



'Supporting People' Programme

**Update report by a Working Group of the
Environment, Culture and Communities
Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

December 2008

DEFINITION:

The '**Supporting People**' programme is a Government funded, currently ring fenced initiative, which requires local authorities to provide housing related support, enabling people with specified and assessed need to live independently in their own accommodation.

BACKGROUND:

In 2005 an Audit Commission inspection of the '**Supporting People**' programme was very critical of most aspects of our work including the effectiveness of the Commissioning Body, a lack of understanding of who our clients should be and the need to tighten up the eligibility criteria.

A concern that a loose eligibility criteria meant that support was being given to individuals who were able to access other resources meant that those who should have been receiving support were reduced in number. There was also insufficient clarity around who was eligible for supporting people services and which services were not eligible.

Following this very critical report the Executive Portfolio holder asked the then Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel to monitor the changes and action plan. Councillors Bob Edger and Anne Shillcock agreed to carry out this monitoring role and over a period extending throughout 2006 and part of 2007 they met regularly with the officers and produced two reports updating the former Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the progress being made.

Councillor Edger had to stand down and there has been a short break in monitoring. Recently, Councillor Mrs Anne Fleming agreed to join Councillor Mrs Shillcock and this report covers our recent discussions with Clare Dorning, Head of Housing Strategy & Needs.

It was decided in early 2007 that more urgent action needed to be taken to progress the changes and service improvements that were recommended by the Audit Commission and Bracknell Forest Council employed for a period of one year an interim manager, Alka Damania, who had considerable experience in '**Supporting People**'.

Councillors Anne Shillcock and Anne Fleming met with Clare Dorning, Head of Housing Strategy & Needs in September 08 in order to discuss the progress made since early 2007.

OVERVIEW:

- **Structure and Governance Arrangements**

Significant progress has been made since 2006. Accountability has been clearly defined with the restructuring of the lines of management. The Commissioning Body which has overarching responsibility for the '**Supporting People**' programme is now chaired by the Executive Portfolio holder for Adult Services, Health and Housing, Councillor Dale Birch, and has a membership which includes the Primary Care Trust, Probation Services and Adult Social Care services. The Commissioning Body's responsibility is to have a strategic oversight of the whole programme and includes decision making powers. Reporting directly to them is the Core Strategy Development Group whose membership includes representatives from Key Partners; their

responsibilities include; driving the programme forward and making recommendations to the Commissioning Body.

The Inspectors are now satisfied that the responsibilities of the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group are clearly defined and are working effectively.

- **Eligibility**

The eligibility criteria has been overhauled and now defines accurately those services eligible for '**Supporting People**' funding. It also outlines activities which are not eligible, to ensure that the criteria is appropriately implemented – this document is available on the '**Supporting People**' pages of the Council's website (www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

During our meeting Clare Dorning provided us with a copy of the eligibility criteria and a breakdown of the financial spend on each of the groups currently being supported. See Appendix 1: **Supporting People Spend 2008/09**.

- **Floating Support**

One of the criticisms raised by the Inspectors was that in their view too much emphasis was placed on accommodation based schemes. To address this, a new Floating Support service has been established and is designed as a person centred support system to assist individuals with issues such as setting up tenancies, application for benefits and making rent payments and to provide support to enable successful living within the community. Currently this service is supporting about 60 people to maintain independent living and this more efficient system has enabled us to offer support to additional groups for example a small number of very vulnerable families. This has been very successful.

- **Move On Strategy**

The "Move On" strategy (moving from supported housing to independent living) is still in draft form and is yet to be implemented. The biggest single difficulty is lack of suitable accommodation. This requires co-operation with the Housing Associations within the Borough and discussions are taking place around this issue. The need for a supply of nominations to ensure move on from supported housing is being considered within the context of the allocation policy review which is underway as part of Choice Based Lettings.

- **Performance Monitoring**

Performance monitoring is much more rigorous than in the past and is a standard item on the agenda of the Commissioning Body meetings. It includes monitoring of statutory work book returns that are completed by all service providers and monitored on a quarterly basis and other key performance indicators relating to the '**Supporting People**' service. Performance indicators quickly highlight areas of weakness and action is then taken.

- **Funding**

The '**Supporting People**' programme budget for 2009 consists of grants totalling £2.043 million. This is being targeted across the range of client groups as shown in Appendix 1: **Supporting People Spend 2008/2009**.

There is an expectation that grant funding will be reduced by 12% over the next 3 years and this will provide serious challenges. The funding will not be ring fenced from 2009/10 but will be subsumed within the general budget and it will be important to ensure that **'Supporting People'** does receive its full allocation.

- **Contracts**

All **'Supporting People'** provider contracts have been awarded on a 3 year basis and will expire in November 2009, this will present challenges but it also offers opportunities to make adjustments if appropriate – a tendering time-table is in place.

- **Improvements**

The Working Group were informed about a number of important new initiatives in both working with key partners and involvement with service users. These include two multi-agency panels – the Young Peoples Accommodation Panel (to assist those under 25 years of age) and the Adult Accommodation Panel. Membership of these Panels include the Council, Mental Health Services, The Youth Offending Team and the Probation Service.

Links with clients include Service User Forums, which meet quarterly, Service Reviews and an Inclusive Forum Planning Group. It was recognised that there might be benefits for a **'Supporting People'** staff member to be represented on the Learning Disabilities Strategic Partnership and Clare Dorning undertook to look into this.

One of the productive ways in which clients and key agencies come together is the **'Supporting People'** Conference organised by the local authority which was held in May of this year and the Working Group attended – it was a really valuable exercise in information exchange between customer and provider. High levels of satisfaction were reported informally to the Working Group members by the clients it met.

SUMMARY

The Inspectors visited and monitored the progress being made rigorously and we are happy to note that in November 2007 they felt confident enough in the progress being made to allow the Council to continue without the constraints of continuous supervision. It is important to note that this significant improvement has been made with a very small number of staff. Working under Clare are two officers with provision for a third – a Strategy Manager – recruitment is currently under way for this post.

CONCLUSION

We recognise that considerable strides have been made since 2006 and that the Inspectors support the view that we provide a good service to our clients. There are considerable challenges ahead particularly with regard to funding and the tendering process which will take place next year.

RECOMMENDATION

We feel it is important that Councillors remain aware of all the issues and so would recommend that a small working group remains to meet on an occasional basis with the **'Supporting People'** staff. In this way the Councillors can both offer support to the staff and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

APPRECIATION

Councillors Anne Shillcock and Anne Fleming would like to record their thanks to Clare Dorning and Andrea Carr for their time and support given in compiling this report.

Councillor Anne Shillcock
Councillor Anne Fleming

Documents to view:

- *Supporting People Spend 2008/2009 (attached at Appendix 1)*
- *Notes of meeting held with Clare Dorning on 30 September 2008*
- *Supporting People Presentation by Clare Dorning to the May 2008 Conference*
- *The Supporting People Eligibility Criteria*

Please contact Andrea Carr for any of these documents.

Appendix 1