Supporting People: Real change?

Supporting People: Real change?
Planning housing and support for marginal groups

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1 Aims of the review

Supporting People programme and priorities

Supporting People is a national policy initiative planned and developed over five years (1998–2003). It amalgamates several different funding streams aimed at providing support to people who need help to find or settle into stable accommodation, to learn to live more independently or to maintain the capacity to manage their daily lives. The focus of the programme is on 'housing-related support', by means of which individuals can obtain suitable housing, sustain their accommodation and develop their skills and self-confidence, as required. The policy has a broad scope, involving support and housing services for all age groups from 16 upwards and for individuals in a wide variety of social and living circumstances.

Responsibility for Supporting People lies with local authorities and their strategic partners in probation and health. They will manage the new composite budget and are expected to spend the funds in line with an agreed local strategy based on an informed judgement about the relative need for different types of services. In the run-up to 2003, hundreds of designated posts have been created in local authority-based Supporting People teams.

This new resource, if well-managed and backed by sufficient revenue and capital for development, should give a strong impetus to the improvement, expansion and re-orientation of support services, supported housing, hostels and certain other forms of accommodation, such as residential care homes and some NHS facilities. Supporting People, while in fact originally based on a rather simple desire to shift funding for support out of the Housing Benefit budget, has become an important social policy enterprise and one which falls squarely within the Government's aims of promoting preventative services and social inclusion.

This review for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been carried out while government departments, local statutory authorities, provider organisations and voluntary and service user groups are still working up to the introduction of Supporting People in 2003.

The broad aims of the review are to highlight the original stated policy objectives, to assess progress in local planning with regard to these objectives and to consider whether the programme can be expected to produce real change for individuals and improvement in services, as well as an administrative shift in funding. We hope that this report will stimulate debate and encourage commissioning bodies, providers and others to consider how their strategic plans and operational practices can best be geared to addressing the challenging issues raised by the review findings.

The framework for the review is provided by the key objectives for Supporting People set out by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR, 1998):

- prevention – helping to sustain people in the community and pick up problems before they become a crisis

- promoting independence – support to enable people to take their own decisions and live their own lives

- alleviating crisis – support to help people through crises in their lives

- resettlement – support to help people establish themselves in a new home and community

- inclusion – supporting people who may not be seeking support, who have difficult behaviour or unconventional lifestyles or who have multiple needs or fall outside traditional client groups

- a focus on people – providing flexible services moulded around people and the way they choose to live their lives.

Review themes

Within this context, the review concentrates on particular issues, rather than attempting to cover all aspects of Supporting People policy. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation was concerned that the involvement of social services and health agencies in planning and service commissioning could lead to resources 'straying' into mainstream community care and health programmes, leaving less available to support those who come into Supporting People by a homelessness, housing or probation/prison route. It therefore wished to explore the extent to which people covered by the 'inclusion' objective (above) have featured in local plans and strategic thinking to date. These are people who tend not to fit neatly into established client categories, or who fall into several categories and need assistance on many fronts. They may be resistant to services, unable to find help that meets their needs or simply not in contact with any formal or semi-formal system of support.

The specific themes examined in the review are:

- services for marginal and high risk groups
- support for people in private rented or owner-occupied housing
- new kinds of services and models of support
- future of supported housing and floating support.

Focus on marginal groups and local planning

The project is intended to provide a high level, strategic overview of progress in planning for Supporting People, especially in relation to services for marginal groups. It is also designed to highlight the likely pressures on locally-held budgets and to look at variations in interpretation of guidance, service priorities and practical action. The review emphasises the local perspective and the views and expectations of Supporting People teams, service commissioners and provider organisations.

In adopting this focus, the researchers acknowledge the clear commitment at national level to give significant priority to marginal, high risk and hard to reach groups. They also recognise that there are a number of recently established or planned central initiatives aimed at addressing issues relating to these groups. The influence of these initiatives should continue to filter down to local level as the preparations for the programme move forward. They include:

- specialist advisers, for example on health and complex needs, probation and ex-offenders and domestic violence

- advisers working with small and specialist providers, managed in England by the National Housing Federation and the policy and training organisation SITRA

- agencies working with black and minority ethnic providers, plus a handy guide and a website with examples of innovation and good practice

- published guides on accommodation and support options for specific groups, including homeless people, ex-offenders and people with drug and alcohol problems

- action research by ROCC (link organisation promoting housing and support) to develop strategies for involving 'hard to reach' users in shaping services.

Review methods

The selected methods for the review reflect the short timescale of the research (four months):

- website search and monitoring (government and Supporting People local authorities)

- review of central policy guidance and consultation to date

- review of local authority policy documentation and a sample of draft shadow strategies

- email contact with all Supporting People local authority teams, with a single issue presented to each authority for comment

- discussion with senior practitioners who are advising on the policy implementation or taking part in preparation pilots

- interviews with local commissioners and with providers working across different local authority areas

- interviews with national organisations.

The email contact with Supporting People teams produced 35 detailed responses (England 25, Scotland 8 and Wales 2). The fieldwork included one-to-one or small group interviews with 38 respondents, including 15 local authority Supporting People managers or teams, 10 providers of housing and support, 10 national organisations (e.g. SITRA, Cymorth, National Housing Federation, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) and key civil servants responsible for the programme.

The review covers the planning for Supporting People in England, Scotland and Wales. While many of the findings are very similar, the different constitutional contexts and variations in how the policy is being implemented do create some differences in the concerns and preoccupations of local commissioners and providers. The report takes a comparative stance, highlighting both similarities and differences between England, Scotland and Wales.

2   Policy objectives and priorities

Principles and service ideals

The principles and service ideals behind Supporting People have been expressed in a number of key policy papers and guidance documents produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and its predecessor departments. Many statements refer to anticipated improvements in service quality and to the need to ensure access to services for marginal or previously neglected groups. The cross-tenure nature of the new policy is also emphasised, as is the distinction between Supporting People support services and care services funded through other budgets.

Wales and Scotland have not produced separate policy statements outlining the objectives of the new policy. The overall vision, broad priorities and aims of the programme are the same as in England. Differences in the administrative arrangements or guidance to local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, as they refer to the concerns and themes of this review, are outlined in this section.

The key policy statements relating to the themes of this review are to be found in four or five main documents published since 1998.

> *The SP programme offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve the quality of their life through greater independence. It promotes housing-related services which are cost-effective and reliable and which complement existing care services …. The programme is a key element in the Government's drive against social exclusion.*
>
> *(It) provides the opportunity to provide better quality services which are focused on the needs of users. The previous link of support services to tenure will be broken, so that more floating support may be introduced where appropriate. The services are intended:*
>
> - *To enable people to remain, or establish themselves independently, in the community – tenancy, own home or specialised supported housing;*
> - *To be part of the range of preventative strategies;*
> - *To form part of 'packages' of provision designed to meet the multiple and varied needs of vulnerable clients;*
> - *To provide generic support services by skilled staff.*
>
> *The Government intends to ensure that current patterns of provision, particularly support for more marginal groups (including homeless people, those who misuse drugs or alcohol and people under probation service supervision), continue to be an important part of the programme.*
>
> *Support within this programme is primarily delivered to people who do not require intensive personal care (but may form part of a package).*
> (DETR, 2000)
>
> *SP will bring major improvements to the quality of housing-related support services …. This will be achieved by:*
>
> - *Developing a more flexible range of services based around individual needs. For example, instead of having to move into hostels to receive support, in future support can be provided to people in their own homes.*
> - *Planning services locally with a clear assessment of local needs.*
> - *Developing a local SP strategy …*
> - *Making robust arrangements for more mobile groups …*
> - *Introducing new quality and monitoring arrangements alongside clear guidance on best practice.*
> - *Introducing a simple and common administrative system …*
>   (DETR, 2001)
>
> *The Government is keen to see the provision of support extended to those whose needs have, historically, been less well met. We encourage*

Commissioning Bodies to identify ways of providing for client groups for whom there is currently no provision, or inadequate provision, and in particular groups such as people presenting a potential for high risk of harm or who are at risk of harm themselves, such as women experiencing domestic violence, vulnerable young people including young parents and those at risk of offending or re-offending. In localities with black and minority ethnic populations, it should involve assessing the extent of provision for these communities and how gaps will be actively addressed.

The (local) shadow strategies should include a discussion of which client groups do not have access to support services and any early proposals for addressing this. (DTLR/DoH, 2002)

Housing support services are intended to be received by the full range of vulnerable groups. Continuing patterns of provision, particularly support for more marginal groups (including homeless people, those who misuse drugs or alcohol, people living with HIV/ AIDS and women fleeing domestic abuse), are to be an important part of the programme. (Scottish Executive, 2001)

The National Assembly (for Wales) is committed to actions to pursue its three major themes, one of which is tackling social disadvantage. Supporting voluntary organisations in their work with the socially excluded and eliminating the need for rough sleeping is significant in the task to combat social disadvantage. (National Assembly, 2001)

Funding arrangements and charging for services

Transfer of funds to local authorities

In England and Scotland, all monies for the funding of services under Supporting People will be transferred to local authorities. The position is different in Wales, due to the fact that the National Assembly for Wales has decided not to transfer funds on a ring-fenced basis for specific purposes.

The original proposal that all Supporting People funds would be transferred in Wales, as in England and Scotland, raised strong objections from voluntary sector providers, who were concerned that services for more mobile and less politically popular groups may not obtain support under this system. The National Assembly for Wales, which 'has consistently indicated that these disadvantaged groups are a priority and wishes to ensure that services for them … are protected' (National Assembly, 2001), therefore decided to employ two funding streams:

- The National Assembly will administer and pay Supporting People Revenue Grant (SPRG) from April 2003 to all supported housing and floating support schemes which are not intended solely for older people and which do not include care within the service (SPRG replaces Supported Housing Revenue Grant). The SPRG budget is expected to be transferred to local authorities, but not ring-fenced, in 2006 (this is a target date only).

- Local authorities in Wales will, from April 2003, hold a budget and administer Supporting People funding in respect of support services in sheltered housing for older people. They will also finance support in housing services which have a community care element, using funds transferred out of Supported Housing Revenue Grant/SPRG or other relevant budgets.

The fact that a significant element of the Supporting People budget will be held centrally in Wales for the first three years does not affect the requirement for local authorities in Wales, as in England and Scotland, to assess their local needs, develop a strategic plan and determine service priorities. Supporting People Revenue Grant will be paid to providers in accordance with the stated local authority priorities, with the overall distribution to be decided centrally.

The creation of local Supporting People budgets across the country brings new pressures as well as major new opportunities. For people in the marginal and hard to reach groups, the increased involvement of local politicians, together with possible tensions between the local statutory partners over key priorities, could make it more difficult to develop new services or shift resources in favour of neglected needs and those known or perceived to be unpopular with the public.

Defining eligible services and eligible users

The consultation paper (England) on Supporting People Directions and Grant Conditions (ODPM, 2002) states that, in order for a service to be eligible for SP funding, its purpose must be:

- developing a person's capacity to live independently in the community or sustaining their capacity to do so

- expanding tenure choices for persons who might remain in or be admitted to institutional care or become homeless or breach the terms of their tenancy, if support were not provided

- in the case of homelessness or domestic violence, providing immediate refuge.

The draft Grant Conditions for England do not specify the elements or tasks involved in housing-related support, except by reference to the general purpose of the service, as outlined above. They do, however, define certain types of excluded services. Nursing, personal care and social care services (e.g. meals on wheels) are excluded, as are psychological therapy, intensive counselling programmes, treatment services for offenders imposed by the courts, general housing management and services provided within a registered residential care establishment (or a residential establishment which the National Care Standards Commission decides should have been registered). The broad definitions of purpose leave considerable scope to deliver

support in many different ways, which should be of particular benefit to those with complex and multiple needs.

In Scotland, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Housing Support Services) Regulations came into operation in 2002. These list the service tasks for which payment may be made from Supporting People Grant (Scottish Executive, 2002). The tasks include, as examples: assisting with the security of the dwelling; advising and assisting with personal budgeting; providing life skills training in maintaining the dwelling. The intention is to exclude no services which have been eligible for funding through Transitional Housing Benefit or the other relevant funding streams. The need to define support in this specific way is linked to a concern to distinguish support services from personal care, which in Scotland is free for people aged 65 and over. Providers of housing support will register with the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and will have to achieve the National Care Standards for housing support services.

Wales, like England, has not continued to prescribe a list of eligible services. The draft Grant Conditions for England specify that, in order for a service to be eligible for Supporting People funding, the tenants or householders concerned must have specific vulnerabilities which make them in need of support. This support must be provided as part of an identified support package agreed between the service provider and the recipient.

The directions for both Scotland and Wales explicitly specify that the person receiving the support *must* be the householder or tenant. In Scotland, for example, the draft Order on housing support services states that 'Supporting People aims to help the family by ensuring that the householder can maintain occupancy of the dwelling. Other services, such as support to the children of homeless families, or advice and counselling for adult dependants, are not housing

support services for the purposes of the (Supporting People) Regulations' (Scottish Executive, 2002). The 'householder' principle is intended to ensure that Supporting People maintains a distinct (housing-linked) identity and that the funds cannot be used to top-up services which should be funded through other statutory (social services or health) budgets.

The effect of the householder rule is that individuals who want to live more independently, such as young people with drug problems, learning disabilities or mental health problems living with their parents, and also homeless young people, or women fleeing violence, staying with friends, do not meet the criteria for support under Supporting People. The same rule appears to apply in England, although it is more implicitly stated than in Scotland and Wales through references to 'tenants and householders' in the draft Grant Conditions (ODPM, 2002).

Charging individuals for support

The arrangements for charging and means-testing for support services are not yet finalised. In England, the proposed charging regime is based on the following principles:

- Provide more incentives, and fewer obstacles, to independent living.

- Recoup costs as efficiently as possible.

- Take account of the nature and level of the user's need.

- Take account of the level of the user's income.

- Increase incentives to work.

- Fit into an overall Government strategy on charging for support and care.

- Introduce change in a gradual and orderly way.
  (ODPM, 2002)

The essence of the proposals is that people living in short term accommodation or who are supported on a temporary basis (under two years) will be exempt from any charges for support, as will all those who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Income Support. The key criteria for deciding if someone is a 'short term' user are:

- The service aims to bring about independent living within two years (disregarding practical delays in securing move-on accommodation), following resolution of a need or completion of a time-limited programme of support (under two years intended duration).

- The support aims to increase the capacity for independent living (even if fully independent living may not be likely) through a package of time-limited support (again, under two years).

Long term service users, where the support is expected to extend over more than two years, will be means-tested and may have to pay if they are not 'passported' by receiving Housing Benefit or Income Support. The key criterion for defining a 'long term' user is:

- The support aims to maintain a limited degree of independent living which is not expected to increase, and may diminish over time, as part of a permanent or open-ended arrangement.

Those long term users who are liable to pay for support and who are also receiving non-residential care services will be protected, to an extent, by the Department of Health's new requirement that an individual's disposable income, after charges and disability-related spending, should not be brought below basic Income Support level – excluding the Severe Disability Premium (Department of Health, 2002). There will be a joint approach to charging for Supporting People services and non-residential

care services where someone is receiving, or applying for, both support and care.

In Scotland, the introduction in 2002 of free personal care for people aged 65 or over does not affect the principle of charging for support services under Supporting People. As in England, Scottish local authorities are given some discretion over charging for housing-related support, for example in deciding not to impose any charges, but the local authority will have to bear the costs of any such decision as the Supporting People Grant will be paid by the Scottish Executive net of an assumed level of charging income. Beyond this, the same 'short term' and 'long term' criteria and Housing Benefit exemptions apply as in England, with the addition that people whose housing support was previously funded by Special Needs Allowance Package (SNAP) will also be exempt from charges.

For those in Scotland who also receive non-residential care services (excluding personal care), local authorities are asked to follow the guidance on charging policies for non-residential services produced in 2002 by CoSLA (Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities). As with Fairer Charging in England (Department of Health, 2002), this contains basic thresholds (for example, Income Support plus 12.5 per cent), below which service users' income should not be reduced by charging for services. Above this, the level of charges is to be determined by individual local authorities, according to a percentage taper of 'excess income' over the basic threshold.

In Wales, the proposal is that people will not be charged if the service is receiving Supporting People Revenue Grant from the National Assembly for Wales. This will exempt everyone in supported housing, including long term users in accommodation not registered as a residential care home. Older people in sheltered housing, where the Supporting People funds come from the local authority, will be subject to charging on a similar basis to that for long term service users in England. Service users in Wales who are in 'supported

housing with a care element', where again the support is funded by the local authority, will be means-tested as for other community care services.

Links with other strategies

Several other programmes and legislative or policy initiatives will have an influence on the workings of Supporting People and the way priorities may be determined. In some cases, they will require Supporting People resources in order for statutory and legislative obligations to be fulfilled. The initiatives include, among others:

- The Homelessness Act 2002, which extends the definition of homeless with priority need to cover 16 and 17 year olds, care-leavers aged 18–21, people considered to be vulnerable who are fleeing domestic violence, and those with an institutional background. This has direct implications for Supporting People, as it will increase the number of people who are accepted as homeless, rehoused and in need of support to settle into and sustain their housing. It applies to England and Wales. In Scotland, the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill (2002) sets out a phased programme for the expansion of priority need categories and a requirement for housing support to be provided to those found to be intentionally homeless in order to enable access to a permanent tenancy. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a requirement for local authorities to produce a local housing strategy (LHS) and a homelessness strategy. The Supporting People Strategy forms part of the LHS. Wales has a draft National Homeless Strategy.

- The Rough Sleepers Initiative, which has its own budget but which may be assisted by provision made under Supporting People. This could have direct resource implications in local areas where the Rough Sleepers

Initiative is active. Applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

- The policy objective, set by the Social Exclusion Unit report on Teenage Pregnancy in 1998, that by 2003 all under-18 lone parents who cannot live with their family or partner should be placed in housing with support, not in an independent tenancy. It was anticipated that half the provision would be in the form of floating support and half would be purpose-built or refurbished schemes. Again, this has direct resource implications for Supporting People. Applies to England.

- Local Community Safety Boards, established as a result of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which agree crime reduction and prevention priorities. Applies to England.

- Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs), which are key instruments for delivering the Scottish Executive's social justice agenda. There are 48 SIPs in Scotland, 34 of which are area based and 14 of which are thematic, covering issues such as health and young people. They comprise the local authority and other public agencies such as local enterprise companies, health boards, and the voluntary and private sectors.

- The 'Joint Futures' approach to the delivery of community care services. This arose from the new Health and Community Care (Scotland) Act, which gave new powers allowing NHS boards and local authorities to work together with other agencies. This aims to ensure that patients and their carers have easier access to appropriate services, to avoid duplication of assessment and to help people move through the system more quickly.

- Other more general strategies and service plans of importance to Supporting People include:
  - The National Service Framework for Older People
  - The National Service Framework for People with Mental Health Problems
  - The White Paper: *Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability*
  - The 10-year anti-drugs strategy (1998–2008).

Key policy differences: England, Scotland and Wales

Table 1 shows the key policy differences in England, Scotland and Wales.

Table 1 Key policy differences: England, Scotland and Wales

	England	Scotland	Wales
Transfer of funds	All funds for SP transferred to local authorities in April 2003	All funds for SP transferred to local authorities in April 2003	Two funding streams from April 2003: a central buget and a locally held budget
Defining support services and users	Three broad criteria for purpose of the service	List of prescribed tasks eligible for SP funding. Person receiving support must be the householder	No list of prescribed tasks. Person receiving support must be the householder
Proposals to charge individuals for support	Means-tested charging for those receiving long term support. Short term users and recipients of IS or HB exempt	Means-tested charging for those receiving long term support. Short term users and those previously funded by SNAP exempt	No charging for those in services receiving central grant. Means-tested charging for older people in sheltered housing

3 Services for marginal and high risk groups

Who are the marginal, high risk and hard to reach?

Local Supporting People strategies are expected to give particular attention to developing and improving services for people who are seen as marginal, high risk or hard to reach. This emphasis is reinforced in England by the ministerial Strategic Steer (DTLR/DoH, 2002) on priorities for the first year of the programme, and in Scotland and Wales by statements within the central guidance and directives to local authorities. It reflects two long-standing concerns of service planners and providers of housing and support. These concerns are that:

- The direct involvement, at a commissioning level, of social services and health agencies could lead to resources being used primarily to bolster community care and community health care programmes, to the detriment of housing-related support services for people who come into Supporting People by a housing, probation or homelessness route.

- Supported housing and floating support providers have accommodated large numbers of single homeless people and other vulnerable groups with a range of needs, but they have often found it difficult, for a variety of reasons, to develop services for people who have highly specialist needs or who require an intensive level of support.

There are many interpretations of the terms 'marginal', 'high risk' and 'hard to reach' among those involved in implementing the Supporting People programme. Generally, the definitions offered by service commissioners and providers, as well as by central government departments, refer to sub-sets of one of the identified Supporting People client groups, or a combination of two groups, such as 'prolific offenders' or 'offenders with drug problems'. In some cases, respondents refer to very specific vulnerabilities or circumstances; for

example, 'people on estates whose homes are taken over by drug dealers', or 'rough sleepers with pets'.

In order to help refine a strategic approach towards identifying the needs of these diffuse groups and designing suitable services for them, the researchers suggest four categories or sub-groupings. While there is inevitably some overlap between the categories, a conceptual breakdown of this type may help commissioners and providers to develop a better (and shared) understanding of who is included and the kinds of marginality or risk involved. It should also help to give a higher profile to these groups by bringing them more clearly into focus. This seems particularly important given the diverse make-up of local commissioning bodies for Supporting People and the lack of familiarity some of the members will have with certain of the sub-groupings.

The four categories are:

1 People with complex or multiple needs, who are likely to need support (and perhaps care) from more than one source, or from a service that offers both generic and more specialist support. The complexities of need are almost endless, but perhaps it is the combination, in its varied forms, of mental health problems, offending and substance abuse which causes greatest concern to those seeking to accommodate people in existing services. Other examples include: women with a drug problem who are fleeing violence; people with an alcohol problem who also have learning disabilities.

2 People who are 'hard to reach' in that they are resistant to services, or perhaps have been excluded from services due to behaviour difficulties or non-compliance with the regime. People within this group may have entrenched and long term problems requiring high levels of individualised support. Examples include some long term homeless people and also people with mental health problems who are recurrently admitted to a psychiatric hospital and get stuck

there for lack of suitable alternative accommodation. The 'hard to reach' group also includes those who do not want to be drawn into, or who are trying to escape, 'the system' of support and care, but who remain vulnerable. Examples include some young people leaving the care system and other young homeless people who have left home and have not had significant previous contact with services.

3 People who are 'high risk' in that they could pose a danger to others or themselves, or who may (most acutely in the case of women fleeing domestic violence) be at risk from others. This group clearly includes certain categories of offenders, as well as people with forms of challenging behaviour which may create risks for others within the service, or in the wider community. It also draws in some people with mental health problems, active drug users and people with alcohol problems whose behaviour is anti-social and disruptive. Others within the high risk grouping include vulnerable tenants exploited by drug dealers, referred to above, those who are victimised on account of their perceived differences and people in services who are subjected to racial harassment or attack.

4 People who are remote from services and who can best be described as 'hard to find', rather than 'hard to reach'. This group may include people in local minority ethnic communities, long-established or otherwise, which have little or no connection with formal social care or similar services. It also refers to people who rely on informal support instead of approaching services (or who have been turned away by services), such as homeless young people staying with friends and young adults with disabilities or mental health problems living with their parents. The group also includes those with support needs who live in privately rented housing and, again, either do not approach services or have done so without success. Finally,

there are significant numbers of people on some large social housing estates who are struggling to cope and whose need for support has gone largely unrecognised as they have not come to the attention of social services or the criminal justice system.

Shortcomings of current services for marginal groups

The interview discussions and email responses indicate a keen awareness of the difficulties in improving services for people within the above categories, but also a strong commitment among many local Supporting People teams and providers to try and achieve it. There is widespread agreement on the shortcomings of existing services and few observable differences in the responses of those in England, Scotland and Wales. The Strategic Steer, which only applies to England and which directs local commissioning bodies to pay specific attention to these groups in the first year, is seen as helpful in giving political leverage and reminding commissioners across the various statutory authorities of the distinctive identity and goals of Supporting People. Among the respondents as a whole, however, there is concern that the effort to get structures in place has resulted in a neglect of the substantive content and aims of the programme and too little topic- and issue-based discussion and guidance (as opposed to administrative guidance).

Respondents identified some significant problems in respect of the capacity and nature of current service provision. The majority, although not all, also anticipated some major difficulties in terms of the scope they would have to extend, adapt and improve services for marginal groups in the short to medium term.

Lack of needs analysis
Strategic needs assessment is seen as the foundation stone for developing a properly informed service response to the needs of these groups. Statistical

data and records are generally weak or non-existent and, where they exist, may be only tangentially relevant to the concerns of Supporting People. Some authorities have carried out needs assessment relating to all or some of these groups. This tends to be seen as most successful where the focus has been on a specific group and there has been time to do some detailed and in-depth research. Some of those that have attempted to take a broader view across marginal groups have found it difficult to obtain sufficiently robust data or to uncover the scale and order of hidden and unmet needs.

Needs assessment is seen as especially important in the new strategic regime, as local politicians will need convincing of the necessity for action and the strategic partner authorities will be expected to commit resources to enable support services to extend their reach.

Gaps in services

There are known shortfalls and gaps in services for marginal groups, despite the lack of hard statistical evidence to back up the intelligence-gathering and analysis of commissioners and providers in their own assessment of the position. The shortage in services for people with high support needs who do not come into the sphere of community care is of particular note, while some respondents also commented on the lack of provision for people with low level needs who need limited help to sustain their situation. Among service commissioners, there is some feeling that housing and support providers have occupied the middle ground, catering largely for people with substantial but not especially complex needs. This view is not necessarily shared by providers, some of whom feel that they have been expected to meet increasingly high needs and that they have done so with some success. Some major specialist providers have concentrated their effort, during the run-up to the introduction of Supporting People, on developing services for 'more difficult' groups and those with higher needs.

Limited specialist support

Current services, whether accommodation-based or operated on a 'floating' basis, frequently offer support of a generic nature and are not in a position directly to provide more specialised support to people with complex needs. This is in line with the expectations of those who originally outlined the aims of Supporting People policy:

To provide generic support services by skilled staff …

To form part of 'packages' of provision designed to meet the multiple and varied needs of vulnerable clients … (DETR, 2000)

It is, however, seen as a limitation in that it has proved difficult to develop 'packages' based on well-founded relationships with more specialist care or support services, where indeed such community-based services even exist. There is criticism, in particular, of the historical lack of commitment from some local health services, which have failed to recognise their contribution to addressing the complex needs, for example, of people with mental health and substance abuse problems receiving support from generic, voluntary sector services.

Inflexibility of services

The historic development of supported housing, with its linking of support to specific types of accommodation, has had an element of built-in inflexibility. People have been offered services, to some degree, according to their ability to fit in, live alongside others and comply with the daily regime. This is of much greater significance in some kinds of services than in others, but certainly applies to many of the longer-established hostel-type services for single homeless people where some of those in the marginal groups have been accommodated. The expansion of self-contained supported housing and increased access to independent housing with support has been a major counter-balance to this. However, some of the theoretical advantages in

terms of flexible response have not been realised due to other limiting factors, such as the location and poor quality of the housing and the lack of specialised support.

> *An examination of a provider's exclusion policy may show that support is not always delivered to those who need it most …While hostels may provide refuge in times of emergency, it may be difficult to balance the needs of different potentially traumatised users. Staff may feel that the admittance of a drug user could adversely affect clients who are trying to remain drug-free. A hostel environment or the location of social housing may also deter people from using the service.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – England)

Location and forms of accommodation

The legacy of past development is that housing and support services used by people in the marginal groups tend to be clustered in well-defined locations within cities and large towns. Much of the accommodation is short term or geared to people in immediate crisis, with considerably less emphasis on longer term services and those which have a more explicit preventative or ameliorative approach. The physical standard of hostels and supported housing for these groups is often still quite low, although this applies as well to some of the independent, social rented housing offered as move-on accommodation or as an alternative to hostel living. It was also noted that improvements in physical standards, together with greater professionalism and more formal requirements to agree support packages, can have the effect of excluding people who would have been accepted and may have managed in a more basic service.

Support tied to housing

The rules for the pre-Supporting People funding streams have ensured that support has been closely tied to housing issues and landlord / tenant responsibilities. This has left gaps, particularly in

regard to support to develop social contacts and overcome isolation and loneliness. The gaps have become more pronounced with the trend towards self-contained and independent housing, especially for people who are perceived as different and who could be particularly vulnerable to harassment or exploitation.

Staff availability and skills

Many projects and services are having difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff with the necessary aptitude and skills for support work. This is due to general trends in the labour market and the low status (and pay) of jobs in social care. This problem is seen as likely to get worse, if services are to address more complex and entrenched needs under the new programme. The related issue of staff training is also seen as problematic, as the service environment is expected to become more competitive when commissioners gain information, through the review process, to compare and 'benchmark' services. There is scepticism among voluntary sector providers that realistic allowance will be made in contracts for training and other indirect costs.

Opposition to new accommodation

The current climate of 'public protection' fosters a NIMBYism under which people in local communities are increasingly resorting to legal challenges against new supported housing and other residential developments. For example, one proposed new service for recovering drug users, which has obtained the political support of the local authority, is being challenged under the Human Rights Act and alleged breach of government commitments to reduce levels of crime and 'fear of crime'. One effect of such developments is that floating support services are seen as an easy political option, while some of the longer term management issues associated with supporting people with complex and intensive needs in their own homes are somewhat obscured.

Restricted access

Restrictive nomination requirements, for example through the local authority homelessness section or through social services referral, have had the effect of excluding people who are not in contact with the right agencies or who do not meet their criteria. This affects, in particular, those who are remote from services and who are described above as 'hard to find' rather than 'hard to reach'.

Steps required to encourage services for these groups

The respondents could see several positive steps which should be taken by Supporting People commissioning bodies and Supporting People teams to promote improved and extended services for marginal groups.

Systematic needs analysis

The strategic partners should carry out more thorough and detailed needs assessment work, with the focus on making the case for strengthening and expanding services where this is borne out by the evidence. The potential benefits of providing support to people within these groups, and the possible consequences of not doing so, should be explained with reference to other local strategies and initiatives to which partner agencies are already committed. The researchers consider that the needs analysis should be designed to reveal demand pressures, exclusions and user preferences and that it should apply across the range of local accommodation and support services, including relevant advice, support, care and residential services not directly funded by Supporting People.

Strategic risk assessment

Service commissioners should recognise and begin to identify, in practical detail as well as in principle, the financial and management risks involved in providing services for marginal groups. They should enter discussions with relevant local providers on the kinds of back up, practical support and formal protocols which will help to anticipate and overcome problems. The additional costs associated with more complex and high risk activities, such as time spent on consultation, funding negotiations, staff training, co-ordination of support and crisis management, need to be taken into account. Within this enabling framework, service specifications can refer explicitly to particular marginal groups which the commissioners wish to see within the service, such as certain types of offenders or people with specified complex needs. Supporting People teams can then begin to develop and offer models of good practice which incorporate expected levels and types of support in different types of schemes.

Funding commitments

There should be advance commitment of mixed funding from Supporting People and other statutory sources, where this is called for by the design and service specification. The situation where generic providers are left to try and negotiate access to specialised support should be abandoned and efforts should be made by commissioners to ensure that existing services which seek to address complex needs are based on a reasonably secure footing with regard to agreements for combined support 'packages'. Where a provider wishes to develop a specialist service alongside its more generic support team, this should be considered as an alternative to frontline partner arrangements. In any event, serious inroads will not be made unless both social services and health commissioners take more financial responsibility for services they have traditionally seen as the preserve of housing or the probation service.

Patterns of exclusion

Supporting People teams should work with providers to see who is excluded from services, either as specific policy or on account of indirect

processes and established practice. This might be done with reference to the four categories of 'marginal' groups outlined above. They then need to think through the options for developing more inclusive provision, which may entail new agreements with providers on existing services or plans for extended provision. In respect of the 'remote' groups, such as those in localised minority ethnic communities which have little or no contact with social care, service planners need to gain an understanding of the gaps in housing and support as perceived by those communities, adopting a community-oriented perspective in parallel to the focus on individual needs.

Potential to shift resources

Commissioning Bodies will have a major problem in identifying possible sources of funding for new schemes, or for the reshaping of existing provision. This may involve the shifting of resources from any under-used provision in other parts of the Supporting People programme, which could prove politically very difficult if it involves sheltered housing for older people. There are mixed views among commissioners and providers about the potential to restructure and develop services, which may simply reflect the perceived generosity or otherwise of their anticipated settlement for Supporting People funding. Some of the most negative views were expressed by local authorities and housing and support providers in Scotland.

Effects of current service expansion

There has been rapid expansion of services funded through Transitional Housing Benefit (THB), which will be transferred to the Supporting People budget in 2003. In the main, this recent expansion has taken three forms: the establishment of new floating support schemes, especially for 'general needs' tenants on social housing estates; the shifting of revenue funding from community care budgets to THB, through de-registration of existing residential care homes or non-registration (as care

homes) of newly opened services; and the continued withdrawal of health funding from community-based support and accommodation services (less evident in Scotland, where hospital closure programmes are still active).

The pattern of new development appears to vary widely throughout the country and it is difficult to judge the overall effect. However, the responses to this review suggest that, if there has been 'straying' of funding in the run-up to Supporting People, it is as much towards tenants in general needs housing as towards people with high care needs who have, in the past, received funds from social services or health. These schemes will in some cases significantly influence the shape of local provision at the outset of Supporting People. The new floating support services for general needs tenants will bring in a number of marginal and hard to reach individuals. The extent to which such people are actually identified and provided with support services should be monitored by commissioning bodies.

Services combining generic and specialist support

The review looked for examples of services which combine generic support with more specialised assistance for people with complex needs, outside of community care provision. They include:

- resettlement services for ex-homeless people in London, where peripatetic community drug service workers funded by the Rough Sleepers Unit work alongside the generic support teams

- the extension of a generic support service to cater for people with a dual diagnosis of mental health problems and substance abuse, using funds provided for the local authority Drug Action Team – the expectation is that people will move across to full Supporting People funding once their accommodation and support situation is stable

- floating support for high risk offenders, with generic support and intensive input from a specialist voluntary sector provider

- short term hostel for homeless people with intervention and support from local health and social services, including a designated district nurse, mental health specialist and social worker.

Supporting People guidance and marginal groups

The review asked for respondents' views on whether Supporting People policy and guidance will encourage or inhibit development of housing and support services for people in the marginal and high risk groups. Most of the respondents adopted a somewhat broader perspective, looking beyond the guidance at other issues such as funding levels and the wider political climate.

- Supporting People brings a new willingness (among local authority Supporting People teams) to look at the needs of marginal groups. This should be helped by the uncoupling of an individual's funding for housing and support, as many of those within the marginal groups are not in a position to benefit from the current system.

- The draft Grant Conditions (in England) are relatively wide-ranging and allow considerable flexibility; the main problem will be lack of new money, not how it can be used.

- The absence of charging for short term services is very positive and will make a real difference to many existing service users, especially those wanting to work; problems remain for long term service users, however, some of whom are in a similar position.

- The new strategic approach should lead to more rational and needs-based service development, although in practice local authorities may have

little leeway to make significant shifts in their pattern of provision over the first two to three years.

- The new approach puts housing and support providers in the position of being agents of the local authority. They will have to give up some control and work to detailed specifications. Some larger general needs providers (notably housing associations) may withdraw from the sector, particularly if they are expected to carry major risks.

- It will be difficult to develop such services in more conservative authorities and those that are used to seeing problems exported to other areas through the migration of people across local authority boundaries (both between boroughs within cities and from rural to urban areas).

- The new, local authority-led strategic approach will result in 'importing' authorities being less tolerant of cross-boundary arrivals in future. They may negotiate new Supporting People contracts with providers requiring them to focus on local need.

- Cross-authority arrangements are intended largely to serve the function of protecting mobile and marginal groups. There is concern that the arrangements are too weak to do this effectively, as there is no designated budget and there is too much scope for local disagreements about responsibility for particular services and the extent of cross-authority movement.

- Funding boundaries will continue to work against development of complex packages.

- Preparations for service commissioning are underdeveloped in many areas and have gone on the 'back burner' in the rush to transfer existing services or develop new services which can be transferred into Supporting People.

- There is a possibility that Supporting People funds will be used disproportionately by local authorities to support those who are in recognised 'priority need' under homelessness legislation, people placed by the local authority in temporary housing and social housing tenants in general.

- Social services departments, and Primary Care Trusts as they develop their commissioning role, may take advantage of Supporting People funding to enhance services funded through other programmes. As with the funding of services for general needs tenants, this will not necessarily be to the detriment of people in marginal groups with complex needs; it will depend on the kinds of services funded.

- In England, the ministerial Strategic Steer is seen to have a real influence on elected members, who expect to demonstrate the high performance of their authority through responding positively to central directives and guidance. Respondents would like to see a follow-up Strategic Steer next year, which reinforces the central message of support to marginal groups and adds more detail.

- In Wales, there are anxieties over the fact that Supporting People funds, in respect of groups other than older people, are to be transferred to local authorities in 2006 without any ring-fencing. Marginal groups may lose out within this system, and indeed may do so in the interim as the central funding stream may not be sufficiently responsive to the need for specialised, complex and high risk services.

There needs to be much more clarity re new policies and procedural guidance before Supporting People can be utilised to maximise local development opportunities. There is concern over the eventual methods for allocating funds locally and the budget restrictions that will be imposed.
(Local authority respondent, email – Wales)

- In Scotland, the lack of information about the overall level of funding for Supporting People has raised a lot of doubts about the capacity of the programme to achieve its objectives.

The issue is not really about guidance. Funding is much more important. In order to cater for these groups effectively, new services will have to be developed and, in the absence of new money, this can only be achieved by decommissioning existing services. This is both difficult politically and runs the risk of further reducing the available options.
(Local authority respondent, interview – Scotland)

4 Support for people in private sector housing

Breaking the link with tenure?

One of the stated benefits of Supporting People is that it will 'break the link with tenure', by extending housing-related support to those living in private rented accommodation and to owner-occupiers. The pre-Supporting People funding streams have been restricted, in that they have largely tied support to receipt of Housing Benefit (only available to tenants) and to tenancy in social housing. While it has been possible for private sector tenants on Housing Benefit to claim extra for support, in practice this has been confined to the relatively few cases where the landlord provides support services, either individually or through a recognised 'supported lodgings' scheme. The Supporting People budget, by contrast, can be spent on services provided to people in all or any tenures.

The issues around extending support services to the private sector are of interest to this review for two main reasons:

- Some of the most vulnerable and isolated people are known to be living in private rented accommodation, including a number who have been turned away by statutory agencies or excluded from housing and support services. Some of the main groups concerned are: offenders (and especially ex-prisoners); young ex-homeless people and young people leaving care; refugees; people with long term alcohol problems; people in the 'high risk' and 'complex needs' groups (see previous section), for whom there is little or no provision of housing and support services; and people in the 'hard to reach' category who do not want to be associated with services or have been excluded from them.

- In order to develop the preventative role of Supporting People, support needs to 'capture' more people before they reach crisis point and fall into homelessness or into needing high level care. While the new floating support services for general needs social housing tenants can be seen as preventative in this sense, there are no such mechanisms for identifying and responding to support needs among those in private sector accommodation.

Steps required to extend services to the private sector

The majority of respondents in the review agreed that the question of support to private sector tenants and owner-occupiers is very much unexplored territory. While some local authorities have begun to consider the issue and to make preliminary plans, others do not see it as of immediate concern and some regard it, in the words of one respondent, as 'not on the radar screen'. There is considerable scepticism about the financial capacity of Supporting People budgets to develop support services into the private sector and, in particular, to potentially large numbers of owner-occupiers. Some respondents felt that the only realistic option, in the short term at least, is incrementally to expand existing floating support services set up for social housing tenants or for particular needs groups, as individual referrals arise.

Despite these doubts among some (not all) respondents, there is wide agreement that the cross-tenure vision is clear, that it makes sense and that it is perhaps achievable over time. They identified various initial issues which would need to be addressed, as well as possible ways forward.

Needs in the private sector

There is an almost complete lack of information about the scale of need for housing-related support (or indeed any other form of care and support) among private tenants and owner-occupiers. Some information is held by local advice agencies or drop-in centres and, to some extent, by probation officers and by environmental health officers, but this is patchy and often anecdotal. One or two respondents noted that new intelligence is also coming through from regeneration projects, although again this tends to be quite partial and fragmentary.

Private tenants and owner-occupiers fall squarely into the 'hard to find' category of marginal groups (see previous section) and any systematic needs assessment should take advantage of the identified information 'hooks' to gain a better picture. There is unlikely to be a strong political imperative for needs analysis with regard to making the case for private tenants or for owner-occupiers in poor communities, although the same is not necessarily true for owner-occupiers in largely affluent areas. In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has commissioned research in this area but it has had little success in identifying the extent of need in the private sector.

> *We are feeling overwhelmed by the scale and difficulties presented in identifying eligible people among home owners. We are using service records to identify people receiving community care services but we are aware of a whole raft of people who could benefit and who are total unknowns.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – Scotland)

Access routes into services

People in private accommodation could gain access to support through Supporting People in one of three ways: by individual referral or self-referral to an established support provider; by individual referral or self-referral to a central point for needs assessment and subsequent direction to a specific service; or (for tenants) by the formal involvement of the private landlord as a provider of accommodation for people requiring support. Respondents felt that all these avenues offered valid ways of developing cross-tenure services.

Health services, including general practitioner surgeries and district nursing, are prospective entry points to support under Supporting People. GPs already play an important role, for example, in the referral of older people to sheltered housing. They and their staff could also refer people for housing-related support or supported housing. To make it effective and ensure that referrals are appropriate, this would demand considerable promotional and education work on the part of Supporting People teams, as well as some interest and commitment from the GPs and other health staff. Local authorities are at a very early stage in thinking about this and some do not see it as a realistic priority for the first two to three years. It could be, however, that pressure to become involved will come from Primary Care Trusts, as they realise the potential of Supporting People to address their own preventative agenda.

Local advice agencies, whether related specifically to housing or more generalist, are also potentially important entry points. They include advice and counselling services for young people, Citizens' Advice Bureaux and housing advice centres managed by the local authority. Drop-in services and day centres could also be useful points of contact. In Scotland, credit unions were suggested as possible access points. Again, promotional work would be needed to put over the aims of the programme and the circumstances in which support can be offered, although many of the service providers would, at least, have some familiarity with the key support issues. While some respondents thought that publicity on Supporting People should, in principle, be as wide as possible and include leaflets in libraries and community centres etc, others felt that a targeted approach,

confining it to agencies already providing certain types of support, was more realistic and would more effectively pinpoint need. In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has produced a publicity leaflet for local authorities aimed at prospective service users.

Gate-keeping role of local authorities
There are divergent views among local authority respondents on whether they should have some kind of 'gate-keeping' role, with respect to managing and channelling referrals and perhaps assessing individual eligibility and needs. For example, one respondent said that Supporting People was essentially about 'keeping people out of the institution of homelessness', while another ventured that the local authority homelessness unit should become the single access point for Supporting People. More generally, respondents saw possibilities in providing initial information and advice through 'customer contact points' with a wider brief to help people to find their way round local services. In the voluntary sector, there are examples of support providers who already manage shop front advice and counselling services with links to their local supported housing provision. This model could allow such providers to extend their services fairly readily, resources permitting, to those in private accommodation who do not wish to move.

Involvement of landlords and private rented accommodation
Local commissioning bodies and Supporting People teams could design and promote new partnerships between private landlords and specialist local support agencies. The landlord would agree to provide and maintain the accommodation in return for rent guarantees and management of the support. This is a model which has already been operated successfully in some areas, for example in respect of people with long term mental health problems. Landlords who are

already involved in rent deposit schemes might be candidates for this.

The current system for involving individual private landlords in support for people claiming Transitional Housing Benefit has had a detrimental effect. Landlords find it too bureaucratic and time-consuming and some have withdrawn on these grounds. In one example:

> *Most of the major private landlords, even those providing support such as leasehold schemes for older people, are not willing to become involved in Supporting People. Without attaching an eligible funding stream to a service prior to April 1 2003 it will not be possible to fund the service post 2003. Working in this area is not a high priority overall, due to the highly resource intensive nature of the work and the reluctance of landlords. We have been approached by a private landlord who proactively seeks to provide accommodation for very difficult and challenging homeless people. This landlord wishes to become involved in Supporting People and is supported by the Police, District Council and others prepared to help them develop expertise and the necessary networks to provide support because of the work they do for highly marginalised people. However, it is likely they will be seeking charitable status and/or to become an RSL and are therefore unlikely to be a private landlord by the time that Supporting People programme comes on stream. This appears to support the notion that Supporting People and private landlords do not really fit well together.*
> (Local authority respondent email – England)

The standard of some private rented accommodation, whether self-contained or with shared facilities, is poor. Commissioners will need to recognise the difficulties, risks and extra costs for providers who work within this environment and to pay proper attention to health and safety issues, including the security of visiting staff.

Services which could be funded in the private sector

The review asked for examples of services which could be funded through Supporting People and which focus on people living in private accommodation. They include:

- A counselling and support service, initiated by GPs, to be funded jointly by a Primary Care Trust and Supporting People, on a 50/50 basis. The main recipients will be older people who are home owners. The Supporting People manager said: 'If repeated across all the districts in the County, it will rapidly drain the funds but will be difficult to resist as it will get a lot of cuddly support from elected members'.

- A service for people with alcohol problems run by a voluntary organisation, where homeless applicants who are not accepted as in priority need by the local authority are advised to seek accommodation in the private sector and are simultaneously referred by the homelessness unit for support to be provided by the specialist agency.

- Floating support services provided to social housing tenants which can be extended to the private sector. 'The issues are funding, charging and capacity'. In one example, the local authority provides a support service to older tenants which it is modestly expanding to include owner-occupiers living on estates that are predominantly council-owned.

- Women's refuges in some cases offer support to people in the community who, for whatever reason, are not able or ready to leave their existing accommodation. This is often in the private sector. The work has been paid for through cross-subsidy from those receiving Transitional Housing Benefit and it

would therefore need extra funding under Supporting People if it is to be continued.

- An arrangement where the Supporting People team provides training for social workers in the elements of support covered (by Transitional Housing Benefit) and asks them to identify and refer potential service users. To date, three people have had support provided through this means. In two cases, the landlord has agreed to the involvement of a support agency (MIND) and is passing on the support funding received. In the other case, the landlord is providing the support. In future, under Supporting People, the formal involvement of the landlord will not be required.

Supporting People guidance and the private sector

The review asked for views on whether the direction of policy and guidance to date will help or inhibit attempts to include the private sector. Many respondents were very positive, while others felt that practical guidance in this area was lacking.

We believe there is a real opportunity to develop innovative services, including the private sector. The policy on charging and means-testing may well hinder long term floating support services, but should not discourage development. The emphasis on support to marginalised groups is welcome and we have responded by setting up a group specifically to look at this issue.
(Local authority respondent, email – England)

We need clear guidance and positive messages to engage this group.
(Local authority respondent, email – Wales)

Expansion of support into the private sector
The current rapid expansion in floating support services for social housing tenants leaves little

scope for new development, unless these same services are directed and also resourced to extend their range to private tenants and/or owner occupiers.

> *Funding that will be placed in the pot for existing services will not suffice for growth in the service once opened to private tenants and owner-occupiers. My worry is not how providers inform prospective new clients – this can be worked out – but the availability of the budget to meet the demand.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – England)

> *The main issue is that there is no guarantee of additional funding so although people living in private accommodation may be eligible they will have no right to a service. Savings on existing services will be limited and will take years to materialise.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – Wales)

Charging for support will be a disincentive to people in owner-occupied housing receiving long term services. On the other hand, if members of commissioning bodies decide to promote services for older owner-occupiers in particular, this could have huge resource implications. The likely losers in such a scenario would be those in the marginal or high risk groups.

Formal assessment
There is an emerging tension between the need to develop individual needs assessment and defined eligibility criteria on the one hand, and the policy objective of creating wider access to services and

building an inclusive approach. Many people, and not only those in private accommodation, are put off by official formalities and processes which draw them into 'the system' and define them in ways they consider stigmatising or unhelpful. There is a need for a 'light touch', which encourages vulnerable people to make use of support services without binding them in. Some respondents expressed concern that Supporting People has shifted towards an eligibility-focused, community-care type approach and that this will be reinforced if budgets are tight and financial pressures mount.

Problems for non-householders
There is interest in making support available to young adults and others living in the parental home or staying temporarily with friends. This could be an important preventative aspect of the programme, helping to stop some people losing their accommodation altogether or assisting in planned moves towards more independent living. However, the policy focus on householders and tenants does not allow for these needs to be addressed within Supporting People as currently designed.

> *Access to social housing is itself difficult. So it is hard to develop supported living services for young adults with physical or learning disabilities living in the parental home as they are considered to be adequately housed and score few points on the housing register.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – England)

5 New kinds of services and models of support

What future for housing-related support?

Supporting People funding is intended to provide 'housing-related' support to people in various forms of accommodation. This includes: independent housing; self-contained supported housing; shared supported housing; hostels; supported lodgings; foyers; and refuges. In the great majority of existing services, support is offered to people where they are living, i.e. the support worker visits individuals in their accommodation or staff are available on-site.

The review examined how 'housing-related support' is interpreted within the framework for Supporting People, in the light of the policy aim to make services more flexible and inclusive. The issue is of interest to the review as there may be some individual service users, or groups of users, who would gain more from a different approach to providing support. This may include support delivered from an alternative community setting, rather than in the home. People in the marginal, high risk and hard to reach groups who are very isolated and/or who could benefit from peer support could perhaps find such support particularly useful.

This is a contentious issue. Most respondents agreed that the principle of delivering support in new ways and different locations was sound, but that it could be problematic in practice, as it will blur the boundaries of Supporting People and could cause it to lose its distinctive identity. There could be increased competition among providers as more local organisations seek to define themselves as falling within the programme. As one respondent put it: 'The more flexible it is, the more vulnerable it is to cost shunting from other services. It could get very woolly. The main thing is to help people cope in the home.' Views were mixed, however, with some local authorities and providers seeing it as a valuable opportunity to open up

support services, particularly with regard to delivering social support and addressing the inclusion objectives of the programme.

In Scotland, where the list of eligible support tasks is prescribed (and very much housing-focused), there are the greatest doubts about the legitimacy of going down this route and developing new models of support. Across the respondents as a whole, providers were generally more keen to test the limits of what could be funded, while local authorities were more cautious.

The very specific draft definition of housing support published by the Scottish Executive was a missed opportunity to be more flexible in the delivery of services to vulnerable people. It ties us into a definition that was previously necessitated by THB and leaves a gap between personal care and housing support. However, we are equally concerned that, although we would welcome being able to provide housing support more flexibly, the fact that it is currently provided to people in their home acts to reinforce the ring-fencing of the Supporting People grant. We would not want to see a reduction in funding of services in other settings from other sources. In addition, there is a need for reliable data about the effectiveness of different forms of intervention …
(Local authority respondent, email – Scotland)

Community based advice centres are a real alternative. Housing related support – such as mediation services, disputes services, life skills training, support with form filling and benefit entitlement – can well be undertaken away from the service user's home. Outreach work is another alternative through youth workers and youth centres. We need to make better use of existing services that go to where people are, rather than wait for the service user to come to us.
(Local authority respondent, email – England)

*Funding drop-in centre support could be a good idea –
isolation and unemployment are obviously big factors
in not surviving in independent living – but it is
important not to divert limited resources and spread it
all too thinly.*
(Local authority respondent, (interview – England)

Services located in settings other than the user's home

The review looked for examples of services which
might be funded through Supporting People and
which do not follow the model of individualised
support provided to people in their own homes.
They include:

- Shop front services run by a specialist
  voluntary organisation for people with
  alcohol problems. Most of their
  accommodation referrals are self-referrals by
  people walking in off the street. The
  organisation has taken pains, for reasons of
  funding, to differentiate between the
  specialist counselling and therapy provided
  by the shop front centres and the generic,
  housing-related support offered to people in
  the accommodation side of the service. In
  this case, they are planning to bring
  additional resources into the shop fronts
  from other sources (particularly if, as
  expected, the Government produces a
  national alcohol strategy in the near future),
  rather than aiming to extend, and dilute, the
  funding from Supporting People. The
  network model of shop front access points
  and service centres linked to a cluster of local
  accommodation and support services is one
  that might be usefully pursued by more
  providers, as a way of both widening access
  and promoting social contacts and peer
  support. Such a network of local services
  could bring in hostels, supported housing
  and floating support.

- A scheme for homeless people temporarily
  placed in a house with multiple occupancy
  and communal facilities. Support in cooking
  and budgeting etc is provided on a group
  basis and this has fostered mutual support
  and camaraderie. It is, however, largely
  determined by circumstances and the service
  is individualised once people move on into
  their own tenancies.

- Women's refuge and support services often
  include courses in life skills training and
  confidence-building. This needs additional
  funding, which could potentially come
  through Supporting People and benefit a
  range of groups.

Supporting People guidance and new models of support

The review asked for views on whether new
models of support and different ways of delivering
services would be encouraged or inhibited by
Supporting People policy and guidance. While
some respondents felt that this was a very open
question, others were clear that the funding terms
were restrictive (and perhaps rightly so). A number
of respondents felt that Supporting People
guidance has not addressed the issue of how to
draw in resistant or 'hard to reach' individuals who
may require specific initial encouragement to come
into services.

- Services which might be termed 'outreach' or
  'extension support' in this context have in
  many instances been funded through cross-
  subsidy from payments of Transitional
  Housing Benefit. This needs to be openly
  acknowledged, so that service
  commissioners can decide whether funds
  should be allocated to continue the service
  and, if so, from what sources.

- Individual needs assessment and support plans are useful for many people but should not be mandatory for gaining access to support. This is pertinent where the first major task is to get people to engage with the service and demonstrate what they might get from it. As one respondent put it: 'over-professionalising of the support relationship will reduce flexibility and put people off'. This could apply, for example, to refugees or to vulnerable young people on estates.

- Supporting People offers the opportunity to expand befriending services and peer support aimed at isolated or stigmatised service users. This is difficult to achieve effectively in any event, and especially within a context of dispersed housing and individualised support. Respondents would like to see examples of good services in this area.

- Supporting People teams will have to do deals with other funding agencies and with providers of many other types of services. This is complicated, but should at least be easier than when housing associations and other providers were driving the development of services.

Many vulnerable people receive care and support from a variety of different agencies. A young care leaver, for instance, may have: a volunteer mentor; a housing support worker; a leaving care worker; a criminal justice worker; and an education adviser. We need to align funding of these services so that the support elements can be provided by one worker …
(Local authority respondent, email – Scotland)

6 Future of supported housing and floating support

Floating into the mist?

Supporting People explicitly promotes the expansion of support to people living in their own independent housing, whether rented or owner-occupied. This is seen as a way of responding more appropriately to individual needs and offering greater flexibility than is possible in an accommodation-based service. It is one of the means by which it is intended 'to bring major improvements to the quality of housing-related support services … For example, instead of having to move into hostels to receive support, (it) can be provided to people in their own homes' (DETR, 2001). The decision to incorporate revenue grants for supported housing into the Supporting People Budget (SHMG/SNAP/SHRG in England, Scotland and Wales respectively) reinforces the trend, as it breaks the link between capital and revenue funding for new schemes.

The review considers three questions related to the promotion of floating support and the place of supported housing in the development and reshaping of services. The questions have been framed with the needs of individuals in the marginal and high risk groups in mind. They are:

- Is floating support primarily a 'low intensity' service, as implied in some of the policy statements, or is it equally applicable to people with complex and high needs?

- Are there particular support activities which are not well covered by floating support, or is it able to offer the full range of support services?

- Are there specific groups for which new supported housing (and capital funding) will be required? If so, for which groups and for what types of accommodation?

In answering these questions, one or two respondents commented that the term 'floating support' is inadequate as a description of what has become a major service area. To those not in the know, including potential service users and professionals in other service areas, it says very little and may be too resonant of instability and impermanence. It may also suggest low level or optional services, which in political terms may come to be seen as dispensable in a climate of rising demand. The fact that services can be detached from the accommodation and can be concluded without the person losing the accommodation is by now well-established and it is not a point which needs to be continually reinforced. The stronger and more descriptive 'independent living support' is an alternative term.

Some respondents also said that the polarity between floating support and accommodation-based services is no longer helpful. Supported housing, especially in newly developed schemes, often provides fully self-contained accommodation, which may or may not be all on one site. It may neither look nor feel like a 'specialist' scheme and may, in some cases, simply consist of a number of designated homes within a larger, general needs development. The suggestion, as late as 2001, that the stark choice is between 'hostels' and 'support to people in their own homes' is somewhat disingenuous.

The scope of floating support

Most respondents were clear that floating support can theoretically offer both low intensity and high level support and that, at its optimum, it should be able to respond to the fluctuating needs of individual service users. In practice, it can be very difficult to obtain funding for high support. Where the funding is available, statutory commissioners can be unrealistic about the capacity of the service

to meet the needs. One respondent (in Scotland) said that some people being referred to floating support services, through hospital discharge programmes, needed as much as 70 hours support per week. It seems likely that the still very active hospital closure programme in Scotland will result in floating support schemes with higher need clients than in England, as this is a preferred model among many commissioners. These post-discharge services in Scotland will be jointly funded from health and Supporting People budgets.

> *Floating support does not need to be low intensity. Assertive outreach models are being developed using THB (for hard to reach clients) and will be delivered on a staff to client ratio of 1:8/10. This recognises that some clients will move in and out of crisis. In addition, specialist workers would be available to provide back up on mental health/dependency issues. One such service being developed is for those identified as being high risk (to themselves or to others).*
> (Local authority respondent, email – England)

> *Floating support is of equal importance for all levels of need and we currently have claims ranging from 1.25 hours to 49.5 hours per week. There is also a pending case for approximately 68 hours per week, but this has yet to be finalised.*
> (Local authority respondent, email – Scotland)

> *What is problematic is not the level of support but the fact that it can only be provided to the householder. What about adult children with learning difficulties or mental health problems? Low level support to them before the death of their parents could assist them in managing on their own afterwards.*
> (Local authority respondent, interview – Scotland)

There is some concern that floating support, as a politically soft option and the current 'blueprint model', is expected to cater for all comers. A number of respondents pointed out that there could be some casualties of this approach, especially as the discernible trend is for the referral of people with increasingly complex needs. One of the dangers is that people will be offered an inadequate level of support but that this will not be picked up, due to their relative invisibility in the community, unless they are involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. On the other side of the coin, several respondents said that floating support was the preferred model for people in high risk groups, although to do it well would cost more in revenue terms, as it was more anonymous, safer and less stigmatising.

Support activities not well covered by floating support

The capacity and ability of floating support services to help people overcome isolation and develop informal social contacts is a concern. Levels of funding, staff knowledge and skills, housing location and the flexibility of the service (e.g. in providing out of hours support) are all relevant here. The role of support in helping people to gain access to other services and make use of local facilities and resources has to be clear in service specifications.

Groups for which new supported housing is required

The concept of staged accommodation, where individuals move through a service (or between services) as they develop skills and deal with the problems which have led them to fail in the past, is seen as still highly relevant by many providers and commissioners. Supported housing can act as a bridge between large institutions and independent tenancies. The groups concerned may include: people with substance abuse problems; repeat offenders and those leaving prison; people leaving institutions; those moving away from the parental home; and young homeless people. Where people have chaotic lifestyles or specific behaviour issues to address, or where they have had little independence in the past, they simply may not be

ready to live in the unstructured environment of their own housing, with all its attendant costs, risks and responsibilities.

> *Some people with alcohol problems benefit from mutual support and new social relationships in shared housing; staff are there to facilitate a therapeutic environment; given long drinking careers and huge personal losses, people may need 1–2 years in such accommodation.*
> (Provider respondent, interview – England)

One respondent expressed the view that the service reviews planned for 2003–2006 are 'more about structural change than service quality'. Others agreed, saying that the reviews would be an important means of re-focusing services and that they would like to see the review process taking place in partnership with providers, using Best Value reviews as a model. Others disagreed with the view that the service reviews would trigger substantial change and felt that there would be little scope for significant shifts in the pattern of provision within the first few years.

Several respondents felt that there was complacency, or perhaps naivety, among local commissioners with regard to the commitment of supported housing providers and especially the large, general needs associations. They pointed out that the latter work to thirty-year time frames, which do not sit easily with three-year revenue funding agreements. For some, supported housing is a small and high risk element. They may not be willing to re-shape services as called for by service reviews and may in some cases decide to withdraw the service and realise their asset. While many of the local authority respondents did not seem to have the capital side of service development at the forefront of their minds, one or two commented on the additional difficulties in developing new supported housing where there is no longer an alignment between revenue and capital funding.

The convergence of good practice in supported housing and good business thinking on the part of housing providers suggests that they should develop new supported housing which can be returned to general use, if no longer required for the specific purpose. This includes models of small-scale clustered self-contained housing which could also appeal (and offer greater choice) to some of the growing number of single people within the general population.

7 Looking forward to Supporting People? Conclusions

This review has drawn on the knowledge, views and experiences of those directly involved in designing, planning and implementing Supporting People, both locally and centrally. Given the 'review' nature of the project, each chapter of the report contains detailed conclusions on the 'fit' between policy and practice, as well as ideas, proposals and recommendations on how things can move forward in line with the aims and objectives of the programme. The final chapter highlights key conclusions of the review as they relate to the policy context and each of the four selected themes.

Policy objectives and priorities (chapter 2)

The twin aims of improving the quality of housing-related support services and developing more, and more effective, provision for people in the 'marginal' groups have been expressed in many Government policy statements on Supporting People over the past five years. While the actual funding transfer arrangements differ in England, Scotland and Wales, there is concern that budgets will not stretch to making serious inroads into developing services for marginal groups and that progress will be unacceptably slow. It is not a case of simply extending existing services, as many of the individuals concerned will have higher needs than current service users. It will require the development of partnerships between generic and specialist services and the acquiring of new staff skills. Providers will also be working in a climate of higher management and financial risk and service commissioners will need to create a framework which takes account of this, without stifling innovation.

Another obstacle to effective service development is the 'left-over' regulation (explicit in Scotland and Wales and implicit in England) that housing-related support be provided to the householder or tenant and not to other members of the household. Many people who come within the marginal groups are non-householders, either because they are homeless or because they are living with others while wanting to live more independently. This rule will restrict the ability of the Supporting People programme to fulfil its preventative function.

Services for marginal and high risk groups (chapter 3)

There has been little clarity about who comes into the 'marginal' groups, with different examples attached to different statements and varying interpretations at local level. In order to refine a more strategic approach towards these groups and gain understanding of the kinds of marginality or risk involved, the report suggests four categories or sub-groupings. These are:

- people with 'complex needs', who are likely to need support from more than one source

- people who are 'hard to reach', in that they are resistant to services or perhaps have been excluded from services

- people who are 'high risk', in that they could pose a danger to others or to themselves *or* may be at risk from others

- people who are remote from services and 'hard to find'.

These categories offer a conceptual platform for carrying out more systematic needs assessment and designing services. Proper and well-founded needs analysis is seen as especially important in the new strategic regime, as local politicians will need convincing of the necessity for action and partner authorities will be expected to commit resources to enable support services to extend their reach.

Support for people in private sector housing (chapter 4)

There is broad agreement that the cross-tenure vision is clear, that it makes sense and that it is perhaps achievable over time. There is considerable scepticism, however, about the financial capacity of Supporting People budgets to develop support services into the private sector and, in particular, to potentially large numbers of owner-occupiers. While some local authorities have begun to consider the issue and to make preliminary plans, others do not see it as of immediate concern.

There is a tension between the need to develop individual needs assessment and defined eligibility criteria on the one hand, and the policy objective of creating wider access to services and building an inclusive approach. Many people, and not only those in private accommodation, are put off by official formalities and processes which draw them into 'the system' and define them in ways they consider stigmatising or unhelpful. There is a need for a 'light touch', which encourages vulnerable people to make use of support services without binding them in. Some respondents expressed concern that Supporting People has shifted towards an eligibility-focused, community-care type approach and that this will be reinforced if budgets are tight and financial pressures mount.

New kinds of services and models of support (chapter 5)

The issue of whether housing-related support can be delivered in different service contexts and locations, as well as to individuals in their home, is contentious. Local authorities and providers have widely varying interpretations of what is possible or desirable. The principle of providing support in new ways is seen as reasonable but there is concern that it will blur the boundaries of Supporting People and cause it to lose its distinctive identity. There could be increased competition among providers as more

organisations seek to define themselves as falling within the programme, or other funding authorities reduce or withdraw grants. On the other hand, it could be a valuable opportunity to open up services, particularly with regard to delivering social support and addressing the inclusion objectives of the programme. Some individuals, and especially those who are most isolated, need networks of support, as well as a support worker.

Supporting People has not addressed many of the issues around the widening of access to support services. For example, many people in the hard to reach, high risk and hard to find groups will need specific initial encouragement to engage with services. They may not be ready for an individual support plan or a formal needs assessment. The funding of designated 'access support' services under Supporting People should be explored, as a way of encouraging into the programme vulnerable people who would otherwise not be eligible or would not find it acceptable. At a wider level, access funding might also be provided where services plan to extend their reach and inclusiveness, e.g. into the private sector.

Future of supported housing and floating support (chapter 6)

Floating support and accommodation-based services should not be regarded as separate and mutually exclusive models within the Supporting People programme. Supported housing, especially in newly developed schemes, often provides fully self-contained accommodation, which may or may not be all on one site. It may neither look nor feel like a 'specialist' scheme and may, in some cases, simply consist of a number of designated homes within a larger, general needs development. As the established trend towards self-contained supported housing continues, the scope for providers to 'detach' particular properties from support services, when the tenants no longer need support, will also increase.

Floating support can offer both low intensity and high level support and, at its optimum, it should be able to respond to the fluctuating needs of individual service users. In practice, however, it can be very difficult to obtain funding for high support. Where the funding is available, statutory commissioners can be unrealistic about the capacity of the service to meet the needs. There is concern that floating support, as a relatively soft option in political terms and the current 'blueprint model', is expected to cater for the full range of needs. The extent to which this model will, or should, be applied to people in the 'hard to reach' and high risk' groups in the future is a subject of much debate.

There are correspondingly diverse views on the role of supported housing in new service development. While some of the high risk and hard to reach groups are seen as highly suitable candidates for accommodation-based services with on-site support, such as small clusters of self-contained flats, there is concern about the visibility of such services and the difficulties arising from this for both service users and providers. Despite the reservations, there is a broad consensus about the need for supported housing which can act as a bridge between large institutions and independent tenancies, or which allows people to develop skills and self-confidence without having to take on all the responsibilities, costs and risks associated with independent living. It is expected that housing providers will normally want to design services which can readily be put to general needs use if no longer required.

Summary conclusion

The policy goal of extending access and improving the quality of housing and support services for people in the marginal groups is very clear. At a national level, there are various important advisory and development initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of these groups and ensuring that they establish and retain a central position within the Supporting People programme. At a local level, where the main focus of attention to date has necessarily been on the arrangements for transferring funds and agreeing contracts for services, many of the practical and 'political' implications have yet to be confronted. There is strong awareness of these priorities and a wish to pursue them, coupled with concern that the scope to bring in the required changes and developments will be seriously restricted, at least in the short to medium term.

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