



**Submission to the CLG Committee Inquiry into
the Supporting People Programme**

May 2009

Contents

Detailed Submission

A Executive Summary	3-4
B Recommendations	4-5
1. An Introduction to Sitra	6
2. The Basis of our Evidence to the Inquiry	7
3. The Regional Roundtable Events	8-9
4. Responses to our Inquiry Questions	10-24
5. Responses from Commissioners	25-29
6. Experience from Scotland and Wales	30-32

Recommendations

Separate document

Appendices

1. Detailed Report from Round Table Events
2. Delivery Against the Aims of “Independence & Opportunity”
3. List of Contributing Organisations

A. Executive Summary

A.1 Sitra's response is based on an extensive consultation with our members. Through meetings and questionnaires we asked for input on the achievements of the SP programme, with particular reference to the priorities of "Independence and Opportunity", the implications of the removal of the ring fence, and the actions required to build on the achievements and continue to drive improvements in housing related support services.

A.2 Our main conclusions are summarised below.

A.3 The SP programme has been highly successful in delivering targeted support service to vulnerable people and the socially excluded. Specific strengths include:

- Highly personalised services that are responsive to needs and which encourage people to move towards fully independent lives.
- Robust data to demonstrate how outcomes meet needs. All authorities have conducted needs assessments, on which SP Strategies have been based. These have informed commissioning and spending decisions. Monitoring of service quality and value for money has been delivered through the QAF and other mechanisms. A range of robust outcome measurement tools has been developed both nationally and to respond to specific local needs.
- Early intervention and preventative work have both improved service outcomes, for example through the prevention of homelessness or hospital admissions and delivered significant savings to the public purse.
- A body of expertise has been developed in local authority SP teams and structures are in place for them to work in partnership at local and regional levels with providers and other stakeholders.
- Service user engagement has been highly developed in service planning and delivery and in some areas in service design and policy development.
- There is a diverse and highly skilled provider sector.

A.4 The lifting of the ring fence and the removal of specific grant eligibility criteria has the objective of better integrating these services in the new local government landscape. Our "headline" view of the implication of this is that:

- The new flexibility and opportunity to deliver more joined up services is cautiously welcomed.
- There is considerable concern that, particularly with the current pressure on public spending, funds will be diverted from support to statutory or other council priorities.
- There is a very real risk of loss of expertise and understanding if specialist SP teams, commissioning bodies and partnership structures are lost.
- SP has not been widely understood, partly because of the ring fence and partly because of the marginalised nature of many of its clients and it is an urgent priority to communicate its value and importance to key decision makers.

A.5 Despite these concerns the sector is divided on whether replacement of the ring fence would be positive. We believe this would be incompatible with the wider agenda of localism shared by the major parties and is therefore unlikely to happen, and has the potential to further marginalise housing related support services. However, we do feel this consultation has raised alternative models which could be explored. We think a core priority is to develop a strategic and monitoring framework that will ensure that government at a national and local level must continue to demonstrate that it is continuing to meet the support needs of vulnerable and

socially excluded people and to deliver the savings to the public purse delivered by effective preventative services.

A.6 We believe the following recommendations provide this framework.

B. Recommendations

B.1 CLG to have clear responsibility for leading and ensuring delivery nationally of a strategy for responsive client orientated housing related support services.

B.2 That local authorities or LSPs are required to consult on and publish and regularly update a needs-based strategy detailing how they will meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable and socially excluded people their borough. This to include how their internal resources and commissioning arrangements will ensure that the right expertise and knowledge of HRS is in place and how they will engage with providers, clients and other stakeholders to deliver appropriate, high quality, person-centred services.

B.3 That in each local authority there is a mandatory named officer with responsibility for ensuring delivery of the strategy and maintaining the necessary levels of expertise.

B.4 That consideration is given to introducing a mandatory requirement that commissioners use the QAF and require completion of the St Andrew's outcomes data to ensure consistency and comparability in assessing service quality and outcomes delivery nationally.

B.5 The Audit Commission to be required to include as a key component of their Comprehensive Area Assessments an appraisal based on a clear methodology of how well the LSP is serving the most vulnerable members of the community and the socially excluded.

B.6 That all the above strategies and evaluation processes place the interests of and engagement with service users at their centre.

B.7 That the CLG consult on a clear definition for housing related support to enable meaningful national monitoring of it to continue.

B.8 That consideration is given to developing a Code of Guidance, to which LAs and LSPs must demonstrate that they have had regard, identifying best practice in the delivery of housing related support.

B.9 That consideration is given to extending statutory duties to protect the most vulnerable, either through a general duty on local authorities to do so, or by extension of existing statutory rights to particular vulnerable or excluded groups.

B.10 That the scope of PSA 16 is reviewed to ensure that it prioritises positive outcomes for all vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

B.11 That alternatives to un ring-fencing raised within this consultation, including the call for a targeted national, ring-fenced budget for the most vulnerable and socially excluded client groups are evaluated and consulted on.

B.12 That clear guidelines are produced requiring local authorities or LSPs to report on their spend on housing related support and the outcomes arising from that spend. Also to monitor cuts and information about types of service and client groups invested in.

B.13 That the CLG, with the HCA, run a consultation exercise on how best to ensure the continuing link between housing and support, including the continuing provision of accommodation based services where appropriate, and ensure that capital investment in new supported housing is not threatened by the risk of ongoing revenue funding being unavailable.

B.14 That the current National Indicator set is reviewed to ensure that NIs relating to HRS encourage LAs and LSPs to make it a priority and that the NIs accurately demonstrate the quality of services delivered and outcomes. Specifically that consideration is given to making NIs 141/2, or any successor NI relating to HRS a mandatory indicator.

B.15 That the value of early intervention and preventative services is recognised and that the cost benefits realisation model for supported housing is regularly updated at a national and local level and that local results from the model are collated centrally to inform the national picture.

B.16 That government actively promotes and supports local and regional structures, such as the Regional Improvement Groups, Core Strategy Groups and Provider Forums, that guarantee joint working and engagement with service providers and users

B.17 That the DH, in developing its proposals for Care and Support in the Green Paper consult fully with the HRS sector in order to deliver personalisation in a way which maximises the benefits to service users, building on existing strengths of the HRS sector, while having reasonable regard for the viability of providers.

B.18 That the local connection requirements associated with SP funding be updated with a view to ensuring that no-one is prevented from receiving a service they need on residence or other local connection grounds.

B.19 That short term support services continue to be available without charge to the user through a variety of formats appropriate to user need including floating support and accommodation based services.

B.20 That CLG works closely with the Office of the Third Sector and representative organisations such as Sitra to develop a programme of capacity building for third sector HRS providers. The detailed programme to be worked up in partnership with the sector but key elements would be: (a) developing the capacity and the structures to enable access to local strategic decision takers such as LSPs; (b) help with the skills and capacity needed for the third sector to compete in a tendering environment, including developing partnerships and consortia; and (c) work to build the capacity of organisations to support their clients in engaging with strategic policy and decision taking processes.

B.21 That the CLG commission an independent study of the use of competitive tendering for HRS with a view to developing good practice guidelines for market testing that is legal, proportionate and appropriate to the sector and will deliver the best and most diverse range of services and providers

B.22 That, in recognition of the significant, but in many respects still uncertain, implications of the removal of the ring fence, and the range of measures put forward by the sector to respond to them, the CLG should extend the transition package and maintain SP funding as a named but not ring fenced grant for a second year. This will offer a measure of support and protection to the sector while the full implications of the changes emerge and are evaluated. It will also enable greater monitoring of the experience of un ring-fencing in Scotland.

Detailed Submission

1. An Introduction to Sitra

1.1 Sitra is the umbrella organisation committed to raising standards in the housing, care and support sector. We are a membership organisation and a registered charity with over 25 years experience of offering practitioners a range of affordable policy, training, consultancy, information, conference and capacity building services.

1.2 Our membership comprises almost 800 practitioner organisations in the field of housing with care and support. The membership elects the committee. Members are drawn from both providers and commissioners, and from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. We operate throughout England, and have offices in London, Bristol, Newcastle and Birmingham. Our work covers all aspects of supported housing, together with associated activities such as human resources and staffing issues, financial management, and community care.

1.3 We are recognised, funded and consulted by government departments and other bodies as representatives of providers of supported housing. We work with them on issues of national strategic significance for the sector. For example we have been working with CLG on developing the transition programme which supports organisations through the changes resulting from the removal of the ring fence, and with the Department of Health on taking forward the personalisation of housing related support services.

1.4 The monthly Sitra *Bulletin* is widely recognised as a key source of technical information and policy development news throughout the supported housing sector. With a circulation of around 3000, it is the most widely distributed specialist publication within the supported housing sector. We supplement the *Bulletin* with regular briefings on matters relating to supported housing and its related fields.

1.5 Sitra is also known as a leading training provider. Each year we train over 4,000 individuals across the country, either on our general programme or on tailored made in-house courses for members and clients. We also provide a range of seminars and conferences on supported housing related themes. We estimate that over 2000 people attend such a Sitra event each year.

1.6 We are therefore in a unique position of combining a detailed knowledge of the housing related support (HRS) sector on the ground with an understanding of and engagement with the developing national strategic agenda.

2. The Basis of our Evidence to the Inquiry

2.1 Our submission is based in part on our general knowledge of the sector derived from our day to day work but also from a number of specific consultation and engagement exercises. These are:

- A series of “round table” events organised in partnership with the CLG. The CLG had supported these as part of their commitment to exploring the issues emerging from the decision to lift ring fence. As a result, during January and February of this year two events were held in each of the English regions – a total of 18 events attended by a total of 635 people, including local commissioners, providers and other stakeholders. This constituted the most significant national debate among stakeholders on the issue of the removal of the ring fence, the a core agenda under review in the Inquiry.
- A questionnaire to members, specifically focused on the Inquiry’s terms of reference, resulted in 91 detailed responses. The questionnaire was sent to members in two formats. It was sent as a list of questions to members; this generated 7 responses. In order to make it easier for members to respond, an online survey was created (using Survey Monkey) and sent to members; this resulted in 84 responses.
- A specific set of questions to commissioners about commissioning structures, which elicited 39 responses.
- Regional consultation events in the London, South West, West Midlands and North East regions, attended by 75 people.

2.2 The views presented in this submission are therefore based on a solid body of evidence drawn from a total of more than 800 personal and written contributions from practitioners in the housing with care and support sector.

2.3 We have organised this submission around the responses to our consultations. As these responses are not specifically organised round the aims of “Independence and Opportunity” we have drawn out a few of the themes most relevant to these in an Appendix 2, attached to the main submission.

2.4 We have also included a section based on our discussions with partner organisations in Wales and Scotland, whose experience can make a significant contribution to the debate.

3. The Regional Roundtables

3.1 These events were organised by Sitra, with the support of the CLG, as part of the transition package to assist in managing the changes arising from the abolition of the Supporting People (SP) ring fence in April 2009.

3.2 Each event heard an introduction from the CLG on the changes and the reasons for them. There was also a presentation from a local Pathfinder authority¹ on their experience of life outside the ring fence. These presentations were followed by discussions in small groups (“round tables”) and then a Q&A with a panel consisting of the presentation speakers and local provider representative. These discussions were structured to ensure a constructive debate and a consistent structure to the outcomes. Groups were asked to identify two key opportunities or challenges arising from the changes locally, two key initiatives to be taken forward regionally or locally and two key issues to be taken forward nationally by Sitra or the CLG. Each group was asked to prioritise one issue for discussion with the Panel. The conclusions of these discussions were collated by Sitra and form the basis of a detailed report which is Appendix 1 to this submission.

3.3 The key themes emerging from the discussions were:

- There is a will to seize the opportunities for more flexible service design and delivery
- SP has achieved a great deal in delivering services to vulnerable people and those otherwise in need of support, based on rigorous needs analysis, strategic planning, joined up commissioning, client involvement, and close monitoring of service standards, value and outcomes. It is critical that these achievements are preserved and built on.
- There is widespread concern that the disappearance of a specific funding stream with eligibility criteria will lead to a loss of focus and expertise, particularly if SP teams are disbanded.
- There is universal concern that incorporation into ABG (Area Based Grant) will lead to funding being diverted away from funding for Housing Related Support (particularly for the most socially excluded and least electorally influential groups) to other local priorities.
- If the opportunities are to be seized and the fears not realised the entire SP sector will need to demonstrate its importance for both individual clients and the community much more effectively to a wider audience.

3.4 The meetings discussed the impact of these issues at local, regional and national level.

3.5 At **local** level the key issues were identified as being:

- Ensuring engagement of service providers and users with the LSP and ensuring that key decision makers understand what HRS is;
- Demonstrating the strategic relevance of HRS to wider objectives in the LAA and PSA 16 targets;
- Demonstrating the value, in both human and financial terms, of preventative work;
- Ensuring continuing good, and appropriately skilled and informed, governance for commissioning and investment decisions.

3.6 At **regional** level the key issues were:

- Maintaining structures such as the RIGs and regional provider forums to facilitate regional planning, communication and support, operational liaison, and the sharing of good practice.

¹ The removal of the ring fence was trialled by 15 “Pathfinder” authorities for 6 months before the final decision to lift it was made.

- The continuing need for regional needs assessments and planning;
- Linking the programme to other service areas operating regionally, eg housing capital investment, the Government Offices;
- Effective cross-border service working, consistency and resolution of local connection issues and disputes.

3.7 National issues discussed included:

- Central government's role in demonstrating and championing the need for HRS services;
- Ensuring services for non-statutory groups do not erode over time;
- Consistency – avoiding a “post code lottery”;
- Refreshing and promoting the cost benefits realisation model (see section 4.1 below);
- Arguing for resources for HRS at a national level.

3.8 Other discussion particularly focused on:

- Maintaining robust data and monitoring;
- Continuing to build the client focus and personalised nature of HRS services;
- Effective communication on all these issues.

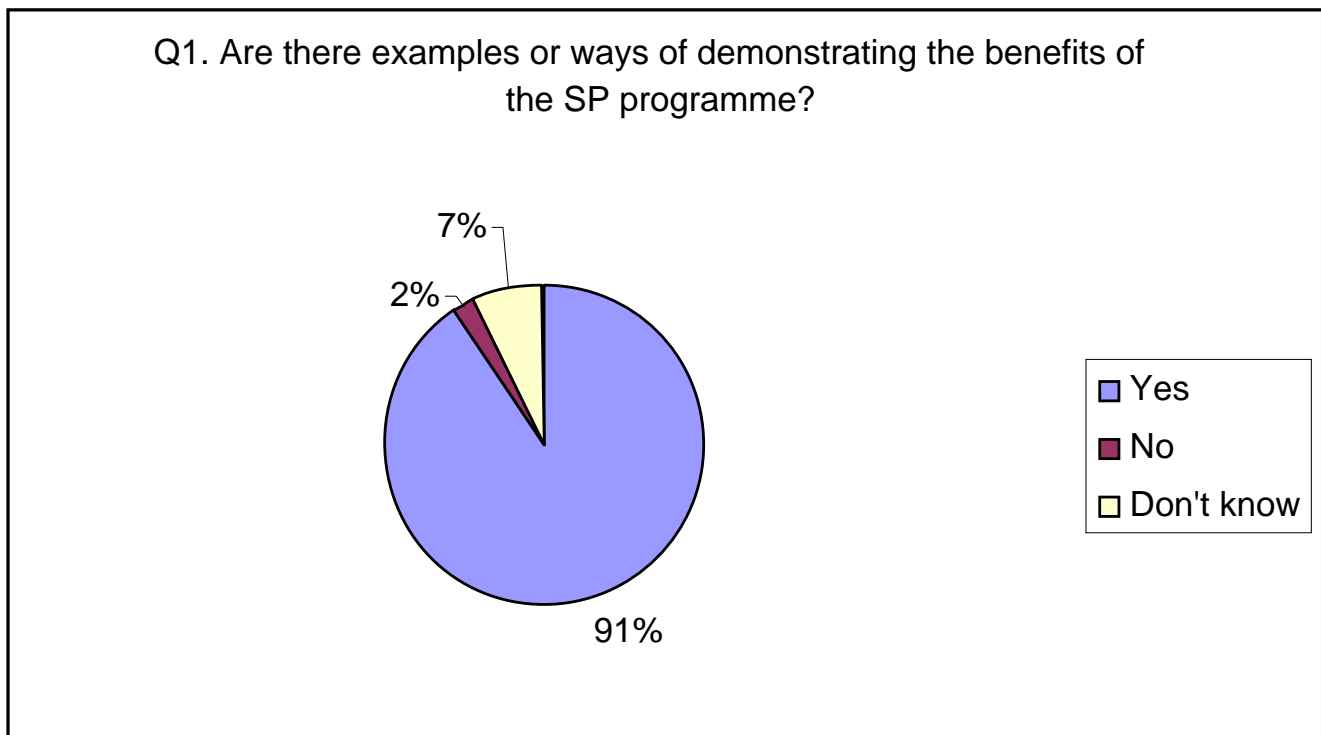
3.9 A fuller account of these discussions is in our report of the events, appended to this submission (please see Appendix 1).

4. Responses to our Consultation Questions

4.1 We sent a letter to our members setting out 10 questions related to the terms of reference for this Inquiry. This was then made available to members in the form of a Survey Monkey questionnaire which facilitated their response and enabled us to produce summary information. In all 93 members replied, 84 of them using Survey Monkey. It is those 84 which are broken down in the statistical information represented in tables in this section.

4.2 We summarise the responses to the questions below. We also structured 4 regional discussion meetings, attended by 75 members, around these same question and we have included commentary and examples from them in the commentary below. Detailed records of the responses and notes from the meetings are available if required.

4.3 *The Benefits of the SP Programme*



4.3.1 Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the ability of the SP programme to demonstrate its strengths and successes. This reflected a theme emerging from the Round Tables which is that the programme has developed excellent practice resulting in and evidenced by robust data, including:

- Needs assessment in each borough;
- Clear SP Strategies and investment plans based on the identified needs;
- Joint Commissioning based on the needs and the strategy;
- Rigorous monitoring of value for money and standards, through the QAF², benchmarking and other tools;
- Detailed information about outcomes for clients though SPLS data, client record forms, data collected by St Andrews University for the CLG and tools more focused on specific client groups such as Outcomes Star and Spirit Level.

² The Quality Assessment Framework is the nationally recognised tool for monitoring the quality of HRS services. The CLG has recently asked Sitra to take on responsibility for updating and maintaining it as a valuable tool. More information is provided in section 4.4 of this submission.

- The cost benefits realisation model developed by CapGemini for the CLG³ that demonstrated the net value to the public purse, and which is currently being updated for use at local as well as national level.

4.3.2 In addition respondents pointed to a wealth of evidence about positive outcomes for users. Individual providers can provide individual case studies which are outside the scope of this overview. As well as the tools referred to above many providers have tracked client satisfaction. One of the key National Indicators (NI 141) tracks successful transition to more independent living (often referred to as move-on) and the sector can generally demonstrate increasing success in supporting clients through this process, despite the ever increasing shortage of affordable social housing. Providers have also been able to provide evidence of other elements of successful independent living including debt management and access to education, training and employment. It is a reflection of the positive relationship many providers have with clients that they often maintain contact with clients after the formal support or residence period has ended and are able to track their success in sustaining positive, independent lives.

4.3.3 Many respondents pointed to the importance of early intervention and crisis prevention which is a feature of housing related support. Examples include working with people with mental health problems to prevent or manage occasional crises; early intervention with people threatened with homelessness to sustain their present accommodation or support them in finding alternatives; the use of Home Improvement Agencies to support older people in their own homes and work with survivors of domestic violence to help them achieve physical safety and start to put their lives back together.

4.3.4 A number of examples were given of flexible and integrated services, both accommodation based and floating support, which addressed the needs of individuals, rather than being based on bureaucratic service categories. Examples included working with landlords around anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol treatment and support services working together and the South West Gateway projects where SP providers worked closely with Probation in the resettlement of offenders. It was felt that the joint commissioning practised by most SP Commissioning Boards (which include Social Services, Housing, Health and Probation as well as provider reps) contributed to this flexible approach.

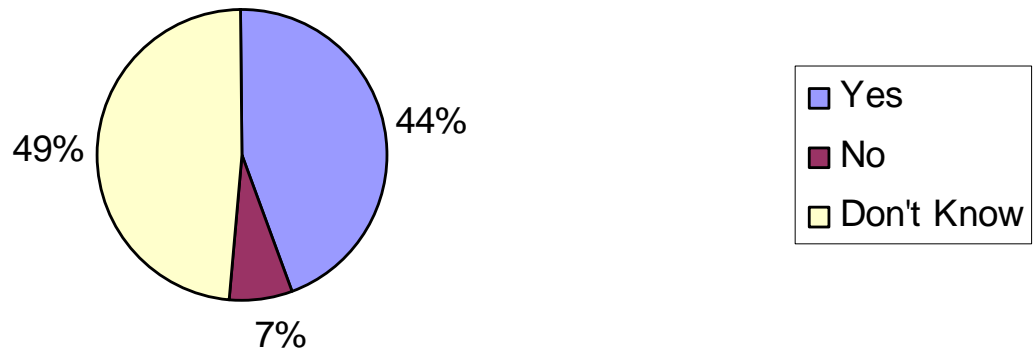
4.3.5 The programme has delivered efficiency and value for money. It was noted that at least 70% of funding is spent on direct user contact, as a result of the sector being less bureaucratic than health or social services. Many areas had increased capacity and throughput even though there have been budget reductions.

4.3.6 These benefits could be demonstrated because of the robust monitoring and recording referred to above and described in more detail in section 4.4. In particular a number of respondents reported a steady improvement in QAF scores over repeated assessments across the sector since the commencement of the programme. The same monitoring has also led to the decommissioning of services which delivered poor standards, outcomes or value for money.

³ This research, published in February 2008 demonstrated that the preventative work funded by SP prevented costs arising from either the costs of alternative provision or later “event costs,” such as hospitalisation, criminal justice or residential care costs that could arise if early preventative intervention and support was missing. The report showed that the, then, programme of £1.7bn produced net savings to the public purse of £2.55bn each year.

4.4 Will the Removal of the Ring Fence lead to Significant Changes in Resources?

Q2. Will the removal of the ring fence lead to significant changes in resources for housing related support and care in your locality?
Please specify any evidence.



4.4.1 While the largest number of respondents answered “Don’t know” - it was clear from supplementary comments that this was simply because it is too soon to say for certain. A tiny minority thought there would be no change.

4.4.2 Many commented that at present the money is tied up in existing contracts and the “crunch” will come, gradually in many cases, when contracts expire and money becomes available for re-allocation. Many felt that the existence of a named grant this year put some useful pressure on authorities not to “raid” it for other purposes and some suggested that this arrangement should be extended to future years. A number stated that their authority had decided to maintain a local ring fence for a period and welcomed this. It is clear that the recent budget has greatly increased concerns about the long term funding of public services generally and increased concerns that support services will be squeezed.

4.4.3 While respondents were aware that ring fence removal (and the attendant relaxation of eligibility criteria) offered real opportunities for more flexible service design and commissioning, the increasing pressure on public spending means that worries about the future risks greatly outweighed optimism about the new opportunities.

4.4.4 The single biggest concern is that the pressure on statutory services will result in a diversion of funds away from groups that do not have statutory protection and the most socially excluded. There is also concern that many groups who receive HRS services will be vulnerable as they are not electorally popular, a factor which will become more significant in locally determined budget decisions than in a national programme. Such groups include gypsies and travellers, ex-offenders, those with substance abuse problems, rough sleepers and possibly those living with HIV/AIDS. Resources may go to statutory care groups but also to other local priorities such as roads and street lighting. Thirdly there is a recognition that, even in those authorities which are committed to maintaining the proportion of spend on HRS, the

budget will be subject to the top slicing necessary to achieve corporate savings from which it was protected by the ring fence.

4.4.5 The risk may act as disincentive to innovation. To commission new services means freeing money up from existing or expiring contracts. There may be a reluctance to do this if any money released from contractual obligations is seen as an opportunity to make corporate savings or divert to other uses, rather than re-investing in new models of support.

4.4.6 Concerns were also expressed about the impact of local decision taking. There were clearly very different relationships between local authorities and their providers sectors ranging from comments which seemed to reflect a highly positive shared approach though to ones which were clearly born of mistrust and conflict. Views of how positive more local decision taking would be varied accordingly. However the concern that the least popular groups would lose out was closely related to this point. There was a frequently expressed concern that issues of local connection (NIMBY-ism) might emerge. The SP programme had very clear instructions about not excluding service users on local connection grounds and many feared the loss of this. This was particularly an issue for specialist services located in one area but with a wider reach (specialist hostels or refuges for example) or those services which needed positive reciprocal referral arrangements for people whose safety required a move out of the area.

4.4.7 It was recognised that PSA 16⁴ gave some level of priority to services to vulnerable people but there was widespread concern that it was too narrow in its impact, referring as it does to only 4 client groups.

4.4.8 Experiences of the role of Local Strategic Partnerships, and particularly their inclusiveness and accessibility to service providers and users, varied. However many were concerned that they did not know how to influence the key decision takers, that these people, whether senior local authority officers or LSP partners, were difficult to reach and did not understand HRS services. Third sector providers felt they were not adequately represented on LSPs. In particular they generally did not have relationships with and were not understood by the CVS, which was often the third sector voice on the LSP. A dual track approach of both educating the decision takers in the value of HRS (and its contribution to their wider community strategies) and also capacity building with providers and their clients to enable them to access LSPs more effectively is therefore required.

4.4.8 Many expressed concerns about the impact of the ring fence removal on commissioning structures. The expertise of SP teams is widely recognised, as is their approach to holistic commissioning. They were generally involved in the needs analysis and the development of SP Strategies. In many areas they have been working to enhance the capacity and diversity of the provider sector. As well as commissioning services they have been responsible for service review and monitoring through use of the QAF and SPLS data. There is considerable concern that this expertise and knowledge will be dissipated if SP teams dissolve into more generic commissioning teams and there is particular concern that the understanding the teams have from this overview should not be lost by splitting their work across generic policy and strategy, procurement and contract management teams. A move towards generic commissioning may in some areas spread the benefits of SP good practice more widely, but with the risk of dilution and eventual loss of focus. In particular respondents feared that support would be mixed with social care and that the essential link with housing would be misunderstood and lost.

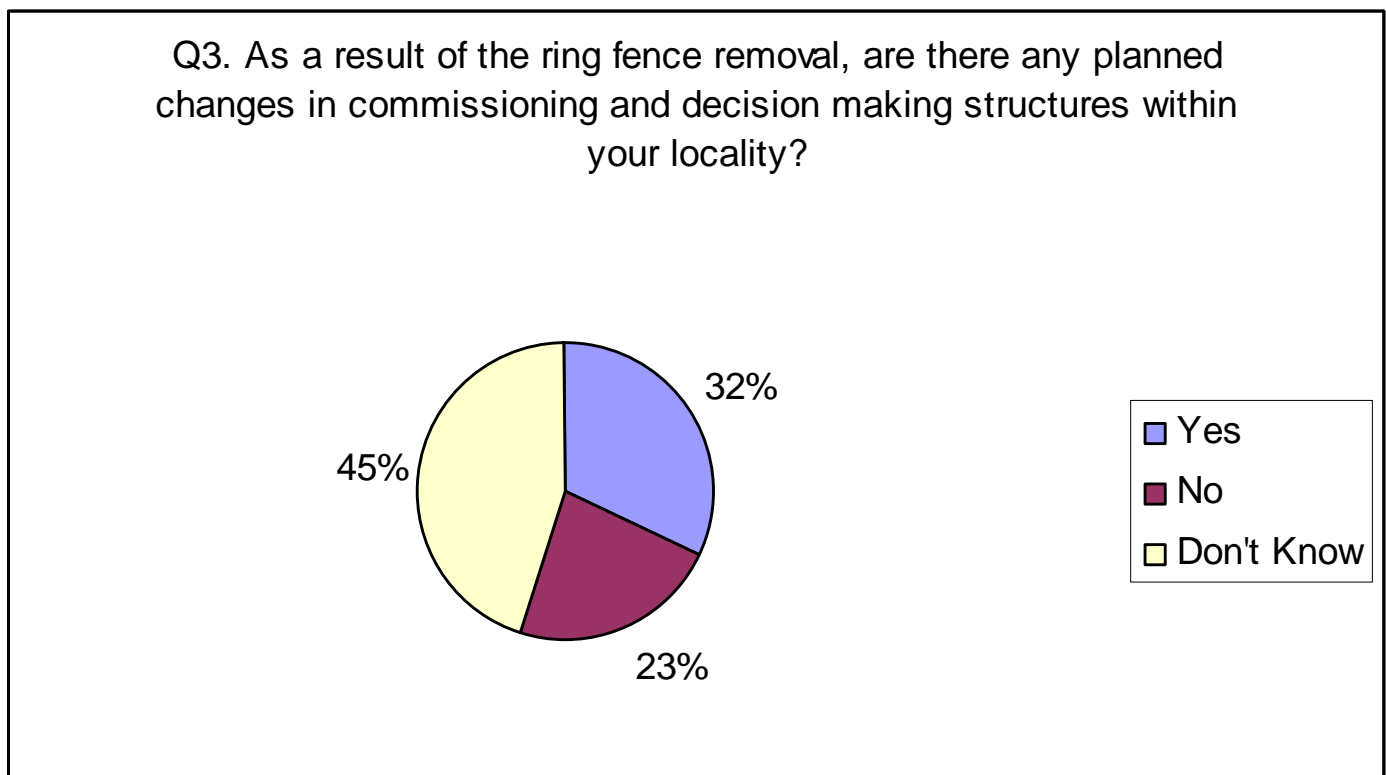
4.4.9 Generic tendering, combined with pressure on public spending, is also seen as leading to more use of competitive tendering which gives undue priority to cost over quality. Formal competitive tendering is seen as often putting at a disadvantage small specialist providers who

⁴ A bundle of National Indicator chosen by the CLG as the priorities in tackling social exclusion.

may provide excellent services but have neither the skills nor the capacity to be successful in the tendering environment. Standard corporate models of tendering may not be appropriate to commissioning specialist support services.

4.4.10 As mentioned earlier some respondents, both providers and commissioners, did welcome the increased flexibility offered by the removal of the ring fence. Resources could be allocated to the greatest need without being forced to match eligibility criteria. Certain activities would not be excluded because they did not fit the criteria. The point was also made that joint commissioning can reduce duplication and inefficiency as well as offering the opportunity of more joined up services. Some respondents made the link with the move towards personalised services, which will also require more flexible service design and delivery.

4.5 Changes in Commissioning Structures.



4.5.1 This question was asked of all respondents. We also wrote separately to commissioners and their responses are summarised in section 5 of this submission.

4.5.2 Only a minority of respondents could say for certain no changes were planned. The biggest number did not know whether structural changes would happen and several expressed concern about resulting uncertainty. In some cases lack of clarity about future arrangements has led to short term contract extensions which causes uncertainty for service users as well as providers

4.5.3 Change can of course be both positive and negative.

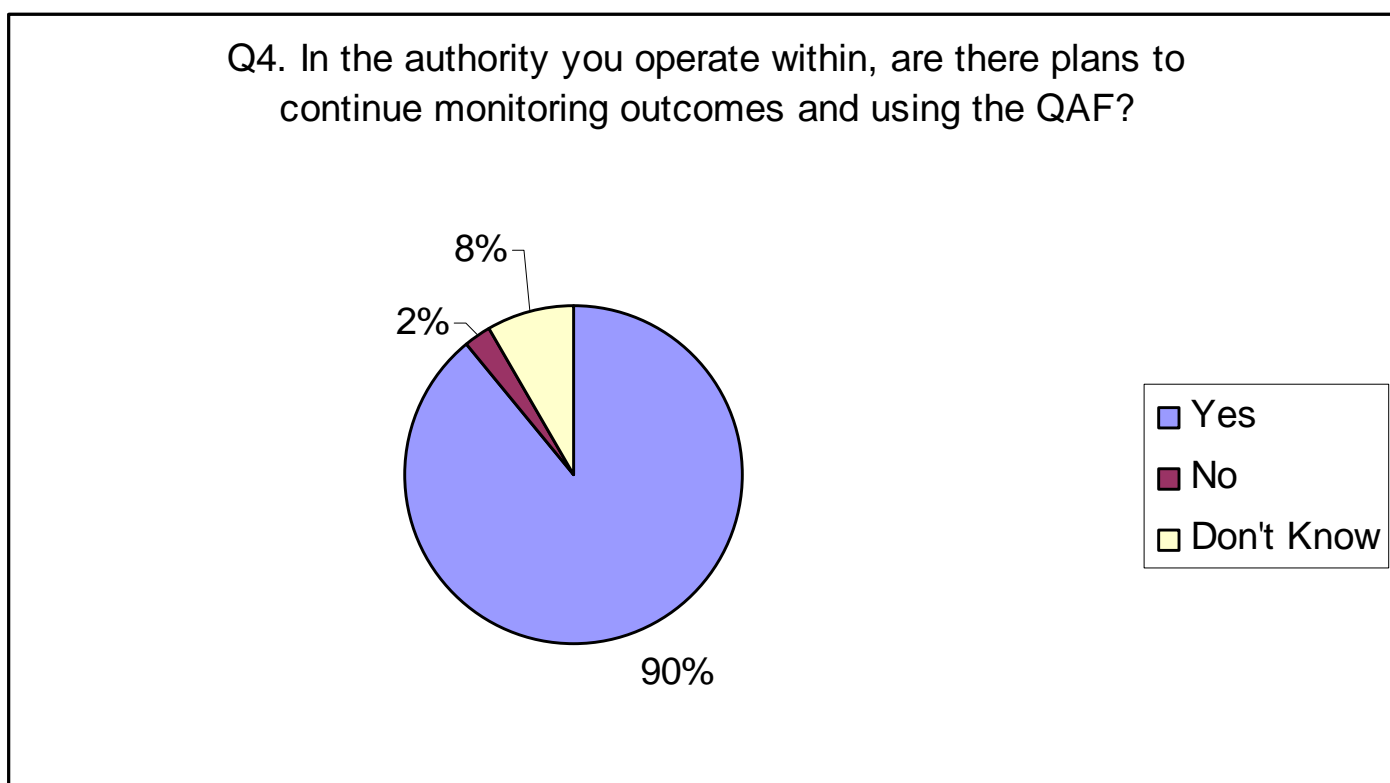
4.5.4 In some areas there was a welcome for the fact that the SP team seemed to be taking on a wider brief and applying their skills to it. It was felt that adult care had a great deal to learn from the SP model and that SP had often led in developing new approaches. Integration with other service areas might lead to better integrated services.

4.5.6 Elsewhere there were concerns that SP teams were being taken over or broken up, with the feared consequences described above.

4.5.7 Structures often followed budgets – a retained local ring fence was likely to be linked to an unchanged SP team and an unchanged SP Commissioning Board.

4.5.8 There is clearly a lot of change in other structures associated with SP commissioning. Many areas see the need for continuing Providers Forums and Core Strategy Groups and these are generally seen as valuable by providers and SP commissioners. However in some areas there is concern that the opportunity is being taken to dismantle these partnership and consultation structures, without putting adequate alternatives in place. In one or two areas providers feel they have been squeezed out and a number of respondents referred to changes made without adequate consultation or lack of clarity about how new structures would work.

4.6 Monitoring Outcomes



4.6.1 As we have seen monitoring of service quality and outcomes is seen as one of the key strengths of the SP programme. Many respondents referred to the role of the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). The QAF is a standard tool which enables the assessment of services in a structured way, scoring their performance in the areas of:

- Assessment and support planning;
- Security, health and safety;
- Safeguarding and protection from abuse;
- Fair access, diversity and inclusion, and;
- Client involvement and empowerment.

4.6.2 Use of the QAF is no longer mandatory (although its use is written into service contracts by many commissioners) so its continued use in the overwhelming majority of boroughs is positive, reflecting a continuing commitment to demonstrating and driving up quality.

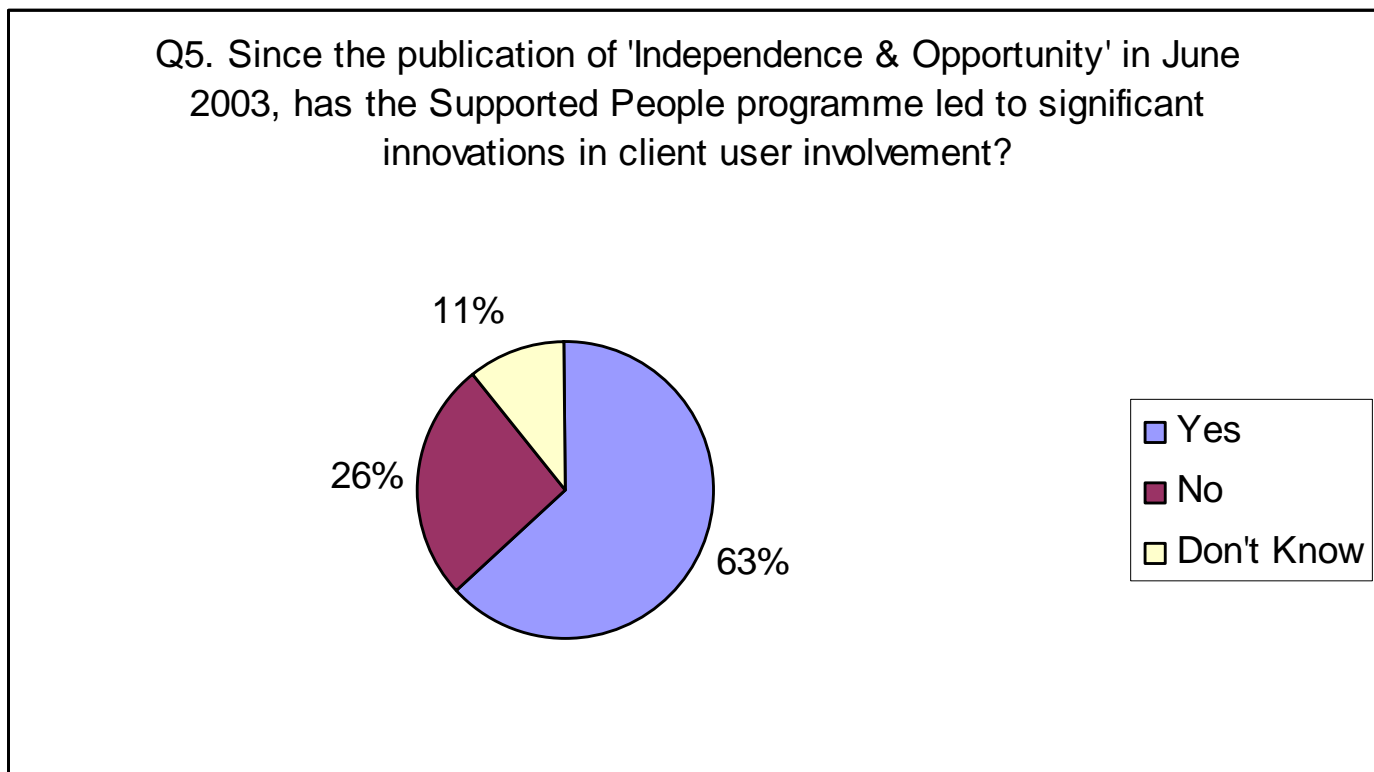
4.6.3 The QAF has recently been reviewed both to reflect the raised standards of provision within the sector and to ensure that it is a more flexible tool, offering providers the opportunity to provide evidence of excellence, rather than simply being a tick box exercise.

4.6.4 There was some concern that use of the QAF might decline if SP teams are dissolved, as more generic commissioners may not understand it or its value. Other respondents felt that one of the benefits of ring fence removal might be the extension into other areas of social care commissioning of the QAF.

4.6.5 A number of respondents made the point that the QAF is only part of a systematic approach to service quality and outcomes monitoring. The sector has been particularly creative in developing measures for soft outcomes (i.e. those related to how clients feel about and experience things) as well as traditional hard indicators (e.g. level of rent arrears, numbers finding jobs).

4.6.7 It was also observed that that personalisation and individual budgets will be a challenge to existing outcomes measurement tools as they will need to match the flexibility and individuality of the services.

4.7 Client Involvement



4.7.1 Service user and client involvement is seen by many as one of the strengths of HRS services.

4.7.2 The services themselves are inherently client centred. Support planning is focussed on the needs of the individual client and in the best services the support plan is developed with their active participation and fully takes into account their own views of their needs. The aim of the services is to promote independent living – autonomy – not a continuing dependence on professionals. Moves towards Individual Budgets and Self Directed Support will build on this and generally the HRS sector is confident about delivering personalisation.

4.7.3 Many organisations also involve clients in service planning and review. Methods include house meetings, focus groups, resident or service user elected representatives, annual satisfaction surveys and feedback from former users. Examples were given of clients developing and running services/activities, such as a café, drama club or a fund raising group.

4.7.4 Clients were also involved in discussions about how services should be delivered and about policies and procedures that impact on their lives. Some organisations have made payments to service users who have become actively involved.

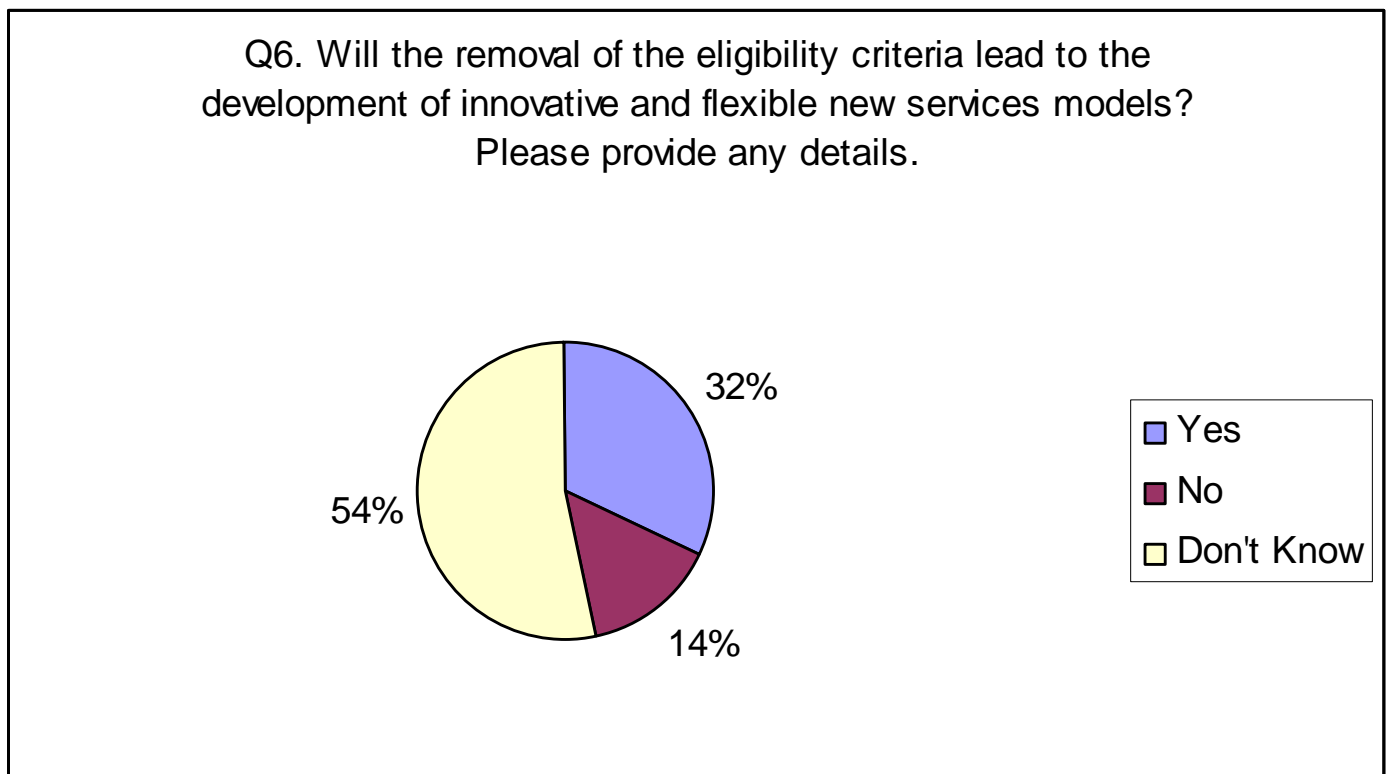
4.7.5 Many examples were given of organisations involving service users in their formal governance, for example through reserved places on the Board, a service users committee, and formal consultation or involvement procedures. Examples were given of operational involvement such as involvement in recruitment or procurement, or, in a residential scheme, the right to veto evictions.

4.7.6 A number of respondents pointed to the fact that client involvement and empowerment is one of the 5 key objectives of the QAF. A service cannot achieve a good or excellent rating without a good score in this area so this has helped to maintain the high priority of the issue.

4.7.7 A number of areas have involved clients in commissioning structures. One example was given of a county which has a group of 66 service users through whom all commissioning body decisions are referred.

4.7.8 There is some concern that new decision making structures may be further removed from service users who may, for example, find it impossible to access LSPs.

4.8 Innovation and Flexibility



4.8.1 Clearly the jury is out on how effective the removal of the ring fences will be in removing barriers to innovation and flexibility. It is encouraging that only 14% have firmly made their minds up that this will not happen.

4.8.2 Many felt it was too early to say, partly because they linked it to whether flexibility would be genuine or a cover for cuts in services (by diverting money to statutory groups, disguising “cost shunts” as efficiency savings, delivering innovation at the cost of existing services or by looking at cost rather than value and outcomes). There was frequently expressed concern that floating support (which is acknowledged to work very well in a wide range of services) would be

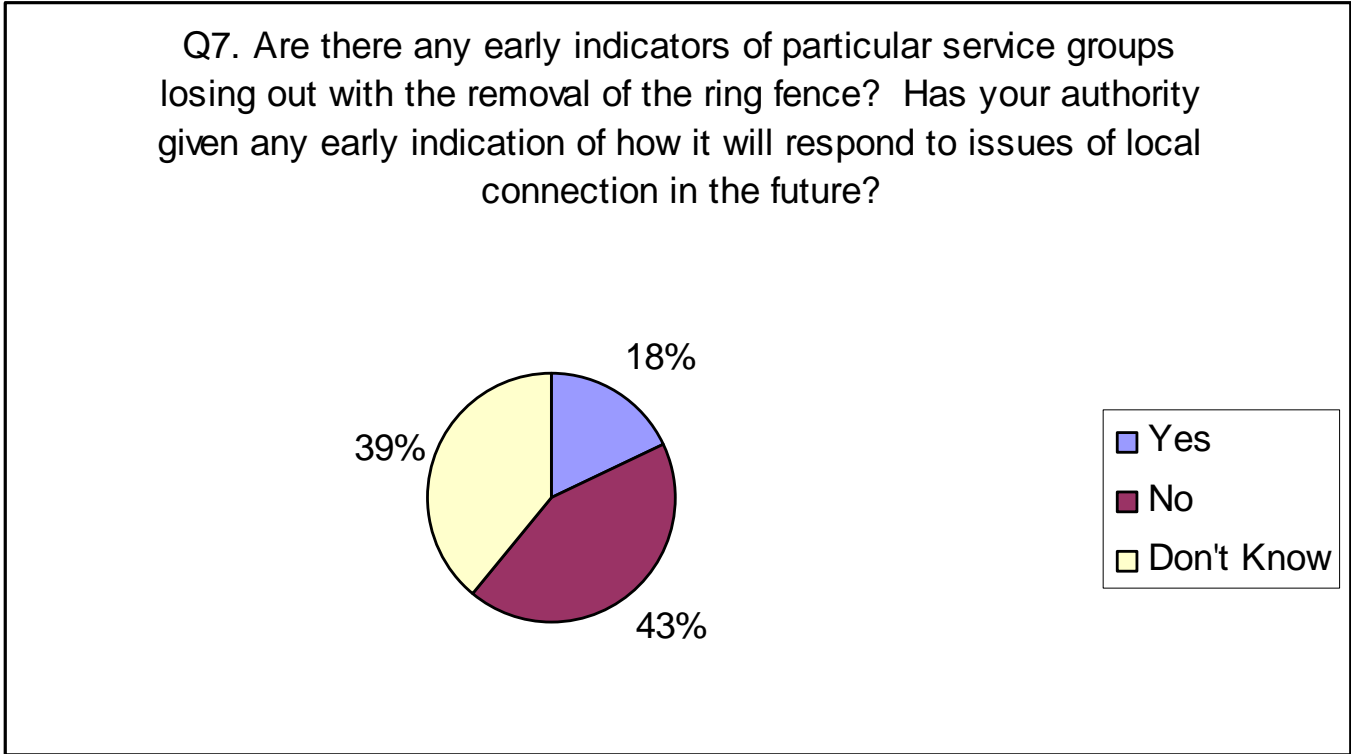
promoted as inherently more flexible and superior to accommodation based services (which also have a long record of successful delivery) simply because they can be cheaper, at least in the short term.

4.8.3 There is certainly an appetite for flexibility in the sector. Some respondents suggested that the removal of the eligibility criteria would enable more holistic service provision, a more honest distinction between care and support (rather than one made to chase available funding criteria), and services that are designed to meet needs, rather than funding rules. Joint commissioning can lead to more streamlined and focused services. One respondent suggested that more flexible funding would enable the design of services based round communities rather than individuals. There was also the point that it would be easier to design services for whole families or, for example, to provide services for children in a women’s refuge. A further example of a positive service that did not conform to the old criteria was a project offering sport to socially excluded groups.

4.8.4 Local authorities will need to be geared up in order to provide a clear strategic direction. They will need to update needs assessments to support joint commissioning. They will need to ensure that they have the right expertise at the right level. To promote and support personalised services they will need to lose some controlling instincts, while ensuring that basic safeguarding, risk management and financial accountability mechanisms remain in place.

4.8.5 Concerns were expressed that more flexible service design, with less rigidly defined eligibility and funding criteria would make it increasingly difficult to monitor and compare outcomes consistently. As the inputs will be less well defined, defining a common base for benchmarking or other comparisons will become increasingly challenging. There was a concern that we don’t lose what we’ve gained. One respondent saw the risk of fragmentation of the sector, although others might see this as a positive development.

4.9 Will there be losers?



4.9.1 This is probably another question where it is too soon to be sure of the answer. The removal of the ring fence will mean change and change involves winners and losers. There is

as we have seen substantial concern across the sector that the losers will be the electoral unpopular, the socially excluded, those for whom there is no statutory protection and those vulnerable groups who tend not to make their voices heard.

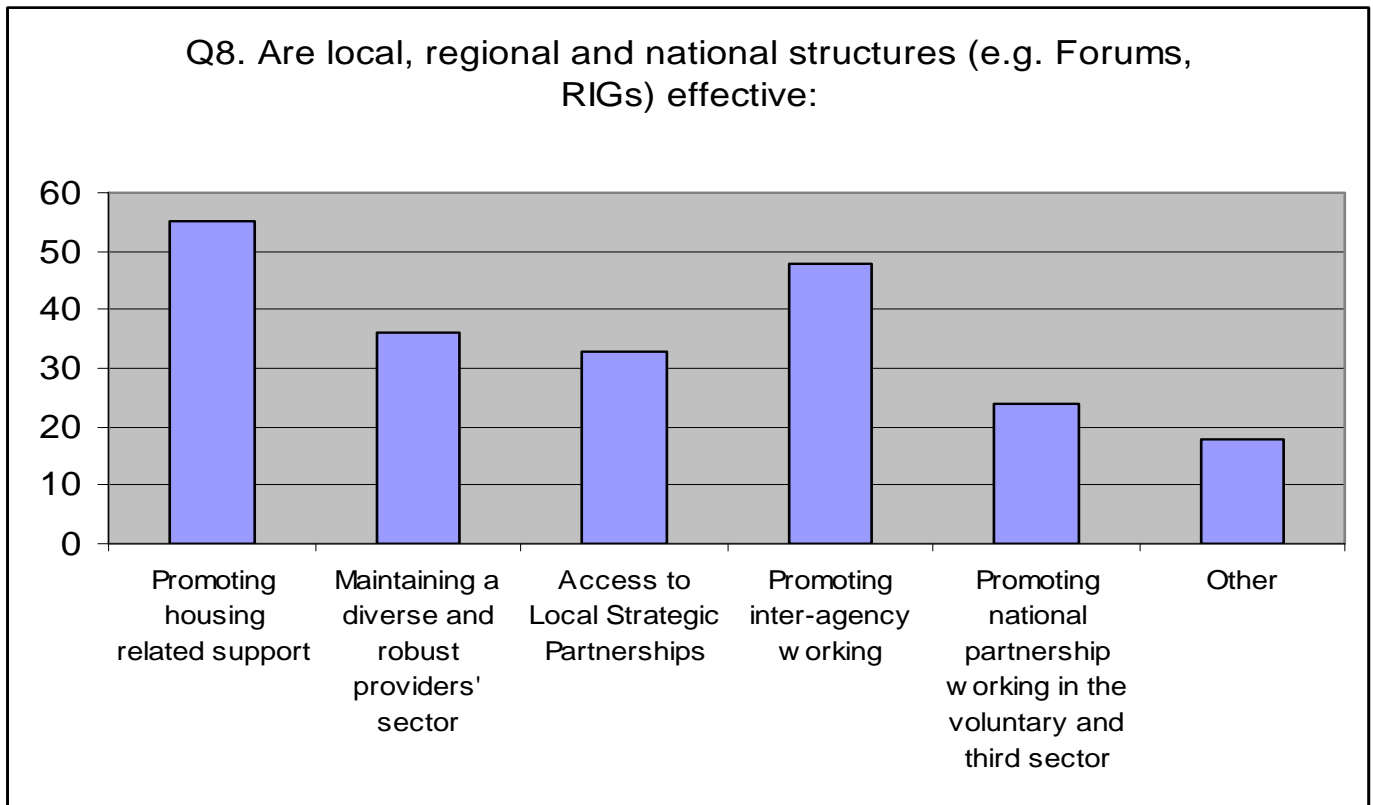
4.9.2 The likely reductions in public spending will lead to higher thresholds of need being required before services can be accessed. It is felt this may be exacerbated by traditional care assessment and commissioning procedures being applied as HRS becomes more integrated, in some areas, with adult social services. Many who currently need and get HRS services would not meet FACS⁵ criteria. This is seen as a risk if SP expertise in local authorities is lost so that the needs of its clients are not represented among those making resource allocation decisions.

4.9.3 There is a perceived risk from changing commissioning practices. We have noted the increased dependence on competitive tendering. There are also trends towards larger, more generic floating support services. These can offer greater flexibility and choice to the client, but they can also lack the specific skills and understanding of more specialist providers. To provide mental health services to asylum seekers may involve a very specific understanding and skill-set that a general mental health service provider may not have. There is also concern that larger contracts, providing generic services make it increasingly difficult for small and local providers to compete. In turn those clients with very specific needs may find themselves marginalised.

4.9.4 We have previously referred to concerns around local connection. Those respondents expressing concern about this are particularly those providing services to women fleeing domestic violence, services where people need to move for their own welfare (e.g. young people seeking an exit from gang culture, sex workers trying to get away from their pimp/dealer) or more mobile social groups (gypsies and travellers, rough sleepers). It will be apparent that these are some of the most socially excluded and many fall into groups which some local councillors would be only too pleased to exclude from their area.

⁵ Fair Access to Care Services, the eligibility criteria for accessing social services.

4.10 Impact on Regional and National Structures



4.10.1 The above graph shows how many people answered that the structures were effective in delivering outcomes. Respondents were able to tick more than one box. Relatively few respondents engaged at a national level. The responses indicate that local and regional groups are most effective at promoting HRS and promoting inter-agency working.

4.10.2 At a local level people commented on both commissioning and provider structures.

4.10.3 Many of the issues raised in respect of commissioning have been touched on already. The commitment and skills of the SP team were clearly seen as central to their success. It was important that local consulting structures were open and involved listening as well as telling. There were examples of good relations, shared learning and genuine consultation. There were others where the local authority was seen as high handed and unresponsive. Several respondents referred to the structures being inaccessible to clients. One example of a county winding up a Core Strategy Group without consultation and against the wishes of partners and providers was cited by two or three respondents.

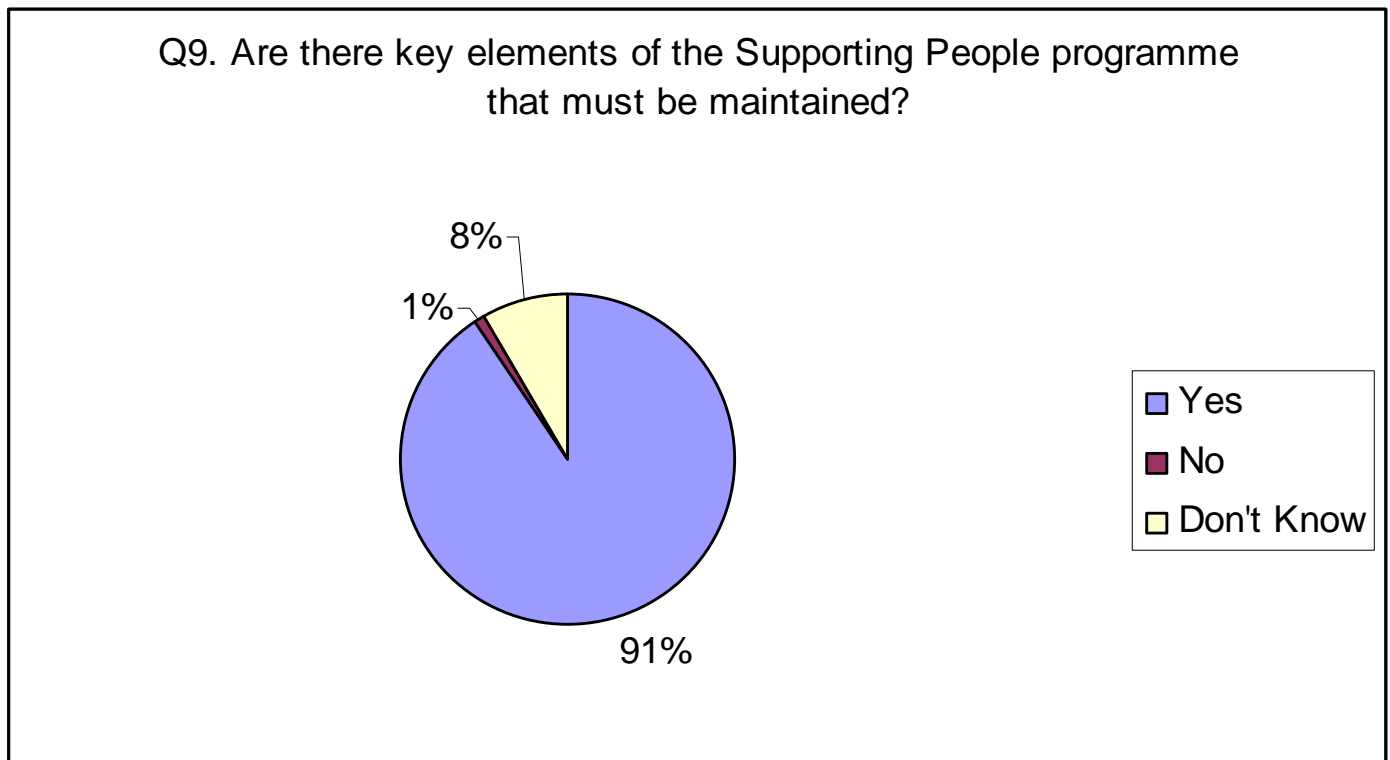
4.10.4 As previously indicated many respondents felt that LSPs were even more inaccessible to providers and clients and that they had a limited understanding of HRS. There were also concerns that the local commissioning and consultation structures had been set up in response to SP and would disappear with it.

4.10.5 Provider forums were widely valued. They need an active commitment from the commissioner, but should not be solely a vehicle for them. They are a valuable conduit for communication from the commissioners (e.g. changing council policies), and enable the providers to feed back information and ideas to the commissioners. They provide a place for the sharing of skills, information and good practice amongst providers. They can link with client forums. Generally providers want to work together. They have a strong sense of common purpose. One example was given of several small hostels running a shared allotment scheme

for residents, which none of them could have sustained individually. However competitive tendering tended to drive them into commercial competition and inhibits working together.

4.10.6 Regional structures were seen as valuable by those who engaged with them. They were seen as places to develop a common vision, to coordinate specialist services and to resolve some local connection and referral issues. Examples of good practice included a new Regional Socially Excluded Strategy in Yorkshire and Humberside and Supported Housing months and events, showcasing the value of the sector in the SW and NW regions. It was noted that London structures were poor and ineffective.

4.11 *The Most Important Things to Preserve from SP*



4.11.1 Not surprisingly the majority of respondents believed there were things it was essential to preserve from the SP programme.

4.11.2 The thing most valued (or possibly felt to be most at risk) by the biggest number of respondents was the QAF/outcomes monitoring/standards. The sector clearly wants to continue to deliver excellence and be capable of demonstrating that it does. This was reiterated through all the methods of consultation.

4.11.3 Respondents also cited the importance of linking the policy with housing and independent living, and the importance of preserving accommodation based services.

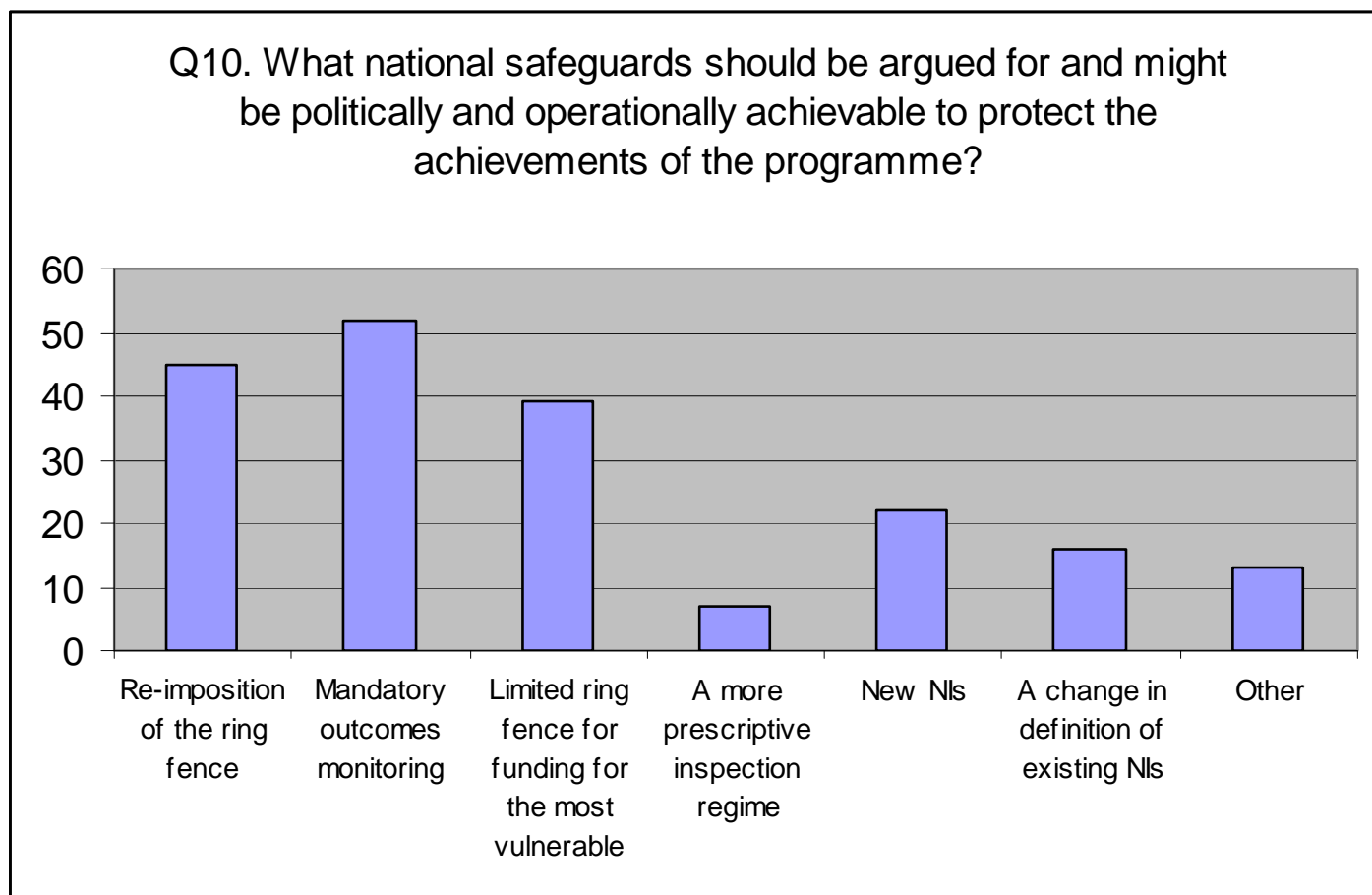
4.11.4 The next priority was the continuation of services to vulnerable and marginalised groups and those with chaotic lives or complex needs.

4.11.4 Other elements people were keen to preserve included:

- The importance of a preventative focus and the emphasis on moving towards independence;
- Service user involvement;
- The skills and expertise of the SP teams;

- The skills of providers' workforces and the professionalism of many care and support workers.
- Diversity – both the diversity of the provider sector, and its ability to respond to the diversity of the clients (including specialist, targeted resources for minority groups)
- Services open to those who need them, free at the point of need, without local connection criteria.
- Links to wider outcomes – employment, training, health, etc.
- Protection of vulnerable adults and safeguarding.
- Clarity – a national direction and strategy, guidelines, advice, consistency.

4.12 What national safeguards should be in place?



4.12.1 This question also allowed respondents to tick more than one option.

4.12.2 The HRS sector's focus on positive outcomes was reflected in the answers to this question with the largest number of respondents (62%).

4.12.3 A significant number (54%) of respondents ticked the box for re-imposition of the ring fence. However the more detailed comments scarcely addressed this issue, perhaps reflecting recognition that this was unlikely to command the support of either main political party and was not therefore likely to happen in practice. This was certainly the view we took from both the round table events and our own consultation events for this Inquiry. Respondents and workshop participants also made comments about the value of local partnerships and knowledge which perhaps indicate an underlying endorsement of a wider localisation agenda. One respondent forcibly argued there should be no new national measures and that the challenge was to make LAAs and ABG work.

4.12.4 However the possibility of a more limited ring fenced budget for services to the most vulnerable, marginalised and socially excluded groups did attract support from both survey respondents (46%) and in meetings. This approach has been taken in Wales (see section ** below). Some respondents made the point that service provision to some groups, particularly survivors of domestic violence and gypsies and travellers, was essentially a national network and that this should be recognised in the funding arrangements. This is an option that merits further consideration.

4.12.5 45% of respondents felt there was scope for better defining or adding to existing National Indicators relating to Housing Support. There was little appetite (8%) for a more prescriptive inspection regime although a role could be seen for the Audit Commission through Comprehensive Area Assessments and a couple of respondents saw the need for a more proactive and effective Ombudsman service.

4.12.6 Many respondents felt that there should be mandatory reporting on indicators which relate to client outcomes – such as customer satisfaction. One suggestion was that reporting against standards should be mandatory for all local partners, to ensure a continuing joined up approach and shared priorities. Others felt that outcomes for particular client groups should be monitored. Although the emphasis was on outcomes rather than inputs and process there was some support for the idea that spend on HRS services must be monitored.

4.12.7 A number of respondents stressed the continuing importance of SP teams – that they should be preserved and have a degree of autonomy. Most welcomed the relaxation of eligibility criteria but felt that SP teams should be guaranteed proper resources to commission good HRS services, but in a more flexible way. Two respondents argued that SP teams should report direct to Council Chief Executives who would have mandatory personal responsibility for the standard of support services to vulnerable people in their area.

4.12.8 A number of respondents wanted to see some financial security. Ideas included the use of a defined local ring fence, longer term (3 year minimum) financial settlements and the mandatory reporting of spend on HRS services. It was also seen as important to reiterate continually the value of HRS services and that money spent on support and preventative services for the most vulnerable is money well spent. The regular use and updating of the cost benefits realisation model and local regional and national level would support this.

4.12.9 Some argued for new statutory measures, either a general duty on local authorities to provide support services to vulnerable groups, or the extension of statutory individual rights to a wider range of needs. Some services, particularly DV refuges, were seen as having a national dimension and needing a national strategic plan.

4.12.10 A clear national strategy was called for. The fact that there is no longer a national spending programme does not mean that there should not be a national policy for HRS. The CLG were seen as having a clear responsibility to lead and to make clear that authorities should continue to provide support services to vulnerable people. They should also continue to promote good practice and the recording and use of outcomes information. There is a need for a clear, updated definition of housing related support to enable local ,regional and national monitoring of spend and outcomes.

4.12.11 A role for the Audit Commission in assessing in a clear and methodical way how well Local Strategic Partnerships served the most vulnerable in their community was seen as positive.

4.12.11 The scope of PSA 16 could be expanded to encompass all vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

4.12.11 There could be local spending plans and reports with HRS as a mandatory identified item.

4.12.11 The emphasis of HRS service on individual support planning and promoting independent living was cited as something to promote and build on at the centre of the agenda for the transformation of social care through personalisation.

5. Responses from Commissioners

5.1 Sitra contacted Supporting People lead officers directly with a request for specific information to inform our response to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry for Supporting People. It was important to capture information about the impact of the removal of the SP ring fence on SP commissioning structures. In total 39 commissioning authorities responded. This represents 26% of all commissioning authorities in England.

5.2 Commissioners were presented with 5 key questions:

1. Has the removal of the ring fence led to changes in the way that SP is delivered in your area?
2. Will an SP team remain in your area following the removal of the ring fence?
3. If the SP team is being moved or restructured, where will it sit?
4. Will there be any significant changes in commissioning structures for housing related support?
5. Are there any elements of the SP programme and commissioning arrangements that you feel needs protection?

This section of the response will provide a summarised response to these questions, and include any overarching recommendations inherent within the responses.

5.3 *Has the removal of the ring fence led to changes in the way that SP is delivered in your area?*

5.3.1 This created a mixed response from commissioners. For many it was difficult to gauge the impact of the removal of the ring fence as the implementation of it was so recent. However, even those who felt that it had not changed things on a local level, broached their response in terms of 'not yet', rather than 'no change anticipated'. Where no change had happened yet, it was acknowledged that this question might usefully be discussed again in 6 months time. Others did not anticipate any change, as they had already been operating as an excellent authority with 'freedom and flexibilities'. One authority felt that there had not been any change, and did not anticipate any because they felt that the commissioning body recognised the strengths of SP and would be committed to its ongoing provision.

5.3.2 Whilst a number of authorities did not feel that any change was happening at present, this was because of acknowledged interim measures, put in place locally to ease the transition, or to provide some short term stability. Interim measures included:-

- Imposition of a local ring fence – enabling some guarantees around the programme for anything between one and three years. This measure was accompanied by some relaxed eligibility, enabling funding of different services.
- Issuing of three year contracts from April 2009. Providing stability for all services for the first three years of the removal of the ring fence.
- Providing a guarantee of funds for 2009-10 – with no commitment beyond that – but allowing for a full transition year.

5.3.4 The lifting of the ring fence has enabled the removal of eligibility criteria, and it is hoped that this will bring significant gains to the programme in relation to flexibility of service provision.

A number of authorities did value this, and were already recognising that greater flexibility was meaning the provision of new services which would offer support to a greater number of people than might have been achieved with a more rigid accommodation based or floating support service. In addition one council felt that they were able to recognise the recession pressures and gave an example of commissioning new services within SP funding which would provide debt advice for those at risk of losing their homes, and also to provide support to credit unions to expand their remit.

5.3.5 Future planning within authorities was an area of key concern. For one authority the reduction in the administrative grant for Supporting People created an immediate impact on their ability to fund needs analysis in order to determine future provision. Another authority found that they had carried out a needs analysis developing a business case for services needed in 2010/11, but were anxious that they no longer had control over the budget to ensure the development of this service. It was also felt that the ABG did not encourage saving and forward planning, as there was a general commitment to not carry forward any underspend, therefore programmes could become very reactive.

5.3.6 The final message around general changes happening as a result of the lifting of the ring fence is part of a theme which runs throughout this consultation. This relates to real concerns about what will happen without a ring fence in a tighter economic climate. The fear is that authorities will struggle to continue to fund non statutory services – and a key casualty of this could be Floating Support. Floating Support will be addressed in other areas of the report and has been seen as one of the key successes of the programme, therefore the anticipation that this may be a vulnerable arm in the future needs to be strongly acknowledged.

5.4 Will an SP team remain in your area following the removal of the ring fence?

5.4.1 Over two thirds of respondents felt that there would be a dedicated team remaining within the authority. However, a good proportion of those who responded positively to this also noted that this had either only been confirmed until the end of 2009/10, or was not something that they could confirm would run into the future. It was noted that the administration grant was critical to the survival and purpose of SP teams, as this provided some of the flexibility to plan, carry out needs analysis, commission research and providing training and support for the provider sector. There was also a concern about how significant they would be in the future if all strategic commissioning responsibilities were taken out of the team, and lead officers were left with a primary payment and monitoring function.

5.4.2 Where SP teams no longer existed, their departure was not directly linked to the lifting of the ring fence. A number of teams had been deleted in the last 2 to 3 years, and responsibilities for SP had been moved into more mainstream commissioning teams with a broader adult social care, community care or housing remit. One authority commented that this had been positive because of the potential to share good practice across the authority.

5.4.3 Whilst it is positive that teams remain in situ, there are concerns about how long, and in what capacity they will continue to exist past 2009/10. There are strong messages from other arms of the consultation about the importance of sustaining a specialist resource within authorities, and whilst there may be efficiencies to be made from mainstreaming, there are also related concerns about loss of expertise and the ability to champion the worth and the preventative support offered through the provision of housing related support.

5.5 If the SP team is being moved or restructured, where will it move to?

5.5.1 In response to this question it transpired that many SP teams had already experienced a move in recent years. Whilst it is not particularly helpful to note the names of all the

departments within which SP had been moved, it is of note that out of the 39 authorities who responded to this question, only 2 acknowledged that they were either now located, or were to be located within housing. Many of those who had moved, or who were planning to move had come out of housing and moved into either adult social care or some form of social care commissioning team. None of the authorities who responded particularly attributed the move to the lifting of the ring fence, and rather that they formed part of a wider internal restructuring programme. Concerns were again raised about the future mainstreaming of the programme within these wider departments and the potential to lose expertise.

5.5.2 However, the break between housing and supporting people is of some significance when thinking about the future. This links into the concerns raised within the regional roundtable debates hosted by Sitra about the relationship between capital and revenue funding, and the anxieties raised by members about future commissioning of accommodation based housing related support. Whilst SP established a break between housing and support, allowing for the positive development of Floating Support, it is important to ensure that this does not preclude the future development or the remodelling of specialist supported accommodation.

5.6 Will there be any significant changes in commissioning structures for housing related support?

5.6.1 A few authorities did not feel there were likely to be any changes in commissioning structures, and this stemmed largely from an acknowledgement that the existing system was working well and had a lot to recommend it. Key strengths were cited as positive partnership approach and strong multi-agency approach as models of good practice.

5.6.2 Within authorities where change was anticipated or in progress, there were a number of directions of travel identified. One authority was exploring the best structure to support the implementation of outcomes based commissioning. A number of others were looking for new arrangements to improve opportunities for joint commissioning and, where appropriate, contract management – both within the authority and across neighbouring boroughs. Where new structures were in place which incorporated a commissioning body with a wider overview, it was felt that this would enable SP services to complement those delivered by other departments within the authority – and avoid duplication. New developments also included the evolution of the SP Commissioning Body to becoming the Social Exclusion Group – which takes a lead on the strategic co-ordination for PSA 16 plus SP. In addition a number of authorities had moved the commissioning of services under the specific client group heads.

5.6.3 Final comments relating to commissioning structures focussed on the future. The immediate concerns about the squeeze on public sector finance came through in the form of fears that there would be no money to commission with. In addition questions about how the move to increased personalised services and the increase in self directed support would be incorporated within the commissioning bodies of the future.

5.6.4 Changes to commissioning structure seem to reflect the longer term trend identified in the earlier responses. They are not linked directly to the lifting of the ring fence, and largely seem to be changes which are broadening the scope of the commissioning body and where possible enabling the sharing of expertise and knowledge. The commissioning body arrangements for SP have often been recognised as a strong and positive element of the programme, with commissioning being based around clear and robust needs.

5.7 Are there any elements of the SP programme and commissioning arrangements that you feel need protection?

5.7.1 Positive endorsements of commissioning arrangements within SP have already been noted. However, for those who commented again on commissioning, important factors to preserve include the focus on partnership, the use of procurement practice to develop wider market knowledge and reconfigure services and the joined up thinking exhibited by commissioning bodies. One authority expressed anxiety that transfer into more generic social care commissioning would lose the developed understanding of needs.

5.7.2 One of the core strengths of the programme has been the development of a long term strategic vision for housing related support. The intensive understanding of needs has driven the proliferation of quality services under the SP programme and has shaped the sector. This growth has been built on positive relationships with providers, enabling commissioners to build on and negotiate enhanced flexibilities. The removal of the ring fence has lifted the requirement for mandatory strategy, and the loss of the admin grant is already limiting some authorities' ability to support essential provider forums and thereby limiting regular contact with those delivering services. The loss of knowledge from links with providers will only compound the loss of expertise predicted if SP teams dissipate. Concrete knowledge of the sector and all that it achieves are seen as fundamental pieces of the jigsaw to influence key stakeholders within LSPs and other potential funders of the strength of the preventative nature of SP services.

5.7.3 The commissioners of SP services placed a very high value on the Quality Assessment Framework, and the need to continue to prioritise monitoring and validation visits as an essential tool in the safeguarding of vulnerable adults. Whilst the QAF has not been mandatory since 2006, there is a strong feeling that the reduction or dispersal of teams, and the subsequent loss of expertise may mean that authorities are less able to utilise this excellent quality tool. There was a strong endorsement of the need to integrate housing related support within other local monitoring arrangements, particularly highlighting the future importance of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

5.7.4 Almost everyone responding made some reference or acknowledgement to the increasing economic crisis and the likely impact on future funding of public services. Whilst it was acknowledged that all public services were likely to be under attack, commissioners reinforced some of the concerns expressed elsewhere, that the socially excluded groups were those most likely to be at risk. It was also noted that changing demographics will strengthen the call on statutory care based services. In addition, a number noted the vulnerability of Floating Support services. The difficulties associated with demonstrating the benefits – particularly of low level Floating Support – and the 'lag' effect of reducing service provision – are likely to contribute to it being an early victim of any squeeze. One authority noted that Floating Support was an 'easy target', yet at the same time seeing the services provided in this way as 'amongst our real successes'.

5.7.5 Additional points were made about problems in moving the programme forward. The reduction in grants has led to a reduction in supported housing units being developed or re-commissioned within the borough. This is a significant cause for concern for the future and it is felt that existing and future procurement practices are reducing the incentive for RSL's to invest in the future. It was noted:

"The introduction of Self Directed support and IB's and the removal of the ring fence will mean we can be more innovative with services, but people do need somewhere to live in and an environment conducive to making a change."

5.7.6 All commissioners wanted to positively endorse the success of the programme in relation to the impact on service users lives. The local impact of reducing homelessness, increased independence and greater access to move on were all some of the strengths identified that should be built on as we move forward. A small number of authorities did feel more positive

about the future, with one feeling that the lifting of the ring fence represents pure opportunity, enabling the funding of new and innovative ways to achieve outcomes. However the tone of the majority of respondents was more aptly represented by the following quotation:-

“In future years the Council is being required to find efficiency savings and the SP programme will not be exempt from this. There is an underlying risk to the programme in that the council may decide to prioritise the funding of statutory services over non-statutory services.”

6. Experience from Scotland and Wales

6.0 It is helpful to look at the experience drawn from the application of the Supporting People programme through the devolved parliaments of Scotland and Wales. Both countries have important parallels to the English experience which can usefully be used to inform the Inquiry.

6.1 Scotland

6.1.1 Scotland adopted the SP programme in a largely similar way to England in 2003. However, they made the decision to lift the ring fence on SP funding in April 2008. In May 2008 the Housing Support Enabling Unit⁶ in Scotland carried out a survey of providers and commissioners within Scotland to create a baseline and to enable some measurement of changes⁷. They are just in the process of refreshing this data in a survey started in April 2009 which will provide an update on how things have changed in the intervening year. At the time of submitting this evidence the full report is not available.

6.1.2 Commissioners noted some immediate changes with the removal of the ring fence, and by July 2008 5 of the 32 authorities had already disbanded their SP teams and no longer had anyone identified with core responsibility for housing related support. Early evidence from the 2009 survey show that this number is increasing.

6.1.3 Information from the new survey⁸ also reinforces English concerns about the removal of the ring fence increasing the difficulties of tracking spending on housing related support. Within one year of the removal of the ring fence commissioners from Argyll and Bute noted: "It is difficult to be totally specific about expenditure on housing support because of the mix of funding from different budgets within the council and the differing terminology used by the SP team, Social Work and others"

6.1.4 Other evidence from East Ayrshire highlights the issues of funding services within an increasingly tight economic climate. They noted "expected reduction of up to 30% in non social work expenditure from 2008/9 to 2009/10."

6.1.5 A number of other commissioners who did respond stated that they were expecting a slight decrease in funding and therefore in the volume of housing support commissioned. Others reflected that there would be no change.

6.1.6 Whilst there is not an overwhelming trend to observe, it is hoped that there is sufficient evidence for the members of the select committee to want to look more closely at what has and is happening in Scotland, and to read across to the English experience. It is of note that Scotland has carried out its own cost benefit analysis, which like the English model, demonstrated the clear savings to be made from focussing on a preventative housing related support agenda. However, despite this, the argument at a local level is being hard fought, and the non statutory clients are at real risk of losing out.

6.2 Wales

6.2.1 Wales approached the introduction of SP in a different fashion. At the outset of the programme a distinction was made between the money which was passed directly to local authorities and that which was held centrally within the Assembly. The Supporting People Grant was passed directly to Local Authorities, and was un-ring fenced from the outset. This pot was

⁶ The Housing Support Enabling Unit is a partnership Initiative between Community Care Providers Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, funded by the Scottish Government

⁷ HSEU research into housing support funding levels and service volume in Scotland from 2007/08 – Moira Weir

⁸ Information contained in HSEU April 09 Housing Support Bulletin

for older people's services and community care type projects for whom LAs had a statutory duty. The LAs have total control how to finance, commissioning and administer such projects. An additional grant was established which was called the Supporting People Revenue Grant (SPRG). The funding resulting from SPRG has been categorised by Cymorth Cymru – an umbrella group for housing support providers - as being for projects for which LAs do not have a statutory duty and who are seen as "politically sensitive". SPRG could be applied for by Local Authorities, and also some projects with national or regional interest were commissioned directly by the Welsh Assembly.

6.2.2 In 2006 the Welsh Assembly explored whether LAs were ready to take on the administration of SPRG and applied a series of conditions to determine whether SPRG should be transferred. The conditions were as follows:-

1. Local authority administration should ensure that schemes are offered a reasonable guarantee of a term of funding and that termination decisions will be taken openly and within the context of local strategic plans.
2. Local authorities provide a clear commitment to a level of local service delivery.
3. Local authorities should be able to demonstrate a clear and logical structure for the administration of the grant scheme including service standards, commissioning and payment arrangements.
4. Local authorities should be able to demonstrate the capacity to administer the grant locally.
5. Local authorities should have demonstrated their capacity for strategic planning in this context.

6.2.3 Cymorth Cymru conducted a snapshot survey with providers⁹, on behalf of the Welsh Assembly and came up with two broad brush conclusions:-

- Concerns over the status of housing related support within the local authority and lack of understanding and support at both the corporate and political level;
- Insufficient capacity of LA SP teams to effectively undertake all the roles required of them.

6.2.4 Whilst the conditions in England are different, the two concerns identified in Wales do seem to resonate with those highlighted within our research. The fears over limited understanding of the importance of housing related support, the centrality of a preventative agenda and the need to fund more than statutory minimum are all mirrored in England. The transition period is aiming to highlight and promote the value of housing related support, but this is a long term project and one which could be destabilised by lack of local, regional and national understanding. The second concern about capacity of SP teams is becoming a central concern of English providers. As teams are merged or disappear completely, then the ability of SP teams to conduct effective needs analysis, commissioning, develop expertise on the sector, monitor and quality control services to the most vulnerable comes into question.

6.2.5 The situation facing England can not be directly compared to either the Welsh or Scottish experience. However there are a number of lessons that could be explored by the committee. Firstly the application of a set of conditions for readiness for the change and the engagement of

⁹ Local Authority Preparedness: A snapshot of support providers' views. A summary of the report to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration for Cymorth members and partners organisations.

providers in determining readiness seem to be principles that could usefully be adopted in England. Whilst it is recognised that pathfinder authorities did go some way towards trialling the experience of un ring fencing, our knowledge of the pilots has shown that the experience of different authorities within the pilot was extremely varied and not tested against an established list of criteria or tests. Secondly there are concerns over loss of expertise within authorities. This message comes from both Scotland and Wales and is a dominant message throughout our research. The establishment of the SP programme in England was part of an active decision to demonstrate that housing related support was a distinct sector within social care. Having made that decision and built a strong and productive sector, there is a danger that decisions made to promote local democracy and notional mainstreaming may destabilise a sector only just finding its collective feet.