has been reviewed it will move onto a steady state contract. Reviewing of services is critical to the success of the programme. The vision for the monitoring and review of services under Supporting People is to develop a system that leads to the continuous improvement of service

4. The Shadow Strategies have been submitted to ODPM and have been assessed. These strategies set out the current position of existing provision and inform what changes are necessary in order to have a fully needs led housing related support services.
5. The intention is to collect common data on outcomes for the ODPM and other central government departments This data will be supplied by Administering Authorities and will measure performance against key indicators. These are
 - Service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living
 - Service users who have been supported to move on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements; and
 - Fair access to Supporting People service

Policy Context

1. Supporting People was introduced by way of a judicial review in 1996 when the decision was made that General Counselling & Support could no longer be included in the overall rent as part of a housing benefit claim.
2. The government therefore needed to make some radical changes to the way funding was distributed to local authorities for housing related support. From these changes came the inception of the 'Supporting People' programme. The newly introduced programme does not have specific legislation but has been 'pigged-backed' on to section 93 of the local Government Act 2000.
3. Since 1997 a range of government initiatives have aided the development of the Supporting People policy. These include the developments of Better Care: Higher Standards charters for local authorities and health authorities; the passing of the Care Standards Act 2000, which introduced new arrangements for registered care provision, including residential care and home care. The passing of the Local Government Act 2000 which gave new duties for promoting or improving economic, social or environmental well being of local communities. These were added to through the publication of the Housing Green Paper and the subsequent Housing Statement, The Way Forward for Housing, and ultimately the Sustainable Communities Plan. Each of these initiatives takes forward, in its own way, the overall policy direction of Supporting People and the Supporting People programme must be integrated into these wider developments if it is to be seen as a success.
4. Supporting People will bring major improvements to the quality of housing related support services in England for 1 million existing users and 10,000 providers at a cost of £1.4b. Some of the services for vulnerable groups to benefit from Supporting People are:
 - Support to older people in sheltered housing or support to those who wish to continue living in their own homes but need some help to do so;
 - Supported housing for people with learning difficulties who can move out of institutional care and into the community if they are helped to do so;

- Housing for people with long term mental health problems who can move out of hospital if regular support is provided to help them cope with living independently;
- Help for young homeless people who may never have had a tenancy but can become established in a stable home with the aid of housing support;
- Support for women fleeing domestic violence who need refuge accommodation and then move on accommodation with some support to resettle;
- A range of other vulnerable people who can move to a stable home in the community if they are provided with a basic housing related support service; and
- The development of services which enable vulnerable people at risk but already living in the community to receive support to continue living in their own homes.

Such improvements can only be achieved by developing a flexible range of services based around individual needs. For example, instead of having to move into hostels to receive support, in future, support will be provided to people within their own homes- this is often referred to as floating support. Planning services locally, starting with a clear assessment of local needs for support, will result in the delivery of appropriate services, designed to meet individual needs and delivered in a timely manner.

5. There are also a range of other groups who are equally important to the programme and whose quality of life is directly improved by Supporting People services. These include people leaving prison, teenage parents, substance mis-users, people with physical disabilities, including those with sensory impairments, who may need support to move from institutional care and others. Support for these groups is linked to other programmes being developed by the social exclusion unit, the rough sleepers unit and other departments; for example the connexions programme in the Home Office.
6. The ultimate aim of the programme is to promote independent living so avoiding the need for institutional care and reducing the risk of vulnerable people becoming homeless. Equally it aims to help people in institutional care to move to a more independent and stable home in the community.

7. In December 1998 the Government issued a consultation paper entitled 'Supporting People': Following this the final policy framework document 'policy into Practice' was issued jointly by DoH, Home Office and DTLR in January 2001. Supporting People (SP) went live on 1 April 2003.
8. Within the framework of Supporting People it is important to understand the distinction between 'care' and 'support' – SP covers housing related support only. A definition provided by what was then the DSS (now DWP) states that:
 - 'Personal care' is, 'care, which includes assistance with bodily functions where such assistance is required'.
 - 'Support', '...entails enabling, reminding and non-professional counselling (which has a dictionary definition of 'advising') with the aim of achieving greater independence or maintaining sufficient independence, for example to retain a tenancy.'

DSS Circular HB/CTB A10/2001

DEFINITION

1. The SP programme brings together all legacy funding streams into one central budget and requires Administering Local Authorities to administer the budget in an effective way, ensuring that local needs are met. The funding streams which have been brought together are:
 - Transitional Housing Benefit (the element within Housing Benefit that pays for support services, rather than 'bricks and mortar' rents)
 - Income Support/Income Based job seekers allowance
 - Housing Corporation Supported Housing Management Grant
 - Probation Accommodation Grant
 - Home Improvement Agency Grants
 - Unpooled Rental Income (that element of rental income, currently charged to all tenants, which covers the extra costs of support services received by a minority of tenants) in the case of council housing providers and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).
 - DSS Resettlement Programme grant (paid by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 30 of the jobseekers Act 1995)
2. One of the underlying principles behind SP is the partnership approach. This recognises that there are many parties with an interest in the supported housing sector:
3. Local Government (as both service commissioners and in many cases as providers)

Health (in the form of Primary Care Trusts –‘PCTs’)

National Probation Service

Providers of Services

Users of Services

The two key bodies overseeing and administering SP are the Commissioning Body (CB) and the Administering Local Authority (ALA).

The Commissioning Body (CB) comprises representatives from Local Government, Health and Probation. The CB has no legal powers, but is responsible for the overall delivery of the programme including the SP strategy, which provides the strategic steer for the programme.

The Administering Local Authority (ALA) is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the programme in line with the strategy set by the Commissioning Body. The ALA will receive SP grant from the ODPM and will hold contracts with support providers. The 150 ALAs include all Metropolitan, London Boroughs, Unitaries or County Councils (in two-tier areas).

Providers and users of services feed into the process via Inclusive Forums which all ALAs must facilitate. Feedback from Inclusive forums is then fed into the SP strategy.

CURRENT PRACTICE

1. The initial stages of the programme are as follows:

- Establish local strategy to match demand and supply of services
- Map the current supply of services
- Identify current funding streams of those services which will be transferred into the SP pot.
- Transfer current funding streams in SP budget
- Establish SP charging policy
- Develop SP IT , financial, review and contract management systems
- Initially maintain the status quo, via ‘interim contracts’
- Review current service provision, establish ‘steady state’ contracts within the first 3 years of Supporting People
- Decommission unwanted or unsatisfactory services
- Develop new services according to demand and agreed standards.
- Ensure services are delivered and paid for by SP and conform to grant conditions

2. All services in existence at 31/3/03 will continue to be funded at the commencement of SP. Providers are issued with an 'interim contract' by the ALA, with the contract price being based on the amount of legacy funding identified during the supply mapping phase. A model contract is available to be used for all SP services, with amendments to the contract allowed only if both parties agree. Service users should see no immediate change after SP day.

3. Two types of contract will exist, they are:

Block Gross' Contracts; and

'Block Subsidy' Contracts

Block gross contracts involve the payment of a monthly lump sum which does not vary with the volume of service use; typically these will cover the smaller non chargeable services provided by charitable organisations, who have a relatively fixed cost base and who would suffer cash flow and planning difficulties were their monthly contract payments to fluctuate, due to circumstances effectively beyond their control.

4. Block subsidy contracts will cover larger services, with monthly payments dependent on the current volume of service usage and will be chargeable under the Supporting People. However all users in receipt of relief of support on 31st March 2003 have been subsidised by the Supporting People programme. The fact that payment of SP grant will be volume dependent, based on current activity levels, places a large administrative burden on both providers and AAs, because of the need to regularly transmit timely and accurate information to facilitate payment and the monitoring of activity levels.
4. Each SP ALA has to adopt a charging policy following a process of discussion within the Core Strategy Group and the Commissioning Body. The ODPM assumes that a local charging policy will exist and will deduct an assumed income from charging when paying SP grant to ALAs. The option not to charge exists, however, it is likely that most SP will charge those users whose income is above a certain level: if the local policy is not to charge, then SP partners will have to fund locally the shortfall in SP grant in order to honour contractual commitments with service providers. Local charging policies are allowed to be more 'generous' than proposed by ODPM, but cannot be 'harsher', e.g. a decision not to charge for sheltered accommodation, but to levy charges to LD service users, could be taken; however, it would not be possible to charge short term service users such as victims of domestic violence.

5. Detailed guidance on charging is contained in the June 2002 Interim Financial Package .The guidance suggests that 'long term' service users defined as expected service duration greater than two years, e.g. sheltered housing, supported housing for those with learning disabilities, should be charged. 'Short-term' service users, e.g. those fleeing domestic violence and homeless people, will not be charged.
6. For chargeable services, new service users will be assumed able to pay full support charges, however, all users are entitled to undergo a two-stage means test: the test will be administered by the ALA. Stage one of the test is to assess the user's eligibility for Housing Benefit: those qualifying for HB, either partial or in full, are to be 'passport'ed from charging, and will pay nothing. Under stage two of the means test, users ineligible for HB are assessed under 'Fairer Charging' guidelines, currently being introduced by DoH but through Social Services departments. The result of the assessment will be that some users will have to pay some or all of the designated charge for their service. It is however up to the discretion of the local authority if fairer charging is implemented in April 1st or delayed for a period up to two years.
8. The introduction of charging may be unpopular, particularly in the sheltered housing sector where traditionally rents have been pooled¹. However, providers can opt not to charge, or to reduce charges, in which case they will have to make up any shortfall between cost of service provision and SP grant from their own resources.
9. Each SP Partnership needs to have a long term effective IT systems in place in order to manage financial assessments, payments to providers, charging administration and contract monitoring. The initial thrust will be towards establishing systems that will enable effective administration of the programme. After the introduction of SP work as part of a wider e-government agenda will facilitate a national internet-based database called the Hub.

¹ Pooled rents were common practice in a number of local authority Housing Departments where rental and support charges for all tenants were calculated and then an average rent, including charges for any support provided, was levied across the authority dependent usually on property type.

INDICATIONS OF BEST PRACTICE

1. Submissions for beacons under this theme will be assessed particularly in respect of evidence and material that can be observed or measured. The satisfaction of users and providers will be highly valued as will the effective working partnership of the Commissioning Body
2. The assessment should consider a number of aspects
 - Strategic Steer and Corporate Commitment
 - Partnership working across the relevant sector
 - Robust review and monitoring scheme in place
 - Delivering Supporting People Services post April 1
 - Risk assessments and Contingency planning
 - Outcomes for services users.
3. **CORPORATE COMMITMENT & STRATEGIC STEER**– There will need to be evidence to show that the community plan/new community strategy links with Supporting People and also that the Supporting People strategy links into wider strategies. There should also be targets set for Supporting People. Evidence on how service users were involved in developing the Shadow Strategy should also be clear and also how service users were involved in setting aims and priorities for the programme.
4. The corporate ownership of the programme is critical and any council being assessed for beacon status should have wide ownership of the programme across the Administering Local Authority. This should include a clear explanation of how any barriers or obstacles have been overcome..
5. **PARTNERSHIPS** -The ALA must have a robust and sustainable Commissioning Body in place that meets the requirements of the SP grant conditions. The CB should have agreed terms of reference and met on a regular basis with clarity around agendas and outcomes. It would be considered very positive practice for the Commissioning Body to have links into other strategic partnerships, for example, the Local Strategic Partnership (Hartlepool are a sound example of this). There should also be an active Core Strategic Group which has terms of reference with representation from Health, Probation and other strategic partners.
6. **INCLUSIVE FORUMS** should be held with wide representation and meaningful participation. The Commissioning Body and Core Strategic Group must liaise with this group.
7. **ROBUST REVIEW AND MONITORING** – ALA should have sufficient staff within the SP team with the necessary skills to carry out the review and monitoring process across the different types of service. If skills are not in place what is being done to achieve this? Should be evidence as to how those providers, who are to be reviewed first, were selected. Other areas of best practice would be the development of additional service standards, additional performance indicators, local benchmarking and targets. Best

practice would also involve users and carers in the process of review and monitoring.

8. **DELIVERING SUPPORTING PEOPLE SERVICES POST APRIL 2003** – Evidence that a SP project plan is in place and being monitored and used as a working document. Robust performance management and monitoring systems should be in place. Payments to providers should be accurate and made on time. Is there an effective charging policy in place? Users should have been informed in the process of change from one funding regime to SP with as little disruption as possible and explanations should have been simple and written in layman terms. Councillors should have been kept informed of all aspects of changeover to the new SP regime. All these consultation processes should be clearly evidenced. Positive practice would see the existence of a SP Communication Strategy in the corporate arena with widespread ownership for its effective delivery.
9. **RISK ASSESSMENTS - Have the local authority assessed the risks** associated with the Supporting People programme. Best practice would involve establishing a separate risk register. The risk register would include what plans are in place to deal with IT project failure together with what plans have been agreed to deal with closure of a provider or sudden failure of a scheme (eg fire, health and safety failures).
10. **OUTCOMES FOR SERVICE USERS** – Beacon Councils should have a clearly defined vision of improved outcomes for service users together with clear mechanisms for progress to be reported to service users and measurable targets for how improvements will be achieved. A mechanism should be in place for service providers to report regularly on service improvements and best practice should also incorporate reality checking with service users on a regularly defined basis to confirm improvements and to monitor their sustainability over time.

DIFFICULTIES IN IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICE

Identifying best practice is currently very difficult, as the Supporting People programme only became operational from 1 April 2003. The outcomes that the Supporting People programme are expected to achieve will take a period of time to accomplish. However there are examples of best practice in relation to the shadow strategy, user involvement and current partnership working although all aspects of these themes are expected to develop over a period of time. The programme of inspections agreed with the Audit Commission will also contribute to this process.

REFERENCES

The SP 'k-web' is an invaluable source of information, where all new policy documents and guidance papers are published, together with a lively debating forum.

The 'k-web' is found at www.spkweb.org.uk

The main policy documents, all available from the 'k-web' are:

Policy into Practice: DETR Jan 2001

Supporting People Administrative Guidance October 2001: DTLR Oct 2001

May Financial Package: ODPM June 2002

SP Grant Conditions and Directions: March 2003