

Housing Support Forum
Local Authority Supporting People Lead Officers

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Your ref:
Our ref:
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Dear Colleagues

GUIDANCE ON END OF THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

Further to my letters of 20 November (following the concordat announcement) and 8 January (on national outcomes and indicators), and in reaction to suggestions from the SP Forum group and the SP Lead Officer's group, this letter seeks to provide guidance on a number of issues raised with the Scottish Government by these two groups, or at the series of regional events organised earlier this year by the Housing Support Enabling Unit. I hope it covers all the areas on which stakeholders sought clarity, but we will be happy to answer any further questions colleagues may have about future arrangements.

I would firstly like to take the opportunity to thank all councils and service providers for their continued co-operation in providing us with the information we need in relation to the use of SP funding in 2007-08 (financial returns / annual client stats etc) to enable us to close the programme down in good order. Your co-operation in achieving that is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank everyone for the tremendous work done to help many thousands of vulnerable people over the last few years through the SP programme. The final issue of the *Supporting People Matters* newsletter sought, rightly, to celebrate the achievements of local authorities, the voluntary sector and private providers in helping vulnerable people, while indicating the case for providing local authorities with greater flexibilities to improve support for those most in need in the future.

The rolling up of the Supporting People funding stream in effect means that all the guidance previously associated with the funding stream is now overtaken and is no longer relevant. Our new web address is www.scotland.gov.uk/housing-support

The main purpose in writing, however, is to give guidance on some of the key issues you have raised with us, as we have engaged with stakeholders over the last few months on the transition to the new arrangements:

1. Does the Scottish Government still believe in the value of housing support?

- Definitely. The consultancy work undertaken by Tribal confirmed that savings of £441 million were generated from £401m of expenditure on housing support. Overall, therefore, every pound invested generated savings of £1.10 elsewhere though avoided costs, notably on community care and NHS budgets, and in relation to homelessness and crime. The research also emphasised there were very significant quality of life benefits for individual clients that couldn't be quantified in financial terms, but which were nevertheless crucial to the individuals concerned.
- The Scottish Government still expects that local authorities will continue to assess the need for housing support and continue to fund the provision of housing support.
- Removal of the ring fence on SP, however, will allow more flexible support packages to be developed.
- Although there is no separate national indicator on housing support, these support services have an important role to play in delivering against several of the new national outcomes and indicators; moreover one of the suite of local indicators (no 29) issued by the Improvement Service is specifically focussed on both care and support needs.
- The Scottish Government looks forward to continuing to meet with the Housing Support Forum (formerly the Supporting People Forum) and the Lead Officers group to discuss areas of mutual interest or concern.

2. So what exactly has been rolled up into the local government settlement?

- The funding streams that became "Supporting People" the main ones were –Transitional Housing Benefit (THB), Special Needs Allowance Package (SNAP) and Resettlement grant. Other smaller streams included rent pooled support services and pipeline services. The entire baseline of £384 million was rolled up into the local government settlement announced on 13 December, but with no indicative amounts for housing support (or any other activity where the ring fence was removed).

3. What happens to charging and "protected tenants"?

- Charging policies will continue to be a matter for individual councils to decide upon, taking account of COSLA's own guidance. Decisions on whether certain categories of service user continue to be protected from charges are again a matter for each council to decide. If it were decided to make changes,

these should be communicated to service users in a transparent manner, and the written consent of clients should be secured before any changes in charging are levied.

4. Arrangements for sharing the cost of cross authority services

- The arrangements for cross authority services can be found at section 7 of folder 1 of the SP guidance.
- Link address <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/supportpeople/CrossAuthority>
- Again, decisions on whether these arrangements are changed because of the removal of the ring fence from the SP programme are a matter for each authority to decide. The original guidance is seen as best practice and we would encourage local authorities to adhere to the principles of the guidance.

5. What requirement is there for support for vulnerable people to be included in Single Outcome Agreement and what will be the consequence if local authorities do not meet the targets set in their SOAs?

- As set out in the recent Concordat between The Scottish Government and COSLA, the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) will cover all local government services in each local authority area, including support for vulnerable groups, but obviously the extent to which housing support services in particular are highlighted within SOAs may vary. Local authorities will be responsible for meeting the commitments made in their outcome agreements, and will be challenged to explain if slippage occurs in meeting agreed targets and objectives. Local authorities will be responsible for delivering the outcomes they have agreed to in their SOAs, which will be used as a basis for future discussions on delivery and performance. Also, as part of the Concordat, both sides will monitor the new arrangements going forward and discuss and agree issues relating to new policy developments

6. Will service reviews continue?

- There will not be any further specific requirement from the Scottish Government to conduct separate SP service reviews, but obviously local authorities will continue to want to monitor the services they commission and, where appropriate, conduct reviews from time to time.
- Research by the Housing Support Enabling Unit (formerly the Supporting People Enabling Unit) identified difficulties some providers have faced regarding service reviews, particularly around unclear processes, lack of transparency, delays and unclear outcomes.
- The Scottish Government recognises that such difficulties will not apply to all service reviews and that some local authorities will have completed their reviews with admirable efficiency. Local authorities are encouraged to promote good communication with providers on reviews and contract monitoring procedures, to proceed timeously with any reviews taking place, and to be mindful of the value both for them and providers in moving beyond letters of agreement and one year contracts.

- 7. Will registration and Care Commission inspections continue?**
- Providers of housing support services will continue to require to be registered with the Care Commission and to be subject to inspection by the Care Commission.
 - We would call for duplication to be avoided within any inspection, review or contract monitoring process, and strongly encourage the effective sharing of information between local authorities and the Care Commission both on the results of inspections and reviews, and the planning of future ones, so that the information requests made on providers are minimised.
- 8. Will external providers be treated the same as internal providers?**
- The Scottish Government continues to expect that local authorities will treat in house providers and external providers in a consistent way in terms of reviewing arrangements and use of tendering. Local authorities obviously need to be free to improve services and maximise efficiencies where they judge best; This will involve devising and implementing their own commissioning strategies, taking account of their own legal advice in terms of compliance with EU procurement regulations.
 - We would remind local authorities that housing support services can be considered to fall within part B services in the EU procurement regulations, which means that the service may not have to be tendered, particularly where there is an existing provider who is judged to be providing a good service in all the circumstances. Links to the factsheet and covering letter on procurement are below;

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/supportpeople/SPprocfactsheetcovlett>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Housing/Housing/supportpeople/SPprocfactsheet>

- 9. Do data protection requirements continue?**
- Yes. We would remind local authorities that any requests for personal and sensitive information relating to service users should continue to be dealt with in line with data protection principles.
- 10. What happens about former rent pooling arrangements?**
- The guidance in Folder ,1 part two, paragraph 2 contains the background and changes that occurred as a result of the introduction of Supporting People. It gives details of the expectations surrounding the protected tenant's rebate and an example of Protected Tenant's rebate is given at Annex 1 of the guidance. Paragraphs 2.9.2 to 2.9.3 detail how the protected tenants are funded.

- Paragraph 2.9.4 explains how the remaining rent pool cost retained by landlords must be used to fund improvements in the housing stock to support progress towards the Scottish Social Housing Standard.
 - It will be for individual councils to decide whether this system is altered or left unchanged.
- 11. What should be included within the contract price for housing support?**
- Contract values are expected to cover the total cost of service provision. This would include training and accreditation costs associated with workforce registration requirements where that was judged necessary and not fundable from other sources.
- 12. What about complaints / appeal procedures?**
- Difficulties experienced in commissioning services with providers may lead to providers wanting to make representations about the commissioning process if they feel the process has not been dealt with fairly or equitably. Providers should follow the local authorities grievance procedures which is available from each local authority.
- 13. What record keeping requirements continue?**
- From 1 April 2008 local authorities will no longer have to submit quarterly monitoring returns of their expenditure on Supporting People to the Scottish Government.
 - Local authorities will be required to complete the 2007-08 final quarter return and the annual Supporting People Expenditure return which is audited by Audit Scotland.
 - The annual statistical return requested by the Scottish Government Analytical Services Division for 2007-08 will still be required however the timescales for completion will be brought forward to ensure the last set of annual statistics can be published quickly. This will also minimise the risk of difficulties in publishing the returns that might result from any potential reassignment of staff following removal of the ring fence.
 - Local authorities and other stakeholders have a continuing commitment to keep the details on the “Housekey” web site www.thehousekey.org up to date.
- 14. Are strategic plans for housing support still required?**
- The new guidance on the next round of local housing strategies will confirm that local authorities continue to have a duty to assess the housing support needs in their area
 - We confirm, however, that there will not be a requirement for local authorities to produce separate strategic plans on housing support services. We do however expect that the role of housing support will feature in any internal plans in relation to homelessness, shifting the balance of care, support for people with learning disabilities or mental health needs or women at risk of domestic abuse etc
 - Councils and external providers should work closely together to implement and report on relevant activity set out in Single Outcome Agreements and develop future sets of SOAs.

- 15. Will registration with the Scottish Social Services Council continue?**
- The planned programme of registration of housing support staff with the Scottish Social Services Council continues, with registration of housing support managers due to begin from autumn 2009. Further details on the registration and accreditation requirements can be obtained from; www.sssc.uk.com
- 16. What about equalities proofing requirements?**
- Local authorities will continue to be responsible for ensuring all their policies and services meet the normal standards expected in relation to avoiding discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, age and disability etc. Housing support services will continue to promote the equalities agenda through providing vital support for a wide range of vulnerable groups including, for example, those with disabilities and women at risk of domestic abuse.
 - It will be for local authorities, however, to take whatever action they judge necessary to comply with the appropriate legislation and regulations, considering the need to keep policies under regular review and collect appropriate data in relation to race, gender, age, disability etc to assure themselves that no adverse discrimination takes place in the assessment of need and delivery of services.
- 17. What will happen following the piloting of the SP outcomes framework?**
- The final evaluation report on the pilots has been delayed slightly but we expect to receive it very soon. We look forward to discussing it with the Research Advisory Group later this month and will let you know after that what further action, if any, is agreed.

I hope this further transitional guidance is helpful. Once again I would like to thank you for your co-operation on a wide range of issues in relation to housing support over the past years.

I am now taking on overall responsibility for the Homelessness and Homepoint functions in the restructured Housing and Regeneration Directorate, but look forward to continuing to work with you all on policy issues in relation to housing support. Please let me know if you feel further guidance on any aspect in relation to the transition from Supporting People is required.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Sandham

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