



Navigating the maze: Summary and resources

Executive summary

Introduction

The guide is the culmination of a piece of work that examined the planning, commissioning and governance of housing related support, providers ability to engage and thus influence local decision making structures, and how both providers and commissioners can ensure the work and value of housing related support is understood and recognised within local authorities and other stakeholders.

The Coalition document and Queen's Speech herald a radical devolution of power from central to local government. A Minister for decentralisation has been created and a bill for decentralisation and localism proposed. The Government, concept of 'Big Society' is expected to encourage people to take an active role in the community and supports the work of charities. Because of this accelerated direction of travel, accompanied by the climate of public sector cuts, it has become increasingly clear that a resource is needed to set out and discuss local engagement issues, share current practice, provide directions and signpost to other useful and pertinent guidance and information. It will be no surprise to those in the sector that the future months have the potential to be very difficult. It is hoped that the guide will prove a timely, valuable and much needed resource.

The guide is primarily for providers to support them in understanding local decision making structures and navigate where best to engage with these structures. Such engagement should then enable effective influencing of decision making on the commissioning and governance of housing related support services. It can, however, usefully support local authority personnel and other stakeholders including health (Primary Care Trust or Strategic Health Authority) personnel by providing examples of governance and commissioning structures, effective engagement and demonstrating the value of housing related support services. Members of Local Strategic Partnerships will also find the publication helpful in understanding their responsibilities in making strategic decisions regarding the provision of services to meet the needs of the vulnerable people in their locality.

The Supporting People programme, established in 2003, provided the funding together with the monitoring and review processes for housing related support services. That funding is now an un-ring fenced component of Area Based Grant for local authorities. Sitra utilised a number of methods to identify the issues regarding the future of housing related support services. Time was invested in discussing concerns with providers, commissioners and other stakeholders investigating solutions and suggesting directions. To build a complete picture the research included attendance at local and regional provider forums, regional commissioner's forums, a provider questionnaire and local authority interviews.

We came to the conclusion that protecting the future of housing related services depends on three things:

- Identifying and influencing local decision makers
- Evidencing the value of housing related support
- Working collaboratively to achieve maximum impact.

Local decision making structures

Our local strategic engagement research highlighted concerns regarding the poor profile of housing related support needs and services in the local decision making structures responsible for Area Based Grant and the perception that the service users' voice is moving further away from decision making. These and other issues are examined within the guide with possible directions for providers and signposting to the resources available.

The expertise built up within the role of the dedicated Supporting People teams and the governance structures for the programme may also change. This is part of the devolution of decision making and control of budgets to a local government level to ensure it is at the centre of providing innovative and better value public services. Our research identified that where Supporting People commissioning shifted into more generic commissioning teams there was perceived to be a loss of housing related support expertise and power being diverted to those who lack such detailed knowledge. Some of the changes already made and their implications are highlighted within the guide.

The guide recognises that the Supporting People programme was a success in providing housing related support to large numbers of vulnerable people, enabling them to maintain or achieve their independence, while achieving accountable and verifiable cost benefit to other agendas. The voluntary sector has made a recognisable contribution to this success by providing a major proportion of the support services.

Working together

The project found a huge variance between providers' degree of engagement. While most are aware of their local provider forum, the majority are not aware of how they are represented within the higher governance structure. Some local authorities are making attendance at provider forums a condition of contracts. There is overwhelming evidence of the value of collective action. Providers are encouraged to attend these forums and become involved to ensure there is representation for themselves and service users at the highest level possible, either by providers' representatives or through second-tier umbrella or infrastructure organisations.

Practice example

One Nottingham is the Local Strategic Partnership for Nottingham City. In the new structure, three places are reserved for voluntary sector advocates on each Theme Partnership. The responsibility for the Supporting People programme is with the Neighbourhood Nottingham Partnership (NNP). A Partnership Officer from the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) was invited to attend the Supporting People Provider Forum to update providers about the new structure. Following her meeting with the Forum, the Partnership Officer recommended that one of the three places on the NNP was reserved for someone from the Provider Forum.

The Provider Forum is currently selecting their advocate and this means that housing related support providers have direct input into the Theme Partnership that will have responsibility for the Supporting People programme in Nottingham in the future.

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Showing the value of housing related support

In the current economic climate, with reduced funding, the recession and expected public sector funding cuts, it is more important than ever that the benefits of housing related services from a financial, social preventative and individual basis are made clear. Providers need to take a strategic approach to publicity, marketing and lobbying and should involve elected and prospective local council members, members of parliament, ministers, commissioners and local strategic partnership members. Press releases, local media and local events can and should be used to highlight good news stories, value of services, threats to services and risk implications.

Practice example

Liverpool Supporting People team held an event to celebrate the work, services and successes of the Liverpool Supporting People programme. A DVD was launched, called *Making a Difference* which demonstrated in graphic terms the success stories of Supporting People for a number of individuals. It is available at www.goved.co.uk/video/local-authorities/liverpool-sp

The event was supported by Communities and Local Government and Audit Commission, together with the leader of the Council, the assistant director from Adult Care and Learning Services and the Director of Liverpool First, all promoting the importance of housing related support services in achieving results within the CAA.

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In being able to show the value of housing related support, there are a number of tools available and providers are encouraged to utilise these to be able to quantify the value of their services. The Cap Gemini model has been used on a national level and shows that for a £1.6 billion investment, savings within other agendas total £3.4 billion. It is now available on a local authority basis. Other tools detailed within the guide include the Care Services Efficiency Delivery model from the Department of Health, and the Social Return on Investment model from the Office of Civil Society.

On more than one occasion, we came across the need for more recognition of housing related support in local decision making structures. Examples of how providers can facilitate this by building positive local relationships are detailed in the guide. Within the local authority and also through the local strategic partnership, providers need to be aware of where housing related support is placed and an example structure is contained in the guide. It will become ever more important, as there is increased competition for funding and a presumed precedence for statutory funding that providers ensure objectives and outcomes are aligned to local priorities, meeting local and national targets.

It has been noted that providers are ideally placed to assess future need and propose services or remodel existing services to meet these. It is strongly suggested this is another reason for involvement in close partnership working both on a local level and at a national policy and strategic level. Research showed the use of the Compact was not excellent in the field of housing related support although there was a stronger use within the wider voluntary sector. So, again, providers are encouraged to identify how they can be informed and consulted.

The guide is accompanied by checklists for providers outlining action that can be taken at frontline, operational, strategic and collective (provider forum) level. Our research concluded that it is critical that staff throughout organisations should understand local decision making structures and how and where staff should be involved in those.

Finally, although there are challenges in the future, providers should be aware and be prepared to capitalise on the opportunities – utilising other budgets and funding streams, coordinating agendas with other commissioners and stakeholders, building stronger and innovative partnerships and ensuring housing related support is understood and valued.

Practice example

Bay Housing Association is a small provider who acts as Managing Agent for two large RSLs. They manage (30 bed spaces) in Blackpool. It was formed in 1995 after local people identified a need for supported housing in the area for 16 to 25 year-olds. It has its roots in the local churches and the community and has always seen itself as part of the voluntary sector, fostering close links with the local CVS.

The Chief Executive has undertaken a number of functions over the years including chairing the NHF North West Care and Support Group and working towards setting up Regional and Local Provider Forums. He has been a Board member of the local CVS for six years and line manages the CVS Chief Officer. The CVS Chief Officer has a place on the Local Strategic Partnership Board and sits on numerous other bodies and is consulted on a multitude of issues. The Management Committee have supported staff investing time and resources in wider strategic activity recognising it is critical to the development and survival of the organisation.

Bay believe there is a need to educate CVS as housing related support is a new activity to them. It is worthwhile to do this, as it should give a clear line of contact to key decision makers.

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About the project

In 2009-2010, Sitra was funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) to promote the effective engagement of housing related support providers, commissioners and users in strategic planning and service commissioning. In addition the work, which was known as the Local Strategic Engagement Project (LSEP), aimed to support providers in developing mechanisms for engaging in Local Strategic Partnerships, in order to ensure that housing related support is understood within Local Strategic Partnerships and that services continue to be effectively commissioned and provided. The work was carried out by Mike Ballard (Policy Officer), Sue Baxter (Policy Officer) and Victoria Thorpe (Research Assistant).

To achieve its aim, the project identified three main bodies of work:

- 1. Commissioning structures:** The project examined, compared and contrasted the existing and proposed structures for commissioning housing related support. It identified what is currently in place, what changes were proposed and their possible implications.
- 2. Engagement:** In order to influence strategic decision making, providers and users need to understand how the commissioning structure works in their locality and how they can engage in local strategic partnerships and other local commissioning and governance structures. This guide will support this.
- 3. Information and good practice dissemination:** To ensure far-reaching understanding and knowledge of housing related support, briefings, presentations, factsheets, and internal and external resources were made widely available to providers commissioners and other stakeholder.

Resources

The resources produced by the project are all free and available to download from the Sitra website at www.sitra.org

They include:

- Briefings for providers, commissioners and service users
- Factsheets on demonstrating the value of housing related support, with information on specific client groups including, services for older and young people, those experiencing mental ill health, substance misuse, those with a learning disability and offenders
- A tool for calculating the amount of Supporting People funding as a % of Area Based Grant per locality
- A briefing, impact assessment Excel spreadsheet and a worked example for Social Return on Investment
- A post conference report on a joint Local Government Information Unit/Sitra event
- A spreadsheet on RSL, housing related support provider and CVS representation on Local Strategic Partnerships and thematic groups
- External resources contributed by local authorities and housing related support providers.

If you want more information, please contact Sue Baxter at sueb@sitra.org

1. *The Coalition: our programme for government*, May 2010. Available to download at <http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk>

Sitra conference – Localism: The time for action

The full guide will be launched on **13 July 2010** to coincide with a national one day conference in London.

Visit the Sitra website at www.sitra.org to find out more and book your place.

Both the guide and executive summary will be available to download from our website.



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