

## Interim briefing

### Select Committee Report on Supporting People

11 November 2009

**This briefing gives members a summary of the Select Committee's report on Supporting People. Sitra is agreeing a joint paper with the National Housing Federation in response to the report which we hope will be available shortly.**

The House of Commons Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee published its report on Supporting People on 3 November 2009.

The all-party Committee was full of praise for the programme's achievements and called for various steps to protect the future funding of housing related support services. But the 11 English MPs on the Committee stayed within the prevailing political consensus, supporting the inclusion of Supporting People funding within the Area Based Grant from April 2010. They also came out against changing the law, to ensure that local authorities have a legal duty to provide housing related support services, by deciding not to put the programme on a statutory footing.

The Committee went so far as to call for all local authorities to be required to use the new version of the Quality Assessment Framework and the Outcomes Framework "unless and until they can demonstrate they are achieving a high level of involvement, communication and consultation with service users, and a commensurately high level of client satisfaction."

The MPs recommended that local authorities keep Supporting People teams and Commissioning Bodies, and that the Government promote these as models of good partnership working.

#### Independence and opportunity

The Committee's report takes a particular starting-point which then determines its structure. The Select Committee set out to consider "how well the Government has delivered against its commitments in the 2007 Supporting People Strategy".

So the first four sections of the report match the four sections of that strategy, which was called Independence and opportunity. Three final sections deal with sheltered housing, the Distribution Formula and the ring fence.

The Committee's overall assessment of the delivery of the 2007 national strategy is positive but they highlight two major issues:

- The burden of the competitive tendering regime

- The lack of clarity as to the future of sheltered housing.

### **Service user focus**

The Committee wanted to retain service user involvement structures and maintain the focus on service user involvement in inspections. They also called on the Government to prioritise Charters for Independent Living, a neglected element of Independence and opportunity.

The Select Committee had words of warning about the personalisation agenda. The report says “sometimes too much choice is overwhelming or even inappropriate. Careful consideration must be given to how to balance personalisation with important commissioned services for people who need emergency support, or who are unable – or unwilling – to choose. Careful consideration is particularly needed of how personalisation will work in accommodation-based facilities.”

### **Third sector partners**

The Committee went on to criticise “constant cycles of competitive tendering” and the use of short-term contracts. They called for providers to benefit from the certainty of the three-year financial settlements local authorities now receive.

The report says “EU procurement rules are being used by councils as an excuse for their own inertia and risk aversion.” It calls on CLG to disseminate best practice and it sees a role for the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships in “challenging poor and inefficient procurement practice, as well as for coordinating tendering and commissioning procedures across local authority boundaries.”

### **The new local government landscape**

The Select Committee wanted to see guidance produced – perhaps by local government itself – on delivering housing related support in shire counties, where social care and health responsibilities reside at the county level and housing is handled by districts or boroughs. And it wanted to see housing related support included explicitly in the guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

Another recommendation was “a requirement for strategic commissioning and contract monitoring frameworks to be in place in each administering authority so that inspectors know where to look for the information they need”.

The MPs wanted CLG “to take a stronger ambassadorial role” for the programme.

### **Increasing efficiency, reducing bureaucracy**

The report calls for CLG to take the lead in sorting out regulation with the Department of Health. It says “the risk of support services which straddle the line between social care and housing becoming lost in the complexities and bureaucracy of insufficiently aligned regulatory regimes represents a huge threat to the sustainability of many providers of housing-related support and care services.”

## **Sheltered housing**

A Ministerial Group is considering the situation of sheltered housing and the report avoids coming to conclusions.

The committee suggests the Ministerial Group focuses on:

- Reviewing whether sheltered housing should stay within Supporting People
- Improving needs analysis so evidence is available of what older people want
- Developing a more coherent strategy for housing and support services for older people, making clear the role of sheltered housing.

But also in this section the report suggests that the Ministerial Group “also consider the effect of splitting ‘accommodation’ and ‘support’ under Supporting People on builders of supported housing, and make recommendations about how to ensure that capital investment in new supported housing is not threatened by the risk of ongoing revenue funding being unavailable.”

## **Distribution formula**

The MPs listened to and endorsed criticisms from authorities like Stoke-on-Trent and Stockton-on-Tees that the government has been too slow to redistribute Supporting People funding from less deprived areas to more deprived areas.

The report calls for “accelerated movement towards needs-based allocations”. For authorities already expecting five percent per year cuts in 2011-14, this will be a worry.

The Committee welcomed CLG’s commissioning of a study of the Distribution Formula and asked it to look particularly at issues of rurality (raised by Hampshire) and population growth (raised by Cambridgeshire).

## **Ring fence**

The committee has championed the freeing of local government from central government restrictions but in the case of Supporting People they have taken a few, small steps in the other direction.

Their final recommendation is for “continued transparency in the allocation of Supporting People funding in the Area-Based Grant. Local authorities should not be required to spend funds allocated on the basis of assessed needs for housing related support on those services if they consider that it would be better spent elsewhere. They should, however, be required to justify, and account for, any decision to do so.”

What is not immediately clear is to whom the local authority would have to justify its decision, to whom it have to account for its decision.

## **What next?**

The Government is supposed to publish a response to the Committee’s report within two months.