



Removal of Supporting People Ring Fence Report on Regional Round Table Discussions Jan – Mar

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1. Introduction

The Regional Roundtable 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 removal of the Supporting People (SP) ring fence in April 2009¹. A total of 18 events were held, 2 in each of the English regions. Each event was attended by an average of approximately 40 providers, commissioners and other stakeholders, and the whole programme represented a significant national debate on the impact of the changes and the future of housing related support and care.

Each event heard an introduction from CLG on the changes and the reasons for them. There was also a presentation from a local Pathfinder authority² 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 a local provider representative. These discussions were structured to ensure a constructive debate and a consistent framework 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 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 this report.

2. Speaker Presentations

The full CLG presentation is appended to this report and covered core themes around the background to the removal of the ring fence, the transition period and a brief section on personalisation. Each of the regional events had presentations from one of the Pathfinder authorities, and as such these presentations reflected a variety of experiences. However, there were some consistent themes running through them. These included

- The importance of getting the governance right. The need to make sure that the SP team had good links into Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) decision making structures, ideally a senior manager with responsibility for SP on the LSP and the appropriate Partnership Board. The importance of provider representation on the LSP was also discussed, and some Pathfinder authorities had been instrumental in securing places of Housing Related Support providers.
- The ring fence may have protected SP but it also hid it (and its achievements) from view. The removal offered the opportunity to raise the profile of SP services locally.
- There was real scope for more flexibility in the design of services following the removal of SP eligibility criteria.
- There will be a battle for resources when SP becomes part of the overall pot of money available to a local authority as a whole, and supported housing will have to fight to keep its resources.
- Early indications from the Pathfinders were that they were able to present a convincing case for the retention of funding for HRS. Much of this success was attributed to the fact that SP is well ahead of most service areas in its ability to evidence its needs, service quality, value and outcomes. However, it is important to

¹ From 1/4/09 the Supporting People grant has been paid to local authorities as a named grant but without specific grant conditions. From 1/4/10 it will be included in the Area Based Grant (ABG).

² 15 local authorities, both unitary and two tier, from all the English regions, were identified as Pathfinders and piloted the removal of the ring fence during the year 2008/09. The aim was to assess the impact, compare experiences and to inform the decision of the CLG in respect of the national ring fence.

note that the Pathfinders had only been in operation for less than a year, and there was significant variation as to how the Pathfinder status had been used locally.

- The programme needs to demonstrate strategic relevance – “mainstreaming”, and show how it contributes to wider priorities and value for money.

A number of examples were given of schemes which had been developed which would have been impossible within SP eligibility criteria. Examples included

- Older people - help with shopping and gardening
- Children’s worker in Domestic Violence refuges
- Advocacy service in court
- Counselling as part of an outreach service to sex workers
- Key safes (to enable carer’s access to vulnerable people’s homes without compromising security)
- Aids and adaptations which helped support independent living but which were not priorities under the housing capital programme

3. Main themes from discussions

The discussions covered a huge arrange of local and national issues. However a few themes came though every event which could be summed up as;

- 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, values and outcomes. It is critical that these achievements are preserved and built on.
- There is a will to seize the opportunities for more flexible service design and delivery
- 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 wider community much more effectively.

The main issues are summarised in this report at local, regional and national level and we then touch on issues – personalisation, monitoring and getting the message across – that impact at all levels.

3.1 Local Issues

The role of Local Strategic Partnerships in setting service and spending priorities was a recurrent theme throughout the events, with comments from participants and commissioners creating a varied picture of understanding, awareness and involvement. The discussion around LSPs took two distinct strands.

Engagement-

- How both providers and commissioners would access the LSP, either in a representative way, or to provide information. It was recognised that many providers,

particularly smaller organisations needed substantial support and capacity building to help them reach decision takers.

- Recognition of the need to raise the profile of Housing Related Support (HRS) with the LSP – thinking not only about who should make the case, but also, ensuring that the data and client or service specific histories which will help make the case are rigorously kept and widely known about.
- The need to link the impact of Housing Related Support to wider NI targets laid out in the LAA and to PSA 16.
- Making the case to LSP partners and local authority budget holders for the financial value of early preventative support work – utilising the planned local cost benefits realisation model³.

Governance

- Recognition that within the different authorities there is a spectrum of maturity of governance, and also that within different authorities there are different levels of HRS integration into the governance arrangements. It will be essential that senior officers with an understanding of and responsibility for HRS are represented at the appropriate planning and decision taking levels.
- SP Commissioning Boards generally represent good practice in strategic, needs-based, joint commissioning. It will be important to spread rather than dissipate or lose this if more generic commissioning and strategic planning models are adopted.
- What will be the role of LSP governance in the service commissioning arrangements (ie who will really drive the allocation of resources) – and again recognition that there will be differences between authorities.
- There are formal representation issues about who is represented and at what level. In particular the third sector is generally represented at LSPs by Councils for Voluntary Service with whom SP providers and RSLs do not have a history of engagement. This engagement will have to be developed, or alternative and more appropriate representation for providers developed.

There was also a recurrence of discussions which can be characterised as **“breaking down the barriers”**

- This is an opportunity for housing related support to show how it ties in with other community agendas – for example the Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- The HRS sector needs to be raising the profile of the support provider with a wider range of partners i.e. adult social care.
- There needs to be drive to break down barriers which will enable greater opportunities for partnership.

A number of issues were raised around **commissioning**. The prominence of this issue did seem to link into the experience of the Pathfinders, several of whom had taken the opportunity to flex their commissioning process during the pilot.

- Issues were raised about the removal of the eligibility criteria – both in terms of opportunities for greater flexibility, but also in relation to significant concerns about the money being moved into other areas.
- There was uncertainty, or disparate views about what joint commissioning might mean in practice.

³ In January 2008 the CLG published research conducted by Cap Gemini which demonstrated that the national programme of £1.7b delivered net savings to the national purse of £2.7Bn by preventing costs of more expensive services (e.g. residential care, hospital, criminal justice costs). An update of that model which can be used at the local authority level is currently being developed and will be available later this year.

- Concerns that once the eligibility criteria were removed, and you were commissioning much broader services, it may become more difficult to conduct a meaningful needs analysis.
- Without the eligibility criteria, there were also concerns that it would be very difficult to make broad statements about outcomes, and might make evidencing impact more difficult in the future.
- Significant concerns were raised at some events about the issue of Local Connection. Feeling that there might be retrenchment.
- Recognition that the current situation is that there is a body of expertise in the local authority on housing related support. How if the SP team goes or is amalgamated, will authorities ensure that expertise and connection between providers and commissioners remains?
- There was a frequently expressed hope that the lifting of the ringfence will bring improved relations between housing and adult social care.
- Recognition of the varying practice in commissioning between authorities.
- An assertion of the importance of the whole commissioning process – strategic needs assessment, building the diversity and strength of the provider market, listening to service users – and that this was not just a generic procurement exercise to be conducted along the same principles as procuring stationery or IT. Skilled commissioners needed to retain control of the process, not corporate procurement teams.

The changes in commissioning practice were recognised as having a direct impact on providers, particularly in the following areas:-

- Enhanced flexibility – this might allow providers to offer more diverse services and also they may find that can expand into new niche markets.
- Commissioning practice may encourage flexibility and creativity.
- Commissioning practice may either encourage or require partnerships. There needed to be an understanding of the time and resources needed to build successful collaborations and partnerships⁴.

3.2 Regional Issues

The need for effective regional planning, communication and support, and operational liaison was asserted repeatedly. Headline issues included:

- It is imperative to retain and refresh strategic regional structures – RIGs, provider forums etc to coordinate all the work summarised below.
- Effective regional structures were seen as essential because of the link to Government Offices, Single Regional Strategies and regionally based funding streams.
- There was a continuing need for regional needs analyses and support strategies including robust needs analyses to support regional joint commissioning.
- Communications at multiple levels – between providers (via Forums), between commissioners, between both providers and commissioners, throughout the SP sector and the wider world of social care must be maintained.

⁴ A detailed exploration of the issues involved in collaboration to deliver SP services, including an assessment of 6 pilot schemes can be found in the Hact Collaborate project report (<http://www.hact.org.uk/downloads.asp?PagelId=175>)

- Regional mechanisms are required to provide effective cross-border working, consistency and resolution of local connection issues and disputes.
- Developing and sustaining cross-authority schemes that meet cross-border needs.
- Developing and supporting specialist services located in one authority that serve several authority areas (eg refuges, specialist hostels).
- Support/capacity building structures for small providers, either by groups of authorities or organisations like Sitra and its regional partners.
- Ensuring that BME/specialist needs are met.
- Develop regionally agreed tools for demonstrating strategic relevance (ie to wider CAA/PSA, not just 141 & 142) and social and cost benefits.
- The need for effective regional champions for HRS.
- The need to forge effective links to housing sub-regions and making them work (particularly a London issue).

3.3 National Issues

A number of issues emerged which are of national significance, which may best be resolved at national level, and which may inform the developing transition package.

Many of these are inextricably linked with the issues around data collection and monitoring summarised in the section below as there was felt to be a pressing need for maintaining a degree of consistency in meeting needs and delivering services. The right balance between local democracy and a post code lottery for the most vulnerable needed to be struck and this has to be monitored nationally. There was not a consensus at the events about the right national/local balance and the mechanisms for achieving it, but there was a consensus that there needs to be meaningful protection for the most vulnerable and excluded groups and we need an ongoing national picture of provision and outcomes.

Key issues emerging included;

- Concerns that services for non statutory groups will erode over time.
- Central government will need to take a lead in demonstrating and championing the need for HRS services.
- Concerns that quality control will erode – the QAF will need to be championed at a national level.
- There is still work to be done to get partners outside of SP to engage at a national level – with health services being repeatedly mentioned.
- Specific concern to track what happens during the transition to SP teams in authorities that were attributed 1 star status.
- Questions raised over the ongoing ability to achieve consistency across authorities when local politics become more dominant. Or is inconsistency the inevitable and even desirable consequence of local democracy?
- Clarity over what national monitoring will continue to happen, by whom and for how long?
- The importance of ensuring a refreshed and robust cost benefit realisation model.

- Much more discussion is required about what can be done nationally to support the importance of the diversity of provision, recognising both the diversity of client needs and aspirations and the value of a healthy diverse provider sector.....
- There was recognition of the importance the central SP team had played in achieving the continued level of financial support for SP in the build up to the last Comprehensive Spending Review. What, if any role will the team have in the next round, and how will the distribution formula alter over time once the grant becomes unnamed?

3.4 Data and Monitoring Issues

The SP programme has delivered very robust methods of

- assessing need,
- commissioning,
- monitoring services for efficiency, effectiveness and value and for
- measuring outcomes on an individual, service, local and national level.

Tools include

- Mandatory needs analysis informing local authority SP strategies and, often, investment strategies,
- Effective joint commissioning through the SP Commissioning Boards
- Service review mechanisms including SPLS⁵
- The QAF⁶
- National indicators 141 and 142 (previously Key Performance Indicators 1 and 2) which measure the effectiveness of services in moving people on to independent living and the support services provided.
- Models for measuring “soft” outcomes for individuals such as the Outcomes Star⁷
- National outcomes monitoring run by St Andrew’s University.
- Inspection of local authority SP strategy and commissioning by the Audit Commission

All of these are predicated at least in part on a ring-fenced fund with set eligibility criteria policed by central government. It is absolutely essential, if we are to retain any overall understanding of how vulnerable and socially excluded people are being served by public services in England, that these tools continue to be promoted and refreshed to meet changing circumstances and that there is sufficient clarity needs, service delivery and outcomes. This need for clarity relates to both the definitions of what is being monitored but, crucially, who has responsibility for doing it.

Solutions for achieving this from the discussions included

- A continuing enforcement role for the CLG.
- Mandatory weight for the QAF and other tools.
- Strong guidelines for the regional Government Offices in assessing the effectiveness of delivery.

⁵ Work-sheets completed by providers for commissioners which provide detailed operational and service outcome information for commissioners and for national analysis

⁶ The Quality Assessment Framework is a tool for assessing the quality and value of services, ensuring that they meet a minimum standard and setting out a clear framework for delivering and measuring excellence. Although no longer mandatory it remains the most effective benchmark enabling evaluation and comparison of services. It has recently been updated to allow for greater flexibility in assessment. Sitra will continue to update and develop the QAF in future.

⁷ The Outcomes Star is an approach to measuring change when working with vulnerable people. Further details can be found on the Homeless Link website

- A stronger role for the Audit Commission, either in inspecting individual services or in assessing the overall effectiveness of a local authority's services to vulnerable people and the socially excluded.
- Develop further professionalisation of HRS services with increased use of accreditation (already widely used in some areas and welcomed by many providers), benchmarking or a kite-mark type of standard.
- Continuing mandatory protection for the most vulnerable and excluded groups, whether through a more limited form of ring fenced fund (administered by the Homes and Communities Agency for example) or through more detailed monitoring and inspection arrangements.

3.5 Personalisation

The focus of these events was the lifting of the ring fence, not personalisation. However as a central policy driver across the care and support sector at present this issue emerged repeatedly. Clearly it is an area that is occupying both providers and commissioners. Whilst many of the themes have been discussed outside of this arena, it is worth noting that a number of central themes emerged:-

- Housing Related Support services are in many ways highly personalised, for example through the development of individual support plans, although users tend to have very little choice at present about who their service provider should be.
- Recognition that personalisation provide real risks and opportunities for both service users and providers.
- The dominant issue in a number of roundtables was the concerns raised in relation to balancing safeguarding and the delegation of decision taking (and therefore risk) to service users. Examples include vetting of individuals (e.g. neighbours, friends of relatives) chosen to provide services and the threat of disreputable brokerage services.
- Understanding that particular service user groups raised greater dilemmas than others particularly in the application of Individual Budgets to the most vulnerable and in relation to accommodation based services.

It is interesting to note that even though it is four months since the conferences Sitra held around Personalisation, the feelings about it are still being expressed in these quite broad brush terms. However, a number of reports have recently emerged which do contribute to the debate. Sitra is currently producing a report on personalisation and HRS with the Department of Health's Housing Learning & Improvement Network. Kate McAllister and Shaun Bennett have produced a report entitled 'Learning and Evaluation from the Individual Budgets Pilot sites'. In addition, the CLG have held a number of conferences focussing on personalisation, and are in the process of putting together a steering group to address some of the issues.

3.6 Getting the Message Across

There are in fact several messages to be got across several different barriers.

While the SP ring fence has protected SP budgets it has also to some extent hidden the services from view. The importance of and need for HRS services is not as well understood at the level of strategic decision taking and resource allocation as it should be. It is an absolute priority for the sector to promote itself and develop this awareness and understanding, but LSPs and senior Local Authority managers and Members also have responsibilities to develop their understanding.

Equally many operating at the front line in HRS services have an incomplete understanding of some national and local policy drivers, such as personalisation or sustainable communities, and of local decision making structures.

There needs to be a greater understanding that the ring fenced grant criteria were not the only reason HRS services existed. There are many other policy drivers, performance indicators and statutory obligations that they support and the sector needs to understand these better and demonstrate more effectively the contribution it makes to achieving them.

There needs to be much greater clarity about the role, if any, of the different central agencies – the CLG, the Audit Commission, the Government Offices, possibly the OTS – in assuring the services delivered to our most vulnerable citizens and more effective communication of what those roles, and any associated powers, incentives or resources they may bring to bear, might be.

Existing communication between providers and commissioners (and within both groups) a local and regional levels need to be maintained and improved.

4. Recommendations for Action

These recommendations summarise the action points which were either suggested or flow naturally from the issues raised at the round table events. In many instances substantial further work would be needed to develop detailed proposals for carrying them through. A series of further events is planned for the autumn as part of the transition package and it may be helpful to use these as a means of developing more detailed action planning based on the discussions at the first round of events. The actions listed have not been allocated to a specific body to take forward, and it is likely that they will need to be delivered by a range of partners.

- That as part of the continuing transition package a programme of events and materials be developed to showcase the achievements and ongoing need for HRS services.
- That this be supported by work with the government associations and other national bodies representing decision makers to ensure that their members understand the importance of HRS services.
- That a mechanism be established for identifying and sharing good practice arising from the new opportunities for flexible and innovative services.
- That support is provided to providers and commissioners about how to influence the LSP. Possible vehicles for delivery include CLG, GOs, OTS, Sitra NHF and the local government associations. There should be a specific project for supporting SP providers, and their clients, in accessing LSP structures which would include

proposals for strengthening links with existing local 3rd sector umbrella organisations such as CVSSs.

- There should be positive action to maintain and enhance quality and professionalism across the sector including the use and regular updating of the QAF (function to be carried out by Sitra), benchmarking, accreditation, kite-mark standards and the promotion of appropriate qualifications and recognition for staff.
- That there should be strengthened support around partnerships – extending existing models and providing a new impetus to allow for the inclusion of organisations outside of the sector, and having particular regard to partnerships for smaller third sector organisations.
- There should be continued support for appropriate local and regional structures enabling effective service planning and delivery and involving providers commissioners and partners to address the issues set out in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this paper.
- That there is clear central direction on definitions of housing related support so that these may be linked into continuing monitoring of needs services and outcomes. This will also facilitate the long-term “badging” of the sector
- That there is clear responsibility at the level of national government as to responsibility for ensuring continued monitoring and enforcement of service standards and outcomes for clients formerly covered by SP grant.
- That serious consideration is given to a national mechanism for ensuring a minimum and consistent level of provision to the most vulnerable and excluded groups, either through targeted funding stream or monitoring of activity and outcomes.
- That there is a clear and effective ongoing role for the Audit Commission in assessing through the Comprehensive Area Agreement how well LSPs are serving the most vulnerable in their communities, including those engaging with HRS services.
- The cost benefits realisation model should be developed and promoted as a robust national and local tool as matter of urgency, including a programme of events and information to roll it out effectively.
- That the CLG or GOs monitor changing commissioning arrangements and whether SP expertise is being lost though the disbanding of SP teams.
- That the DH and CLG work with the HRS sector and its representatives to develop a clear analysis of how personalisation can be most effectively be promoted within HRS services.
- Need to gather together research into IBs and challenging client groups – identifying what has been learned so far and building on any guidance or consultation.
- Explore further models for brokerage and personal assistant services as an element of personalising support.
- Promote the preventative success of SP with the OTS, and encourage their ongoing commitment to enhance work with providers. The existence of a diverse and healthy HRS provider sector is a key element of healthy communities and should be promoted through the Government’s Third Sector Strategy.

Specific actions for Sitra

- Maintain a support function for providers forums – providing them with core information and advice to make them more strategic.
- Encourage commissioners to value provider forums and where possible offer support.
- Continue to promote excellence in procurement – disseminating good practice and highlighting what works well to make sure lessons are learned.
- Explore role for Sitra in alleviating some of the pressure of monitoring and evidencing practice for small providers.

- Maintain a “Transition” page on web-site – FAQs, reports on events, copies of guidance etc
- Develop “Showcase” events.
- Work with partners to exchange and promote good practice in commissioning.
- Work with national bodies representing those working with socially excluded groups, eg travellers, DV, substance abuse – particularly around areas of local connection
- Work across sector to enhance capacity to influence LSPs.
- Detailed guidelines on strategic links, ie map those HRS activities that support specific Nis, in addition to 141 and 142, and PSA 16.
- Run, with the CLG, a series of autumn follow ups to Roundtables.
- Work with DH to develop a workable and effective model of personalisation for HRS services.
- Capacity building for providers.
- Support effective regional structures.