

Supporting People

How the recent changes are affecting Supporting People services

During the first year of the programme, Supporting People funding was used to support 140,207 individuals in Scotland.

In October 2004, the Minister for Communities announced a number of changes to the Supporting People funding stream. These changes mean that:

- The overall Scottish budget for Supporting People will have been reduced by about £25M by 2007-08.
- The share of the overall budget allocated to each local authority area has been radically revised, with local budgets in some areas being reduced by up to 25% over the next three years. This reallocation was based on statistics relating to disability, homelessness, older people and deprivation, but with no reference to the individuals already supported by the programme in these areas.

The Scottish Executive maintains that budget reductions can be achieved through efficiency savings, and that existing services can be maintained despite the changes. Voluntary organisations share the Executive's aspiration to protect services, however they believe that such significant reductions will inevitably have an impact on services.

Voluntary organisations have so far managed to maintain services, but this has not always been easy.

Despite inflationary pressures on staffing and other costs, most providers have received no increase to their service budgets since the Supporting People programme was first introduced.

In addition, a range of new cost burdens have arisen since the introduction of the programme - for example, Care Commission registration fees - which were not built into original budgets.

This is only the first year of the projected three-year schedule of budget reductions. Voluntary organisations anticipate serious problems as the budget reduction schedule continues.

Alan's story

Alan took up a placement in a supported tenancy provided by a voluntary organisation in August 2004. He had never had his own home before and had spent most of his adult life in homeless accommodation.

Due to a long term addiction to alcohol, Alan led a chaotic lifestyle and developed serious physical health issues including pancreatic disease. He had little structure in his life and was unable to maintain contact with his son.

Making the transition into a housing support service, funded by Supporting People, presented a whole range of difficulties for Alan and the first six weeks were particularly challenging. He was unable to accept support, or to believe that people cared about his feelings or views, as he had never experienced this before.

Over time, with continued staff contact, trust was established with his keyworker and he was able to begin to take responsibility for his own life. He identified three goals: regular contact with his son, getting his own tenancy and dealing with his alcohol problems.

Although some setbacks were experienced, he now has formal contact arrangements with his son. He has been alcohol-free for 9 months and receives help with this. He also has a full mainstream tenancy - his first permanent home - with housing support to help him settle.

Alan views his experience as so positive that he now wishes to be involved in service user meetings where he can share his experiences.

Dealing with budget reductions: establishing principles

Voluntary organisations recognise that local authorities are themselves facing major challenges in managing the budget reductions. They believe that both voluntary and statutory agencies must work together to protect existing services and to maintain the level of support now provided to individuals.

Accordingly, voluntary organisations propose the following set of principles to guide those managing the programme:

Protecting individuals

- **No across-the-board cuts.** If cuts are necessary, either to budgets or to services, they should only be made after an assessment (or re-assessment) of an individual's support needs. Some authorities have already written to voluntary organisations proposing an across-the-board percentage cut to all services and all providers, without regard to the circumstances of the people supported by services. This is in direct opposition both to Scottish Executive guidance and to the guiding principles of the Supporting People programme.

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- **Communicating with people who use services.** Local authorities and voluntary organisations need to agree a protocol on how people currently supported under the programme are to be notified, and by whom, of any reduction in or withdrawal of service. It is unreasonable to expect voluntary organisations to 'front' reductions in service on behalf of government agencies.

Ensuring equity

- **Treating all services, and all service providers, equitably.** Supporting People services are provided by a 'mixed economy' of organisations, including voluntary organisations, housing associations and private companies. Local authorities, too, provide services directly, as well as contracting with these independent providers. In managing the cuts, it is crucial that authorities do not impose conditions on independent providers that will not apply to their own services.

Alice's story

Alice is 49 years old. She receives a service from a voluntary organisation funded by Supporting People.

Before receiving the service, Alice was drinking heavily. She had a chaotic lifestyle, poor physical and mental health and problems with memory and confusion. Alice's teenage daughter was in care because the situation at home was too difficult.

A year later, Alice has been alcohol-free for 8 months. Her home environment has improved vastly and she has been supported to deal with her debts. Her health and memory have greatly improved. Most days she gets out of the house, with support, and is now looking at local college courses. Alice's daughter is back at home with her mum.

- **Fair treatment of housing support staff.** Local authorities' directly-employed housing support staff enjoy protected rights to nationally agreed salary rates, terms and conditions, including annual inflationary salary increases (2.95% in 04/05 and 05/06). These same authorities, however, do not fund equivalent salary uplifts for housing support staff employed by their contracted providers. This is a matter of particular concern where local authority staff salary uplifts are funded from within the Supporting People budget. Central and local government cannot expect voluntary organisations to treat their staff unfairly in pursuit of budget reductions, particularly where those reductions are required in order to fund salary increases in the public sector.
- **Open and transparent cost comparisons.** It is very important that funding decisions are open to scrutiny and clearly justifiable. Several authorities are conducting 'cost comparison' exercises between services; they must include their own costs in these exercises, and they must be seen to be doing so. Authorities should also guard against setting uniform

A view from Scotland's voluntary organisations

'hourly rates' for a wide spectrum of services, taking no account of the differences in individuals' support needs.

- **Recognition that budget cuts are likely to result in service cuts.** Voluntary organisations are committed to work with local authorities to seek efficiency savings wherever these can be made. However, many voluntary organisations are already struggling to maintain services on unrealistic budgets, and further reductions may result in commensurate cuts to the level or volume of service. It is unreasonable to expect the same amount of service for a reduced amount of funding.

A 'joined-up' approach

- **A corporate approach to funding services.** Wherever possible, other funding streams should be brought to bear to protect services. Voluntary organisations are aware that significant savings were made to community care budgets in some local areas by the introduction of the Supporting People programme, and these savings may now need to be redeployed. This principle is equally appropriate for central government: the contribution made by Supporting People services to wider objectives relating to social inclusion and longer-term efficiencies warrants support for the programme from other areas of the public service budget.
- **Proportionality in control and reporting requirements.** Whilst budgets are being reduced, the requirements being placed on voluntary organisations to report on performance and account for funding are increasing exponentially. The reporting requirements of local authorities and regulatory bodies in particular require much greater co-ordination.

Morag's story

Morag is a young woman with significant learning disabilities who, in January 2003, was living in supported accommodation for young, single mums. Her 18 month old son, Jaime, was in foster care and her partner and Jaime's father (Bob) was homeless and sleeping on his sister's couch.

The local authority wanted to help the family get back together in their own home. The first step was for a voluntary sector support provider to begin to establish a relationship with both Morag and her partner prior to the move to their own house.

Morag was receiving support in her supported accommodation around budgeting, shopping and parenting, and the couple also had regular input from a play therapist to enable them to interact better with their son.

When housing was secured, through a local housing association, the housing support provider was asked to increase support and the couple moved in at the end of October 2003.

Social Work returned Jaime to his mum and dad in the middle of November. A phased return had previously been discussed but Social Work decided, as Morag and Bob were coping so well with the support package, that Jaime should be returned immediately.

Housing support helps the family with budgeting and paying bills; shopping, menu planning and cooking; help with benefits; making appointments; and practical household tasks. The family were coping so well that everyone agreed that the number of hours support provided could be reduced.

Jaime was recently diagnosed as having a learning disability, placing extra pressure on his parents, and as such the housing support provider is now working alongside the Family Liaison Officer.

National action for Supporting People

The principles outlined overleaf relate chiefly to the way in which budget cuts locally should be handled. Voluntary organisations believe that action must also be taken at a national level to ensure the continued success of this vital programme.

- **Increasing the Scottish Supporting People budget.** The Supporting People programme was originally costed on the basis of individual claims for Transitional Housing Benefit. Regardless of the merits or flaws of that costing method, the fact remains that every penny of the total was committed to individuals. The success of the programme, for those individuals, is therefore dependent on the total cost being honoured in the budget and uplifted appropriately for inflation, and with the agreed 'pipeline' schemes fully funded. This would result in a budget for 2007-08 of more than £473M, not including the resources anticipated for the agreed pipeline schemes. Now, the projected budget for the same year is only just over £401M, leaving a shortfall of more than £70M. This shortfall must be addressed in the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
- **Ensuring equitable resource distribution.** Many of the proposed principles listed relate to the need to ensure that all services, and service

providers, are treated fairly and equitably. If local authorities fail to subscribe to this principle, the Scottish Executive must intervene. Otherwise people who use publicly-funded services provided by voluntary organisations will either have their support subsidised by that organisation's non-statutory resources, or, where no such resources are available, will be supported by a service which is significantly under-funded by comparison with similar services provided by local authorities directly. Neither of these alternatives should be acceptable in a publicly-funded system based on equity.

- **Protection of Supporting People as a distinct funding stream.** Housing support makes a unique contribution to the panoply of services for people affected by disability, mental health problems, addiction, homelessness and other challenges. Funding for this type of support must be protected, and not be merged or amalgamated with more general 'care' budgets. Experience shows that where 'preventative' service budgets are not protected, resources are diverted towards more acute or high-dependency services. In the case of Supporting People, this would jeopardise the guiding principles of the programme and undermine many of the Scottish Executive's broader policy objectives and longer-term efficiency gains.

The need for local principles and national action

Voluntary organisations fear that if these principles are not adopted, and the national action points not agreed, then the consequences will be serious:

- **Services will be lost.** Individuals will lose the support that is so vital to their independence and inclusion. They may have to enter residential care, or go to hospital; they may become homeless.
- **Scottish Executive priorities will be undermined.** Targets set for learning disability hospital closure, homelessness reduction, hospital admissions reduction and efficiency gains are unlikely to be met.

- **The 'Aiming for Excellence' agenda will be seriously compromised.** Significant resources have been invested over a number of years in strategies and targets for quality improvement in care and support services and staff, through the activities of the Care Commission, the National Care Standards and the Scottish Social Services Council. Few of these strategies and targets will be achievable for housing support services, unless adequate funding is made available.

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What voluntary organisations are asking you to do

Voluntary organisations believe in the Supporting People programme and want to see it work. They suggest that local authorities, central government, the Scottish Parliament, regulatory bodies and other relevant agencies share, with them, the responsibility to protect and support this crucial programme that supports so many individuals.

The voluntary sector vision for Supporting People is of a service that offers early, timely and cost effective support to individuals, promoting independence and social inclusion, and preventing more serious problems developing.

Voluntary organisations invite readers of this pamphlet to:

- **Share this vision**
- **Sign up to these principles**
- **Press for national action.**

This document was produced by CCPS and endorsed by SFHA (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) and SCVO (Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations).

Community Care Providers Scotland (CCPS) is the association of voluntary sector organisations. Its membership comprises all the major charitable and voluntary providers of social care services in Scotland. Information about the aims, activities and membership of CCPS can be found on our website at www.ccpscotland.org.

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A view from Scotland's voluntary organisations

Supporting People and the voluntary sector

The Scottish voluntary sector has a long tradition of offering support to people who face difficulties because of disability, mental health problems, addiction, homelessness and a range of other challenges.

Voluntary organisations specialise in providing the kind of support that enables people affected by these difficulties to access, and live in, their own homes, retain control over their lives and avoid their problems escalating, to the point where they need residential or even hospital care, become homeless, or become susceptible to the risk of offending.

The Supporting People programme was introduced in 2003 to fund precisely this kind of support. The programme funds 'housing support', defined in legislation as a service which provides "support, assistance, advice or counselling...with a view to enabling [a] person to occupy residential accommodation".¹

This close connection between the purpose of the Supporting People programme and the type of work at which the voluntary sector excels explains why voluntary sector organisations - including the housing association movement - are responsible for almost two-thirds of the Supporting People budget for Scotland.²

Over the past year, a number of significant changes have been made to the Supporting People budget. These changes are likely to have profound implications for the voluntary sector's ability to continue to offer support services. This pamphlet is intended to

highlight the value and importance of these services, and to alert those with an interest in or responsibility for the programme to the implications of the changes now being made.

Why Supporting People is important

Voluntary organisations believe that the services funded by Supporting People play a crucial part in the spectrum of public services in Scotland.

- Supporting People services help people to access and stay in their own homes, as tenants or owners, promoting social inclusion and independent living
- Supporting People services are funded by a specific, protected budget, clearly targeted at housing support and distinct from budgets relating to acute services or residential care
- Supporting People services help to fulfil the Scottish Executive's aspirations to efficient government, by promoting and enabling early intervention and preventing inappropriate hospital admissions³
- Supporting People funding contributes to the success of a range of linked government initiatives, for example increasing the number of people with learning disabilities with their own tenancies⁴
- Supporting People funding enables voluntary organisations to develop and provide creative and innovative service solutions for some of Scotland's most socially excluded people.

1 Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001
2 See Analysis of funding arrangements for Supporting People: Final Report, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Scottish Executive June 2004
3 See Building a better Scotland, Efficient government - securing efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, Scottish Executive 2004
4 See The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities, Scottish Executive May 2000, and subsequent progress reports