



# **Consultation on guidance on mainstreaming the commissioning of local services to address violence against women and girls**

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## **An introduction to Sitra**

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.

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.

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.

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 3,000, 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.

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 inhouse courses for members and clients. We also provide a range of seminars and conferences on supported housing related themes. We estimate that over 2,000 people attend such a Sitra event each year.

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

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on this guidance.

## **Commissioning services to address violence against women and girls**

Sitra welcomes this guidance on commissioning services to address violence against women and girls. The five areas and 12 key principles provide a good framework for commissioners.

However we believe that the guidance would benefit from additional focus on: the Supporting People regime, the role of specialist services, how to combat localism in cross-authority provision of services, how services should be monitored, provider involvement in the commissioning process, and the relationship between housing and the provision of services.

## Supporting People

The guidance notes that £64 million of the £100 million of funding for services to combat VAWG was from the Supporting People budget but makes few references to the Supporting People programme and its value. Although Supporting People grant is no longer ring-fenced and is now a mainstream rather than separate programme in many areas, the commissioning and provision of housing related support services is still of central importance in addressing VAWG. In local authorities where there is no longer a separate Supporting People team, those who have moved into other departments' commissioning and contract management teams have taken their experience and learning from the Supporting People programme with them. The guidance should put more emphasis on what has been learned from the Supporting People programme on both the commissioning and monitoring of housing related support services, whether or not the Supporting People brand is still in local use.

Joint commissioning is an area where many of the Supporting People commissioning and governance structures have achieved involvement of local partners through their Commissioning Bodies and the guidance could usefully refer to this experience.

The guidance notes the need for commissioners of services to recognised the four drivers<sup>1</sup>:

1. Government policy
2. Specialist organisations
3. Victims experience
4. Service priorities.

These are similar drivers to those for the Supporting People programme. It developed and continues to use to inform both commissioning and contract monitoring processes:

- A national Outcome measurement and Client Record reporting framework
- The Quality Assessment Framework.

These tools are widely used and supported in the housing related support sector and it would be helpful to refer to them in this guidance.

## Specialist organisations

The guidance notes the need to recognise the value of small specialist organisations in the delivery of services to address VAWG. We would encourage emphasis on the value that specialist organisations play.

The Supporting People Client Records demonstrate that between 2003/04 and 2008/09 60 to 69 percent of Supporting People services for Women at Risk of Domestic Violence were provided by Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Since 2003 there has been a slight decline in the provision of services by Voluntary & Community Sector Organisations, while there has been an increase in services provided by Housing Associations, rising from 20 percent to 24 percent<sup>2</sup>.

As Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations deliver the majority of services funded under Supporting People programme we would advise that the guidance seeks to use the experience developed in Supporting People teams on liaison with small specialist organisations. This sector has identified the added value that local specialist providers can bring, such as accessibility to discriminated against groups, integration into local networks and partnerships, their volunteering and educational roles. However it has also shown that,

in some areas, procurement practices have excluded evaluation of such benefits by a focus on price and efficiency savings through economies of scale. The guidance notes the support of the National Commission focus groups for women-only specialist services. The need for specialist support for sub-groups for women from discriminated against ethnic or gender groups should also be acknowledged. It would be helpful therefore for the guidance to further emphasise the need to take account of the value of specialist support if commissioners are to avoid loss of specialist services through procurement of large scale, generic contracts.

## Using the Supporting People data sets

The guidance notes the need to carry out local needs assessment in order to set priorities for services. The main data sources referenced are the British Crime Survey and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. We welcome the encouragement to use these data sets but note that at present most Joint Strategic Needs Assessments do not address needs for housing or housing support services. We would encourage commissioners to also refer to the Supporting People Client Records data and the Supporting People Outcomes data.

This Client Record data has been collected for all Supporting People funded services since 2003 and shows:

- Number of clients supported who are at risk of domestic violence
- Diversity data for those clients
- Geographical location of services provided, by region and local authority area
- Provider type and service type in each area
- Sources of referrals to providers – whether from within or outside the local authority area.

The Client Record data can be found at: <http://www.spclientrecord.org.uk/webdata/index.cfm> It can be analysed at a local, national and regional level. As the data has been provided since 2003 it can be used to assess trends in the provision of services. It is a valuable source of information and, as most services funded by Supporting People grant are still required to submit the data, it would be beneficial to make explicit reference to it in the guidance,

The Supporting People Outcomes monitoring tool is used to record the outcomes for all clients who leave Supporting People funded short term services and a sample of those in long term services. It records numbers and percentages of clients identifying as needing support to achieve an outcome and whether or not it was achieved. The outcome domains accord with those of 'Every Child Matters':

1. Achieve Economic Well being
2. Enjoy and Achieve
3. Be Healthy
4. Stay Safe
5. Make a Positive Contribution.

As with the Client Records data, it can be analysed geographically, by service type, provider type and client characteristics. This data can help support assessment of the effectiveness of services and the outcomes that they achieve for the clients. It can also help services and commissioners assess whether there have been changes in the needs of the clients referred. For example, in a number of areas it has identified an increase in the prevalence of clients with multiple needs.

## **Cross authority provision**

The guidance notes that commissioning has to address the fact that VAWG is a cross authority issue. It would be very useful if the guidance could address concerns on localism in the provision of services. With funding decisions being made at a local authority level, and budgets under severe pressure, there are increasing reports of local connection criteria being imposed even on services for women fleeing domestic violence. It is important that commissioners are advised on how to address the issue of cross authority needs for VAWG services by partnership and consultation with other local, regional or national agencies. The Supporting People Client Records data can provide data on source of client referrals which could provide useful information to commissioners on numbers moving out of and into services in particular local authority areas.

## **Regulation and monitoring**

Section 5 of the guidance notes the need to ensure that commissioners monitor services. It also notes that the services may be monitored in a variety of ways depending on how they are funded. As Supporting People has funded £64.5million of the £100million investment in addressing VAWG, its monitoring practices are relevant. Since 2003 Supporting People has used the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) to monitor services. The QAF was revised in April 2009 and a survey on its use showed that all but one local authority<sup>3</sup> was using it to monitor housing related support services. This widespread usage warrants its reference in the guidance. As Supporting People teams and services are mainstreamed into other local authority departments it is also being adapted for a broader range of services, for example for joint monitoring of support and social care services. Work has recently begun on developing read-across from the QAF to Care Quality Commission standards but currently there are no proposals for registration or monitoring of the type of support services most often commissioned to address VAWG to be taken on by the Care Quality Commission.

Sitra leads on the maintenance of the QAF for Communities and Local Government and would be happy to advise further on how to incorporate its use in the guidance.

## **Housing**

The guidance refers to the role of housing in the provision of services for VAWG. It is essential that commissioners work closely with housing providers when commissioning accommodation based services to address VAWG. This is an area where a lack of understanding of financial and management aspects of housing provision often impedes good partnership working. We would encourage commissioners to work with those Supporting People teams who have gained experience of working with housing providers on the commissioning and decommissioning of accommodation based support services.

Sitra would be happy to provide further information on any of the issues discussed above.  
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## Footnotes

1. At page 14.

2.

<b>Provider type</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>
Voluntary Organisation	68.26%	69.42%	68.42%	67.22%	64.64%	63.81%
Housing association/RSL	20.74%	19.36%	20.37%	19.58%	23.61%	24.84%
Housing Authority	6.59%	5.40%	5.00%	5.18%	4.78%	4.76%
Local Authority – Joint H&SS	1.81%	2.23%	2.31%	1.76%	1.46%	1.36%
LSVT	0.77%	0.68%	0.61%	1.15%	1.15%	0.90%
Private Company	0.58%	0.71%	0.52%	2.08%	1.56%	0.77%
Individual	0.56%	0.92%	0.72%	1.38%	1.57%	1.57%
ALMO	0.46%	1.03%	0.97%	0.87%	0.65%	0.79%
Social Services Authority	0.20%	0.05%	1.03%	0.79%	0.59%	1.21%
NHS Trust	0.03%	0.19%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,229</b>	<b>20,629</b>	<b>20,387</b>	<b>20,619</b>	<b>21,936</b>	<b>24,535</b>

3. City of London