

# **Supporting People Review**

## **Summary Report**

### **A Review by the Housing & Community Safety (H&CS) Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**25 January 2005**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The Housing & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Panel has undertaken a review of the Supported People (SP) programme and its priorities for the future provision and commissioning in Bath & North East Somerset.

The purpose of this review has been to provide input, via consultation with council staff and affected organisations, to Bath & North East Somerset's 'Supporting People Strategy'.

#### **2.0 Review Objectives**

The proposed objectives of the review were:

- To review and explore future challenges of providing services under the Government's Supporting People (SP) programme and highlight potential problems over funding allocation.
- To consider future opportunities ahead of any changes in the Government's SP programme, so that appropriate Council strategies can be developed.
- Overall, to open up the debate about the SP programme, to inform direction of travel in support of the future decision making by the Executive and implementation of the SP programme in Bath & North East Somerset.

Detailed Terms of Reference setting out the purpose and objectives of the review, scope and constraints around how the review would be conducted were agreed by the Panel (and are available as public papers of the Panel's meetings or from the O&S Projects Team, tel: 01225 477329).

#### **3.0 Background: Supporting People in Bath & North East Somerset**

Supporting People within Bath & North East Somerset is a £4.5m programme, which brings together a number of funding streams for supported housing and housing related support including the support element of Housing Benefit, Probation Accommodation Grant and Supported Housing Management Grant.

Bath and North East Somerset Council receives the annual funding allocation and administers this funding, in accordance with Government guidance, at a local level.

There is a significant risk of future reduction in Government funding. The Government has set savings targets for this financial year and given clear messages about larger savings targets in the next financial year. A future lack of central funding would leave the Council with a dilemma to either reduce services or subsidise the Supporting People Programme from its own revenue streams.

Bath & North East Somerset received notification of the Supporting People Programme allocation for 2005/06. The allocation is £4,083,000, which represents a reduction on the programme allocation for 2004/05 of approximately 5%.

A Council Strategy for future management of the SP programme is currently being developed (by a multi-agency Core Strategy Group). This has to be with Government by March (2005) and must address how savings targets advised in December will be met. This Strategy will look at which services are priorities for continued/increased funding and which services should receive reduced funding and/or be reconfigured. In light of the funding allocation for 2005/06, it may be necessary to identify services that would not receive SP funding in future years.

### **3.0 Review Process**

The Panel have undertaken a series of research and fact finding activities to expand their knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding the provision and commissioning of Supporting People services.

#### **3.1 SP Service User Consultation Workshops**

Members were able to attend a series of SP Service User Consultation Events. These consultation workshops, organised by the SP team were part of the development of the SP 5 year strategy. The workshops enabled the opinions of users and providers to be collected and demonstrate the range of ways the SP Team are seeking to understand the development needs of services within the programme. Workshops available to members during the period of the review (Aug. – Sept. '04) were:

- An event for people with mental illness at Mulberry House, Bath
- An event for young people/care leavers at Pathways hostel
- An event facilitated by i-2-i for people with learning difficulties.

#### **3.2 SP Commissioning Body**

Members of the Panel were able to attend meetings of the SP Commissioning Body, to observe the decision making process after completion of funding reviews of providers. The Commissioning Body (CB) is required by Government Guidance to comprise a representative of Housing Services, Social Services, the PCT and Probation Services. A representative of

Children & Families also sits on the CB but can only vote on decisions in the absence of the main Social services representative. The meeting gave an opportunity for Panel members to observe and discuss the process with those on the CB.

### **3.3 SP Team meeting**

The SP Team welcomed members to their team meeting. This was an opportunity to meet the team, for them to explain their role in managing the SP programme, highlight some specific examples of work, and discuss future opportunities and concerns with members of the Panel.

### **3.4 Meetings with SP providers**

Some members of the Panel met and talked in private with selected providers of SP services that had recently been or were about to go through the review process. Individual representatives of provider organisations met Councillors and discussed their experiences or expectations of the SP review process.

### **3.5 Core Strategy Group**

Members were able to attend a meeting of the multi-agency Core Strategy Group where the Council Strategy for future management of the SP Programme is being developed. A specific agenda item was assigned for Members to discuss issues with the group.

### **3.6 Councillors Own Research**

Some members of the panel have also spent time talking with providers using a contact list of all 35 provider organisations within the Council's Supporting People programme. The list included summary details of the client groups supported as well as contact names, phone numbers and email addresses. As a requested aspect of the review, this allowed the opportunity for members to individually make contact with or arrange visits to organisations to discuss the services they provide and their experiences/expectations of the SP Review process.

## **4.0 Findings**

At an H&CS Panel meeting on 11th November, Panel Members shared and discussed the information learned from the various events they had attended. Key themes are noted below

### **4.1 SP Assessment Review Process**

A feature of the SP programme is that all SP Providers must be reviewed before contracts are renewed. SP Reviews are undertaken within a statutory "Quality Assessment Framework" though are subject to local variation. A rolling programme to review all providers over the next 3 years has been defined. To date, SP Reviews have been prioritised by contract size and/or by grouping organisations providing similar services.

Some Members of the Panel had received feedback from providers had been subject to a review so far, and were able to report that providers found the self-assessment part of the review process to be a helpful quality audit.

However, a common theme of providers' feedback on reviews was that the reviews would benefit from a more structured, formal approach with clear expectations set out at the beginning of the review and timely follow-up and feedback after the review.

#### **4.2 SP Team**

Providers fed back that they had a positive relationship with the Supporting People Team and most providers found the Providers Forum useful. Those Panel Members who attended a Supporting People Team meeting agreed that the Team is very committed and appears to work very well together as a team.

#### **4.3 Reductions in Government Funding**

Members voiced concerns over annual reductions in Government funding of the SP Programme and the financial and service risks to the Council if these reductions were not managed with Providers.

#### **4.3 Current SP Budget Position**

The Head of Housing and Supported Living Services assured Members of the Panel that the Supporting People Programme is almost in budget with a small projected overspend in the region of £10,000. It was confirmed that the Council is not directly subsidising the cost of the Supporting People Team, for which there is an Administration Grant for the Programme itself. However, any reductions made in the Supporting People Programme do impact on other services' and organisations' budgets, in particular, the Social Services budget.

#### **4.5 Overflow from Neighbouring Local Authorities**

Concern was raised over the potential increasing number of people that may use the SP programme in Bath & North East Somerset if similar services in neighbouring Councils were reduced.

### **5.0 Recommendations**

The Panel have defined the following **recommendations to the Executive Member** for consideration with SP Officers to support decision making in developing and adopting the Council's Supporting People Strategy.

#### **5.1 Future Budget Reductions**

'Top-slicing' of budgets to all SP providers is not a preferred way forward.

#### **5.2 Targeted Savings**

Any savings in funding to be arranged by priority selection.

#### **5.3 Language**

The use of plain english language in this review helped in making steps forward and should continue.

#### **5.4 SP Provider Reviews**

As well as the comments noted in the findings (section 4.1), the Panel provided some specific feedback to the Head of Housing and Supported Living Services about improving the structure and process of the SP Provider Reviews. Any actions put in place are to be directly reported to the Chair of the Panel.

#### **5.5 Financial Reporting**

The Officers working in SP programme include some form of financial monitoring in Four Monthly Performance Reports, in particular highlighting potential financial risks.

#### **5.6 Referral**

It was requested that the Panel's recommendations and Notes of meetings be forwarded to the relevant Executive members for a response, and that;

#### **5.7 Follow-up**

A follow-up to the Review is added to the agenda for a future H&CS Panel meeting in approximately 9 months time.