



'Supporting People' Programme

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



June 2010

INTRODUCTION:

The '**Supporting People**' programme is a Government funded initiative which requires local authorities to provide housing related support, enabling people with specified and assessed need to live independently in their own accommodation. The funding was ring-fenced until April 2009. From April 2010 the funding has been included in the Area Based Grant, a sum of money which local authorities are able to spend however they see fit according to their own local priorities, and has reduced each year by approximately 12%.

The administration grant for managing the Supporting People project has also been reduced, by 5% which equates to a reduction of £13,000 and spend needs to be reduced commensurately.

If a local authority redirects Supporting People funding to other uses the Government requires justification.

A House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee was established to look into the delivery of the '**Supporting People**' programme and was tasked to consider the implications of lifting the ring-fence. The Select Committee report, which was published in October 2009, states that:

'The committee expresses strong support for Supporting People, and the report is a timely reminder that Supporting People funding has improved the lives of many thousands of vulnerable people. The programme has proved to be extremely good value for money, providing low level and joined up support to retain people's independence or help to move people into more independent lives.'

The Working Group concurs with this view. The Government's response to the Select Committee report, which was published in January 2010, states that it:

- provides a positive endorsement of the Government's decision to lift the ring-fence from the '**Supporting People**' programme in order to devolve decision making and control over budgets to the local level;
- agrees with the Government's view that local authorities should be free to manage their own budgets – but they must also be prepared to justify any decisions to redirect '**Supporting People**' funds to deliver other locally targeted services;
- recognises the need to maintain stability by continuing with three-year financial settlements – particularly important for third sector providers of '**Supporting People**' services; and
- acknowledges that the 'invest to save' nature of the '**Supporting People**' programme has been a success and has been demonstrated in robust financial terms.

BACKGROUND:

The '**Supporting People**' initiative was launched nationally on 1 April 2003. In 2005 an Audit Commission inspection of the Bracknell Forest '**Supporting People**' programme was very critical of most aspects of our work, in particular the effectiveness of the Supporting People 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 led to support 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 the Audit Commission report, **'Supporting People'** roles and responsibilities were clarified and the Supporting People Commissioning body is now chaired by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Adult Services, Health and Housing.

The Audit Commission has closely monitored our **'Supporting People'** progress for a period of time and has now indicated that it is satisfied with progress made.

In order for the **'Supporting People'** programme to be classified as an excellent service, Members need to be well informed of its activities and performance and there is an expectation that this will occur. It has therefore been agreed that a small working group of two Councillors should continue to monitor progress on an annual basis and report back to the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

OVERVIEW:

- **Eligibility**

The eligibility criteria has been overhauled and now defines precisely 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). A breakdown of the financial spend on each of the groups currently being supported is attached at Appendix 1. The apportionment for 2009/10 and 2010/11 have remained the same, this was the Commissioning Body's decision as the basis for the re-commissioning of services.

- **'Move On' Strategy**

The 'Move On' Strategy (moving on from supported housing to independent living) was finalised in September 2008. The lack of suitable accommodation to which service users can move on to remains the greatest single impediment. Housing allocation has now changed and the Council and its housing association partners are operating a Choice Based Lettings system. In order to ensure that the 'Move On' Strategy can be effective, the Council's new Allocations Policy prioritises 'move' on from supported housing schemes in the Borough and has introduced a Lettings Plan which includes a quota of properties for 'moving on' tenants.

The Homelessness Strategy is in preparation and will link to the 'Move On' Strategy.

- **Funding**

As mentioned above, the **'Supporting People'** programme funding is now included in the Area Based Grant and is to be reduced year on year. The amount for 2010/11 is £1,799,000. Appendix 1 outlines how the funding has been allocated for 2010/11, the apportionment between groups of service users for 2010/11 mirrors that for 2009/10.

- **Contracts**

All **'Supporting People'** provider contracts were awarded on a three year basis and expired in November 2009. Slippage has occurred in the contract renewal process. Negotiations are ongoing and efficiencies are being sought in line with the 12% budget reduction.

- **Performance Monitoring**

The Audit Commission has indicated that it is satisfied with progress made by Bracknell Forest's **'Supporting People'** programme and as the current inspection regime is on a risk basis, it is not expected that the service will be re-inspected unless a problem occurs. Officers are self-assessing the programme against the key lines of enquiry (KLOE) used by the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate when assessing the **'Supporting People'** programme and these have been translated into an Action Plan which is in the process of development. The Action Plan is designed to identify any gaps in service provision and currently lists seven actions for completion during 2010 to fill the gaps. Officers are striving to reach the 'Excellent' standard.

- **Progress Over Last Year**

As part of the Supporting People Team's pursuit of excellence, progress has been made on comparing the development and delivery of the Bracknell Forest **'Supporting People'** programme against the Audit Commission's KLOE.

1. **Corporate Commitment and Links.** The Supporting People Commissioning Body receives regular performance reports which include reporting on the two national indicators that relate to the **'Supporting People'** programme.
2. **Supporting People Commissioning Body.** The Commissioning Body has undertaken a review of its governance arrangements to ensure its objectives are fulfilled. As a result of this review, a service provider and a service user have been elected to join the Commissioning Body in a non-voting capacity.
3. **Accountable Officer.** The role of the Accountable Officer is undertaken by the Chief Officer: Housing.
4. **Partnerships.** The Commissioning Body has received a report on the Communities and Local Government Outcomes Framework which has been in place since July 2008. The Commissioning Body has agreed to include a further two local performance outcomes in the monitoring of service provider performance.
5. **Voluntary and Community Sector.** Officers have met with Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action to explore ways of improving links between service providers and voluntary sector agencies. The voluntary sector was invited to contribute to the Inclusive Forum event on 16 April 2010.
6. **Grant Compliance, Strategy and Needs.** There are performance indicators covering grant compliance and service reviews. The eligibility of services is reviewed regularly through service reviews to ensure the programme is funding appropriate activities.

7. **Strategy for Access to 'Move On' Accommodation.** A 'Move On' Strategy is in place and a 'Move On' quota has been agreed as part of the new Allocations Policy.
8. **Delivery Arrangements.** A new management structure for the Supporting People Team has ensured that the necessary skills and knowledge at appropriate levels are in place.
9. **Adult and Child Protection.** Staff have recently received refresher training in these areas. As safeguarding is compulsory for all service providers, the Council offers safeguarding training to its service providers.
10. **Local Area Agreement.** The Commissioning Body receives regular reports on national performance indicator NI 42 concerning independent living for vulnerable people.
11. **Fairer Charging.** At present there are no 'Supporting People' service users who are also assessed under fairer charging.
12. **Individual Budgets / Direct Payments.** The re-commissioning of learning disability services on a framework contract basis will enable service users to exercise choice in how they purchase services.
13. **Communities and Local Government (CLG) Monitoring.** Data is uploaded regularly into the CLG's data collection system.
14. **Risk Management.** A risk register for 'Supporting People' is in place.
15. **Performance Monitoring and Management.** The implementation of a new computer system has improved the ability to link performance management to financial management. The performance monitoring reports prepared for the Commissioning Body are also shared with the Provider Forum.
16. **Procurement.** A Corporate Procurement Strategy is in place and 'Supporting People' services will be procured in line with these requirements.
17. **Contracts.** The Working Group has been advised that robust contract managing arrangements are in place with service providers.
18. **Quality Assurance.** Formal reviews of service providers are undertaken using the Quality Assurance Framework standards.
19. **Improvement Planning.** Improvement plans are put in place following a service review. These plans have agreed timelines for achieving the required improvement.

- **Work in Progress**

1. **Five Year Strategy.** The revised Five Year Strategy is a working document in progress.
2. **Needs Mapping, Analysis and Review.** A review and analysis of needs has been undertaken by the Commissioning Body as decisions in respect of the re-commissioning of services have been made. Needs mapping is in progress across Berkshire with a view to possible future joint working with other Berkshire unitary authorities and a resulting report is expected by the end of Summer 2010.

3. **Work Planning.** A review of work plans will be undertaken to ensure all appropriate links to the service plans and targets of other key services are made.
4. **Commissioning.** There is a need to review how current and emerging needs are monitored at the Young Persons and the Adults Panels.
5. **Joint Commissioning.** Joint commissioning with other authorities is not in place at present. The Council leads a Berkshire Supporting People Services liaison group which is looking at issues of common interest such as joint commissioning and the intention is to establish a schedule of all contracts across Berkshire authorities so that opportunities for joint commissioning in the future can be identified.

CONCLUSIONS

We feel that the '**Supporting People**' programme is now well bedded down, that progress made since 2006 has been steady and that there is good quality service user involvement. Challenges remain around funding and there is a need to be vigilant to ensure that the funding is not used for other purposes but continues to provide what is now a good service to a range of vulnerable adults. The Working Group supports the officers' aim to deliver an excellent '**Supporting People**' service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The '**Supporting People**' programme provides critical support to the most vulnerable adults in the Borough and it is important that Councillors are kept well informed of how the programme is implemented and progress is made. Therefore it is recommended that:

- (a) a small working group continues to monitor the service and report its findings back to the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on an annual basis.
- (b) Member induction and briefings include information relating to the '**Supporting People**' programme to enhance Members' knowledge and involvement.

APPRECIATION

Councillors Anne Shillcock and Anne Fleming would like to record their thanks to Simon Hendeby, Clare Dorning and Andrea Carr for their time and support given in monitoring the '**Supporting People**' programme and in compiling this report.

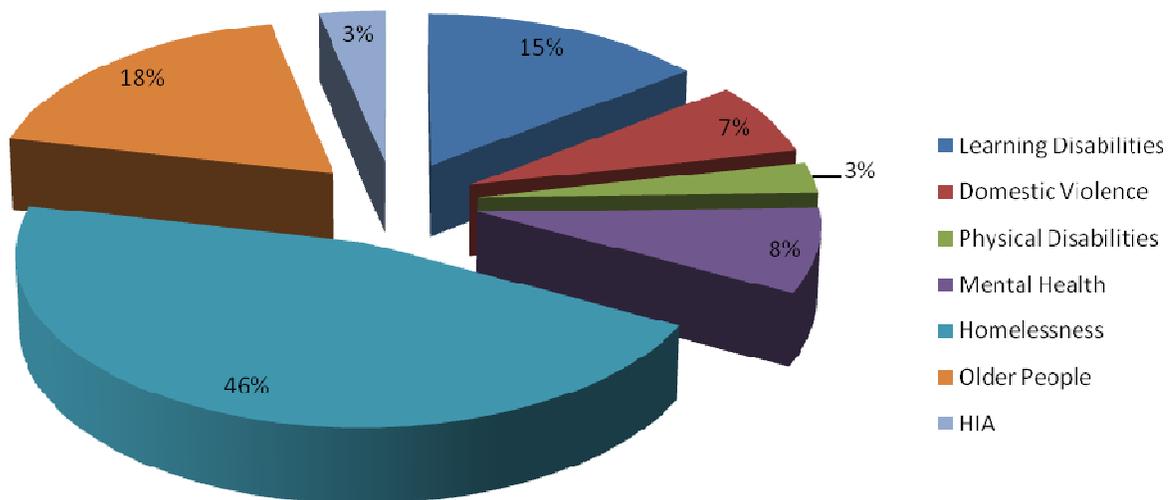
Councillor Anne Shillcock (Lead Member)
Councillor Anne Fleming

Documents to view:

- ***Supporting People Spend 2009/10 and 2010/11 (attached at Appendix 1)***
- ***Notes of meetings held with Simon Hendey, Chief Officer: Housing, and Clare Dorning, Head of Housing Options, on 22 February and 10 May 2010***
- ***The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate's Key Lines of Enquiry***
- ***The 'Supporting People' Action Plan***
- ***The 'Supporting People' Eligibility Criteria***
- ***The House of Commons' Communities and Local Government Select Committee report in respect of 'Supporting People' published in October 2009 (a briefing summary is available)***
- ***The Government's response to the Select Committee report published in January 2010***

Please contact Andrea Carr for any of these documents.

Apportionment of Supporting People Grant Funding 2010/11



The total amount of Supporting People grant funding for 2010/11 is £1,799,000