

Briefing on the CLG Select Committee Report on the Supporting People programme

January 2010

Introduction

This joint briefing from the National Housing Federation and Sitra updates our members on the findings of the parliamentary select committee report on Supporting People published in November 2009.

In April 2009, the ring fence around Supporting People funding was removed. The removal of the Supporting People ring fence creates a significant risk that vital services for vulnerable people will suffer as funding is diverted away to other priorities and the experience, expertise and focus of Supporting People will be lost. However, the new funding regime also creates opportunities to respond to local needs in more flexible ways, by joining up expenditure across health, adult social care and housing related support.

Earlier in 2009, the CLG Select Committee conducted an inquiry into the Supporting People programme, analysing its progress against the 2007 Supporting People strategy. The National Housing Federation and Sitra are committed to influencing government to ensure the funding regime and mechanisms are in place to preserve and build on the successes of Supporting People.

The Federation and Sitra gave written and oral evidence to the Committee in May and June this year and the Committee's conclusions below respond to a number of concerns we raised in our evidence. The Select Committee's full report is available online at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmcomloc/649/649i.pdf

Findings and recommendations of the CLG Select Committee

Supporting People has achieved a lot

Sitra and the Federation have been clear that the success of Supporting People needs to be protected as the ring fence is withdrawn and the identity of the programme is threatened. Supporting People has been instrumental in supporting the needs of some of the most socially excluded members of society, raising the quality of provision and delivering significant saving to the public purse. The Committee highlighted the need for local authorities to protect specialist services and ensure vital provision is not lost in a rush to rationalise delivery. The Committee responded to our concerns about the future of the programme's identity and has recommended that local authorities retain Supporting People teams and commissioning bodies and promote them as models of good partnership working. The Committee made other specific recommendations about the governance arrangements for housing related support outlined below.

Transparency and commitment from Government is needed to counter uncertainty

The Committee rejected the need for a ring fence to protect services, but agreed with evidence from Sitra, the Federation and others that greater protection was needed to ensure that funding was not diverted away from critical services. The Committee supported devolved decision making and local control over budgets but shared our concerns about the loss of protection and possible loss of funding to Supporting People services in areas where Supporting People is misunderstood or not considered part of mainstream service provision. In line with the issues we raised, the Committee felt this can best be countered by ensuring that it is clear to all concerned how much money has been allocated to a council for those services, and how much the council has actually spent on them. We have asked the Government to retain Supporting People as a named grant and named expenditure within the area based grant. The Committee recommended continued transparency in both the allocation of funding for housing related support through the area based grant and how much local authorities have spent on housing related support. The Committee concluded that local authorities should justify and account for decisions to divert Supporting People money away from housing related support, though the Committee stopped short of recommending Supporting People services being put on a statutory basis.

Preserving the governance and delivery systems of Supporting People

Sitra and the Federation have argued strongly that the achievements of Supporting People need to be preserved in the new funding environment. The Committee endorses this view and concludes that there is a need to preserve a number of the governance and delivery arrangements of the programme. This includes the outcomes framework, the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) and joint commissioning bodies which have proven their worth in improving quality, joining up commissioning better and building an evidence base for the value of Supporting People services. Sitra and the National Housing Federation will continue to champion purpose of housing related support.

Our members have emphasised the importance of its continued use and support of the QAF and the outcomes framework. The Committee recommended that the QAF and the Outcomes framework should be mandatory for all local authorities until they can demonstrate high level of engagement with service users and high level of satisfaction. This provides an important statement of ongoing commitment to raising levels of quality and measuring impact. Sitra and the Federation were closely involved in the refresh of the QAF and Sitra has an ongoing role in promoting the framework.

Lightening the burden of competitive tendering

Quoting considerable evidence they received from providers, the committee highlighted the burden of competitive tendering processes. This includes the expense of the continued cycles of tendering for short term contracts and the pressure this puts on services. The Committee also highlighted the confusion over the application of EU procurement rules and the challenge of adapting approaches to accommodate the different procedures and approaches taken by different local authorities. Sitra and the Federation have asked the Government for more focused work to improve purchasing and commissioning. We have argued that commissioners need a more sophisticated understanding of value for money than seeking the lowest costs available or maximising throughput, and commissioners should not assume a full competitive tendering process is always the most effective way of securing value for money services. The Committee has responded and highlighted

concerns were provided with examples where the emphasis had been on driving down price through commissioning rather than focusing on quality and outcomes.

The Committee picked up on evidence submitted on contract length and practical problems in commissioning and have recommended that:

- Local authorities must continue to pass on certainty of three year financial settlements to third sector providers in line with the 2007 Supporting People Strategy
- CLG should promote best practice guidance on commissioning and procurement and encourage greater consistency across all local authority areas
- The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships need to be more involved in tackling poor practice and joining up procurement across local authority boundaries.

Maintaining the national profile of Supporting People

Both Sitra and the Federation's submissions to the Committee made the case for a strong role for CLG as a national champion for housing related support. This should include monitoring the patterns of expenditure of local authorities, supporting better commissioning and promoting the value of housing related support across government. The Committee has underlined the need for CLG to take a stronger ambassadorial role within government to ensure the value of housing related support is recognised and linked to health and social care agendas.

Getting the case heard in local partnerships

In order to join up housing support, health and social services in the future, it is important that the profile of housing related support is maintained in local partnerships. Sitra and the Federation argued that we are still far away from the partnerships, commissioning environment and levels awareness of housing related support needed to ensure that removing the ring fence will deliver better, more joined-up services. The Committee had concerns about the potential loss of focus on housing related support as Supporting People is subsumed within the Area Based Grant and priorities set by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). CLG's work on the financial benefits of Supporting People will continue to be critical to making the case to local partnerships. However, the Committee had concerns about the maturity of local partnerships and the ability of the existing arrangements to commission services jointly. These conclusions reinforce our arguments that housing related services need continued protection as LSPs and local partnership working develop.

Housing and support for older people

The Committee received lots of positive evidence about the value of housing related support services in helping older people to continue to live independently at home. However, it received a range of views on the place of sheltered housing within the programme and the removal of resident wardens from sheltered housing schemes. In addition, the Committee heard that many residents of sheltered housing thought that they had not been adequately consulted about changes to the funding for warden services.

The Federation's evidence recommended that local authorities should involve older people in reviews of funding for support services in sheltered housing and that local authorities should consider setting out a strategy for the long term future of sheltered schemes and support for older people, prior to any changes in funding. The Committee agreed that

opportunity for older people to be consulted, discuss and choose from the options available were important and recommended that the ministerial working group on sheltered housing should develop a more coherent strategy for the provision and funding of housing and support services for older people, making clear the role of sheltered housing.

The split between accommodation and support

The splitting of accommodation and support under Supporting People has created significant challenges for developers of supported housing. The Committee acknowledged our concerns about the split between accommodation and support, concluding that there were risks that capital investment can be threatened by the prospect of ongoing revenue funding being lost through competitive tendering.

Identifying need and planning services

We asked CLG to work with the Department of Health to ensure a clear understanding of needs for housing related support is linked to an area's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and fed through into local investment programmes. The Committee endorsed the view that the better identification of local needs and joining up commissioning of services to meet those needs is critical to the future of housing related support. They recommend that housing related support should be included in guidance for the joint strategic needs assessment.

Next steps

We are pleased that the Committee has responded to our call that the allocation of the Supporting People grant must be clear and that local authorities must account for how they spend the money. We will continue to lobby the Government to take forward this recommendation. The Federation and Sitra will also lobby Government to give the strong national leadership demanded by the Committee to protect the achievements of Supporting People and join-up housing related support across a number of different policy areas.

The Committee recommended that local areas should take advantage of the new freedoms to integrate housing related support in to health and social care, housing and crime reduction partnerships, and that this should be done in a way that builds on the experience and expertise of Supporting People. However, this will not be possible without action by Government and the sector. In order to achieve this, as well as lobbying to ensure that commissioning of Supporting People services is improved, we will continue to work with others, including the Department of Health to increase the understanding and awareness of the importance of housing related support across Government.

In addition both organisations are involved in contributing to and shaping the agenda of a number of key policy areas highlighted by the report:

- Both the Federation and Sitra are involved in a partnership group working with CLG to improve the package of transition measures
- The Federation is closely involved with the ministerial working group on sheltered housing
- Sitra and the Federation are working on initiatives to increase providers' access to local decision making

- The Federation will lobby Government to encourage local authorities and health services to integrate health, social care and housing related support expenditure and invest more on preventative services. We will build on work by Federation / Department of Health as well as the CLG's financial benefits toolkit to identify savings housing related support makes to a variety of different local authority budgets and communicate these to central government and commissioners
- Sitra and the Federation are involved in developing a greater understanding of how the principles of personalisation can be applied to housing related support.

Other recent developments

Local financial benefits modelling tool

The recently updated CapGemini cost-benefit analysis of the Supporting People programme concluded that the £1.6bn investment delivers £3.41bn of financial benefits to the public purse.¹ The financial model used in the report is available as an accessible spreadsheet so local authorities can enter their own data to understand the levels of financial benefit provided by the Supporting People services in their area.

Using this tool can help demonstrate the financial benefits of providing housing related support to meet local needs and could therefore be used to influence local discussions over budget setting and commissioning priorities. CLG are working with local authorities to raise awareness and use of this tool. The tool can be downloaded from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/financialbenefitsresearch

Sitra's showcasing events, autumn 2009

In October, Sitra hosted two conferences to promote and showcase the value of housing related support to an audience of commissioners and decision-makers from across local government. The events were held in York and London and engaged providers and commissioners in a discussion about what housing related support can achieve.

Publication of the Audit Commission report on Supporting People 2005-2009

On 8 October 2009, the Audit Commission published their review of the Supporting People Programme 2005-2009. Their review included a survey of Supporting People lead officers, and wide consultation with service users, commissioners and providers. It also draws on the findings from inspections carried out by the Audit Commission. The Federation has published a short briefing highlighting main findings and recommendations relevant to its members. It is available at www.housing.org.uk/default.aspx?tabid=291&mid=1033&ctl=Details&ArticleID=2498

Stay involved

It is vital that Federation and Sitra members are involved and engaged in this work to ensure we accurately take into account of the up-to-date achievements, issues and

¹ CLG, *Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme* (July 2009) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/financialbenefitsresearch

concerns you have. We will contact you with specific surveys and requests evidence we are looking for to underpin our national lobbying work.

Outside this, we are keen to hear from you about work you are doing to protect and preserve Supporting People services locally, changes to funding you are aware of or general feedback on priorities for national lobbying in this area.

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