



Independence and Opportunity

Our Strategy for Supporting People
Executive Summary



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Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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Ministerial Foreword

Supporting People can – and does – turn people’s lives around, allowing them to live independently and to contribute to society more widely. There is a great deal to celebrate both in terms of the success of this programme, and in the Government’s work overall to tackle disadvantage and support the most vulnerable people in our society.

From the beginning, Supporting People has been a collaborative partnership effort. The constant communication and interaction between service users, service providers, umbrella organisations, local and central Government has been vital in getting us to where we are today.

In November 2005 we began to consult on how the programme should best be delivered in the future. We received a fantastic response, including over 600 written responses from people using the service, and a mass of information, views and ideas to think over. I would like to thank everybody who contributed to this.

The key messages were drawn together in the document *Supporting independence: Next Steps in our Supporting People Strategy* published in July 2006 and they are now reflected in this strategy.

The strategy focuses on four key areas:

- keeping service users at the heart of the programme and of the local delivery of the service;
- building on the already successful partnerships with the Third Sector;
- delivering effectively in the new local government landscape; and
- working towards better efficiency and less bureaucracy.

These are the issues on which contributors wanted greater clarity, assurance and direction and I believe the strategy provides that in a clear and practical way.

This document is an important milestone in the delivery of Supporting People, and sets out the next steps forward in delivering housing related support. It must not, however, mark the end of the collaborative relationship for everyone involved. Indeed, the months and years ahead will be crucial in developing and embedding the aims and expectations set out here. And everyone will continue to have a key role to play in achieving that.

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Communities and Local Government's vision is of prosperous and cohesive communities, offering a safe, healthy and sustainable environment for all.

The Supporting People programme, created in 2003, provides the means through which Government ensures that some of society's most vulnerable people receive help and support to live independently, and makes an important contribution to our objective of promoting equality of opportunity and enabling vulnerable people to participate fully in the social and economic life of their communities.

It is helping more than a million people each year to attain or maintain independence, through the provision of housing related support services. By helping reduce re-offending, reduce homelessness and rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour amongst many other issues, Supporting People helps the most vulnerable and excluded contribute to wider society.

Despite this success, acknowledged both by the stakeholder community in our national consultation and by the Audit Commission in its 2005¹ report on the programme, there is more to do to improve the delivery of housing related support to service users and new challenges to meet in doing this including the new local government landscape outlined in the White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*.

In November 2005, we began an extensive public consultation process by publishing our preliminary views on how best to move forward with Supporting People. We set out our initial conclusions from the consultation in July 2006 and committed ourselves to publishing a strategy for Supporting People in 2007.

This strategy is based on four key themes; Keeping people that need services at the heart of the programme; Enhancing partnership with the Third Sector; Delivering in the new Local Government landscape, and; Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy.

It sets out what we as a Government will do to achieve the aims of the programme, what we expect Supporting People commissioners and providers to do, and what service users should therefore be able to expect from housing related support services.

This strategy does not address future funding levels or distribution of that funding; these issues are subject to and will be addressed following the current Comprehensive Spending Review process.

Keeping people that need services at the heart of the Programme

Across Government, we want people to have services which are appropriate and responsive to their individual needs and expectations. Supporting People already has a strong record in delivering appropriate, personalised services and interventions which are tailored to the needs of individuals. The voice of people using Supporting People services was strong in responses to the consultation and is at the forefront of this strategy.

¹ Supporting People: National Report. Audit Commission, 2005.

As the programme moves forward we, as a Government commit to:

- Capture and share best practice about what an effective, user-focused model of support looks like.
- Clearly set out what service users can expect and influence locally through the development of charters for independent living, linked to best practice.
- Ensure that people receiving Supporting People services are kept properly informed about what is happening, particularly when changes are being made which could affect future delivery of those services.
- Ensure that access to services is not unnecessarily restricted through local connections or administrative boundaries, particularly for groups of people, such as survivors of domestic violence or gypsies and travellers, who tend to be mobile.
- Explore the inclusion of housing support in the emerging Common Assessment Framework for Adults, which would allow a person's health, social care and housing support needs to be assessed at the same time.
- Publish a National Housing Strategy for an Ageing Society which will review current provision and plan for the future in the context of an ageing society. It will look at all tenure groups and will cover the whole spectrum of mainstream and specialist housing. It will outline how it can ensure housing and housing support services rise to the challenge of demographic change.
- Enhance service user choice and control by using the learning from the Individual Budget pilots and other choice led personal funding mechanisms.

Enhancing partnership with the Third Sector

Supporting People has been built upon the efforts of voluntary agencies, charities and housing associations over many years. The Third Sector already provides some two-thirds of the services enabled by the Supporting People programme, and receives over £1 billion annually of the funds invested by local authorities in housing support services.

We have already set out how we expect authorities to work appropriately with the Third Sector, including compliance with the Compact and full cost recovery principles.

The Office of the Third Sector recognise in their action plan² the work Supporting People has already done to engage the Third Sector. We will continue to work with the Office of the Third Sector as they take forward this work.

We will commit to:

- Ensure that obstacles preventing good quality providers from across public, private and Third Sector organisations from competing fairly to deliver housing support services are minimised.

² Partnerships in Public Services, Cabinet Office, 2006.

- Work further with national Third Sector organisations to ensure that front-line agencies receive appropriate development and support; and
- Further develop our capacity building work to support and encourage smaller voluntary providers.

We have recognised the importance of the energy and creativity of the Third Sector in providing services that can reach those that are most difficult to reach, and to continue innovating to give more effective help to get people back on their feet.

Delivering in the new Local Government landscape

As the strategic leaders for their local area, local authorities are at the heart of ensuring provision for their most vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) approach, which brings together partners, funding and service commissioning, to the best advantage of the local community, is the key to making this happen. Consequently, Supporting People will be delivered through the new performance framework set out in the Local Government White Paper and we will support authorities and their delivery partners in moving towards delivering Supporting People funds through the new area based grant which we are aiming to do by April 2009

This will be backed by our work to ensure that support for people is built into the new performance framework for local government, and also by the development and roll-out of an outcomes set for Supporting People.

In addition we will:

- Look at how the provision of support to vulnerable people should best be addressed within this new, risk-based approach to performance management and inspection.
- Support, develop and share positive practice in the commissioning, procurement and delivery of housing support, particularly through the appointment of Regional Champions.
- Work with Regional Assemblies, Government Offices and Communities England to strengthen the strategic and practical linkages between housing and Supporting People.

Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy

Much has already been achieved by Authorities and delivery partners in creating efficient and effective services in the early years of the programme. We are keen to explore what further potential there is to optimise efficiency and tackle unmet need, and to support authorities and providers to make that happen.

Building on the learning from the 11 initial Value Improvement Projects, we will roll out a national Value Improvement Programme.

We will also work with local authorities and providers to ensure that administration and bureaucracy is minimised, including through the appropriate use of Business Process Improvement and mobile technology, so that resources can be redirected towards frontline delivery.

Conclusion

This strategy sets out how Government will work with Authorities, service providers and service users to ensure that Supporting People continues to develop to best meet the needs of its one million service users. It is the result of extensive engagement and constructive dialogue between all those with an interest. Including with the service users, who are, rightly, at the heart of the programme and the forefront of the strategy.

This strategy is not an end point. There are further challenges ahead for all of the Supporting People community. But it is an important step in the ongoing development and evolution of Supporting People. Development that will have at its core the four themes set out here.



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