

BRIEFING

The Future of Supporting People Removal of the Ringfence December 2008

Following months of speculation, the Government announced on 26th November the future of Supporting People Programme funding which has funded housing related support since its inception in 2003. This follows the report from the 15 Pathfinder areas <http://www.spkweb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FBF1A0ED-5C5C-4401-8828-6228CB3440C3/15989/081126SurveySummaryCLGSupportingPeople.pdf> which raised no serious concerns on the impact of the removal of the ring-fence and demonstrates innovative practice in the joint commissioning of services.

From April 2009 the ring-fence will be removed. The £1.6bn Supporting People Programme funding will be paid to local authorities as a 'named' grant under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 in a 'transition' year which will enable local authorities more freedom to allocate the funding according to local need, but will still be viewed as a grant for housing related support. From April 2010 SPG will be placed into Area Based Grant, the allocation of which will be determined by Local Strategic Partnerships.

The transition year of SPG being paid as a named grant has been in response to representations made by Sitra and others that many housing related support providers still have concerns that the long term effects of the removal of the ring-fence might lead to the diminution of housing related support for vulnerable people and funds being diverted to underpin statutory services.

Specific measures to aid transition announced in the Ministerial Statement are:

- A commitment to **deliver a new financial modelling tool which will provide evidence at a local level on the financial benefits of investment in housing support** in terms of crisis prevention and the reduced need for more intensive and costly interventions,

leading to better outcomes for the citizen and savings to the public purse. CLG will be seeking tenders for this work before Christmas. This is to build on the research conducted by Capgemini (<http://www.spkweb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/BF683D3D-32AB-4D66-822E-62D84CDEAAFA/14494/ResearchintothefinancialbenefitsoftheSPPprogramme.pdf>) and published in January 2008, the findings of which were that at a national level overall there was a net financial benefit from the Supporting People Programme of £2.77bn per annum against an overall investment of £1.55bn. This will be available from April 2009.

- **Two national conferences jointly hosted by CLG, DH, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in January 2009** to help authorities and their commissioning partners learn from the Pathfinder project and consider how their own localities will respond to the changing agenda. These conferences are not aimed at providers, but the Office of the Third Sector will feed in as will Sitra in order to ensure that there is a provider perspective.
- There is a commitment that CLG will continue to work with the sector to support providers in responding to the new commissioning and procurement environment. This will include **18 regional roundtable events** (2 in each region) in January and February 2009 to bring commissioners and providers together to discuss planning for the future. Sitra is working with CLG to organise these events and further information will be available in the next couple of weeks. We will advertise these on our website.
- **Communities and Local Government are committed to working with the Office of Third Sector on promoting better commissioning practice**, with a special focus on small third sector groups. It is not yet clear how this will be translated into practical support – but it is expected that there will be conversations around commissioning and procurement and whether there are any resources available to assist providers during the transition period.
- The publication last week of guidance on undertaken by Matrix Consultants **understanding regional need for housing related support** (http://www.spkweb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7C642DB3-2F41-4442-9DF0-0B58CEF47659/15994/12941HousingCare_bkmk.pdf). Hitherto Supporting People has featured relatively low on the agenda of Government Offices and the Regional Improvement and

Efficiency Partnerships and the CLG along with OTS recognise that there is a job to be done in raising the profile of the contribution of the Supporting People Programme and how it has benefit vulnerable people. Related to this there will be:

- **Ongoing support from the Communities and Local Government Regional Resource Teams to support local performance improvement** on the commissioning and delivery of services (taking into account the work being undertaken by Government Offices and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships)

CLG have made a commitment to holding further feedback events throughout the course of the transition year and they want to hear from providers, commissioners and others as to who should be involved.

Sitra welcomes the announcement that has now ended months of speculation over the future of Supporting People funding. We supported a decision being made on the removal of the ring-fence, as the most worrying feature being fed back to us from members and delegates to our recent conferences was the uncertainty as to when and if this would happen, making it impossible to plan for the future. We have now had a decision.

We are also pleased that there will be a transition year with a measure of packages aimed at helping providers to plan for the future including developing the case for the financial benefits of housing related support at a local level, guidance on the case for not only local, but regional support with ongoing support from Communities and Local Government (CLG) regional resource teams, discussion with the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) for help for smaller providers and feedback events on how the removal of the ring-fence is working to be held during the year. Both providers *and* commissioners have concerns as to how the transition will pan out. We share these concerns and to this end, Sitra will be working with CLG over the coming months to stage roundtable events in all of the regions in order to have a dialogue and feed back into the process of transition. Most important is how the outcomes for vulnerable people will be evidenced under the new regime and how providers can work with their service users, commissioners and the LSPs to ensure that the important contribution of housing related support is recognised.

There will have to be a concerted effort to ensure that there is greater recognition in the regions of the benefits of Supporting People, and

most importantly we will have to keep a watchful eye on how these changes work alongside the personalisation agenda over the coming year. This could present the greatest threat or the greatest opportunity for providers and will need a consistent co-ordinated approach across government departments, the Audit Commission, Government Offices and LSPs.

Particularly, we should use the opportunities presented with the Audit Commission's Review of the Supporting People Programme currently underway to impress upon them the need for rigorous monitoring of outcomes under National Indicators 141 and 142 even where a local authority has not elected for these as part of their 35 indicators in their Local Area Agreement. See the following link for more information on National Indicators.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/?view=Search+results&query=Single+Set+of+National+Indicators&contentType=all&sites=all+sites&quickSearch=true&resultsPerPage=20>

To keep up to date with developments keep an eye on Sitra's website – www.sitra.org.uk.

