
Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods)

Date: 8th September 2008

Subject: Update on the Supporting People Programme

Electoral Wards Affected:

☐ Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity ☐

Community Cohesion ☐

Narrowing the Gap ☐

Eligible for Call In

☐

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supporting People is the national programme for funding and commissioning supported housing services for vulnerable people. The programme aims to assist vulnerable people to ultimately live independently in the wider community through the provision of high quality, strategically planned, complementary housing support services. The programme also aims to ensure that such services deliver value for money.

Leeds City Council administers the Supporting People programme on behalf of a partnership which comprises of the Council, Health and Probation. The Supporting People team, which administers the programme on a day to day basis, sits within the Housing Services Division of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate.

The Supporting People programme in Leeds was subject to an Audit Commission inspection in January 2007. The Audit Commission concluded that Leeds City Council was administering a fair (one star) programme with promising prospects for improvement.

The Audit Commission Inspection Report sets out six key service improvement recommendations for the Council to implement.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Board members of progress against the service improvement recommendations made by the Audit Commission following the inspection of the Supporting People programme in January 2007.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Supporting People is the national programme for funding and commissioning supported housing services for vulnerable people. The programme aims to assist vulnerable people to ultimately live independently in the wider community through the provision of high quality, strategically planned, complementary housing support services. The programme also aims to ensure that such services deliver value for money.
- 2.2 The programme covers a wide range of supported housing services ranging from the provision of a warden service in sheltered housing schemes to the provision of permanently staffed direct access hostel accommodation for homeless households. The Supporting People programme only funds housing support services; activity that is defined as being social care or housing management is ineligible for funding.
- 2.3 The Council administers the programme on behalf of a partnership which comprises of the Council, Health and Probation. The Housing Strategy and Commissioning section, which administers the programme on a day to day basis, sits within the Housing Services Division of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate.
- 2.4 The partnership manages the programme through a Commissioning Body. All decisions relating to the management of the programme need to be considered and ratified by the Commissioning Body. All decisions made by the Commissioning Body need to be unanimous and each partner body have equal voting rights
- 2.5 The Audit Commission Inspection took place between the 8th of January and the 12th of January 2007. The scope of the inspection related to the capacity of the Council to administer the Supporting People programme rather than the effectiveness of the wider Supporting People Partnership.
- 2.6 The Audit Commission concluded that Leeds City Council administers a 'fair' one star Supporting People programme which has 'promising prospects' for improvement.
- 2.7 The Audit Commission made six key service improvement recommendations for the Council to implement. These were as follows:
- 2.7.1 Address identified gaps in service provision through new commissioning
- 2.7.2 Continue to improve service user involvement in programme development
- 2.7.3 Improve the availability of information relating to the programme
- 2.7.4 Improve strategic planning relating to the programme
- 2.7.5 Ensure that all services are subjected to a rigorous eligibility and value for money assessment and ensure that arrangements for withdrawing identified ineligible funding are implemented more swiftly

2.7.6 Improve governance and delivery arrangements relating to the programme.

3.0 Gaps in Service provision

- 3.1 The Audit Commission indicated that they would expect Leeds City Council to commission new services to address service gaps identified in the original Leeds Supporting People strategy. The identified service gaps related to addressing the housing support needs of refugees, Gypsies and Travellers, people with life affecting illnesses, people with substance related issues and people with physical and sensory impairments. The Audit Commission anticipated that such new commissioning could be funded through the release of funding that is currently used to fund ineligible services –please see section 7.
- 3.2 Since the Audit Commission inspection the Communities and Local Government Department have notified all Supporting People Administering Authorities of the grant settlement for the period 2008/09 to 2010/2011. The grant settlement for Leeds has been frozen at £32.9m for the next two years and is reduced by £1m in 2010/2011. Whilst the grant settlement has been made the Environment and Neighbourhood Directorate is mindful that the costs incurred by service providers will increase on an on-going basis. Therefore a decision was taken to award all providers an inflationary uplift to their current contract values of 2.4% in 2008/2009. The cost of making the inflationary uplift is in excess of £750K for 2008/2009.
- 3.3 The cash limited nature of Supporting People funding means that the Council will invariably have restricted capacity to commission new services to address unmet need and that decisions will need to be made as to what the priorities for new commissioning should be.
- 3.4 The Local Government White Paper ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’ seeks to promote the capacity of Local Authorities to determine local improvement priorities and seeks to grant greater discretion to Local Authorities on how these priorities are to be realised. Decisions relating to future commissioning need to reflect the strategic outcomes/improvement priorities set out within the Leeds Strategic Plan and with the priority improvement targets set out within the Local Area Agreement.
- 3.5 The Leeds Strategic Plan includes a strategic outcome relating to ‘reducing crime and fear of crime through prevention, detection, offender management and changing behaviours’. It is understood that unstable housing is often a contributory factor leading to criminal behaviour. Consequently, it has been agreed that the Supporting People programme should commission three housing related support services, as part of a wider programme of Offender Management Services, which are designed to reduce incidences of criminal behaviour. The cost of these services is 620k and this leaves the Council with limited current capacity to commission other new services.
- 3.6 The development of Offender Management Services will respond to the unmet need relating to housing related support services for people with substance related issues as offending behaviour is often linked to drug usage. The three existing Supporting People contracts for refugees have been awarded additional funding of 220k for 2008/09 to respond to the Case Resolution programme.
- 3.7 The Supporting Commissioning agreed to fund two services, previously funded through POPPs (Partnerships for Older Peoples Projects), for older people with mental health issues, who require support to prevent them from being admitted to hospital, or following hospital discharge. The annual cost of these services is 360k in

2008/09. The Supporting People Commissioning Body has also increased the funding given to NRASS, an organisation providing floating housing support for people with at least one sensory impairment, to ensure that the service would continue, after it encountered financial problems that could have resulted in the service folding.

- 3.8 The commissioning of additional housing related support services for gypsies and travellers has been deferred, pending the publication of the findings of the West Yorkshire Gypsy Travellers Needs Review.
- 3.9 Commissioning Body has recently agreed to fund on a short term basis a range of services with a view to longer term commitment should funding allow. This is possible as a cash surplus exists due to under-utilisation within some contracts and through efficiency savings. Services to be commissioned include housing support to care leavers; a service to work with young offenders; funding towards the Family Intervention Project working to support families to remain in their tenancies; housing support elements of the established Neighbourhood Networks across the city supporting older people to live independently and a service to prevent homelessness by supporting people to find and sustain accommodation within the private rented sector. With all these services consideration has been made to exit strategies should funding not be available in the future. The majority of the services are to be commissioned in partnership with Adult Social Care, Children's Service, Safer Leeds or the Leeds Primary Care Trust.

4.0 Service User Involvement

- 4.1 Service user representatives are now invited to the Core Strategy Group and are therefore able to influence and contribute to the strategic development and delivery of the programme. Service user representation will also be invited to contribute to impending competitive tender exercises. For example, representatives from the Leeds Tenants Federation will be invited to take part in tendering work relating to sheltered housing provision in 2008/09.
- 4.2 Service user consultation continues to be a key component of the contract management of services within the programme. Service users are asked for feedback on the quality of services provided as part of validation visits and officers survey service users and attend focus groups to ensure that the views of service users are represented within the review of service considered by Commissioning Body.

5.0 Availability of Customer Information

- 5.1 A prototype on-line directory of Supporting People commissioned services has been developed and testing is currently being carried out and adjustments made as required. It is estimated that the directory will be operational by the end of September 2008.
- 5.2 Additionally a review of information available for housing services is to be undertaken. This will include specific information relating to the housing related support. It is important that this review ensures that consistent and concise information is available to customers and as such work will be undertaken with Adult Social Care and Children's Services to join up information available.

6.0 Sector Wide Reviews

- 6.1 The Supporting People Commissioning Body have agreed that it would not be appropriate to carry out separate sector wide reviews for each Supporting People client group and that issues relating to supported housing should be built into wider service area reviews that are being carried out in the city. For example, issues related to the supported housing needs of people with drug and alcohol issues are being factored into the wider strategic profiling work that is being carried out by Safer Leeds.
- 6.2 The Leeds Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which is being undertaken by the council in partnership with the Leeds Primary Care Trust will provide valuable information to inform service area reviews and the Supporting People programme is contributing to the assessment.

7.0 Retraction Plan

- 7.1 Feedback from the Audit Commission indicated that the service improvement recommendation relating to the retraction of ineligible funding (paragraph 2.7.5) was the key priority for action. The Audit Commission concluded that the existing arrangements for establishing the value of Supporting People funding for learning disability and specific mental health services needed to be reviewed and the process for withdrawing ineligible funding to such services needed to be completed by the end of 2009/2010.
- 7.2 This recommendation represented a high risk to the Council as it was considered that the swifter withdrawal of funding from Adult Social Care managed services could inhibit the capacity of the Council to continue to deliver priority services for vulnerable people.
- 7.3 A project team, consisting of officers from Housing Strategy and Commissioning and Adult Social Care, was established to undertake the review of the 54 affected services. The project team established the eligible funding value for each specific service. It was established that £3.8m worth of ineligible funding would need to be retracted from these services by the end of 2009/2010.
- 7.4 The Supporting People Commissioning Body ratified the updated retraction arrangements and agreement was reached with Adult Social Care that £1.7m would be retracted in 2008/2009 with the remaining £2.1m being withdrawn during 2009/2010. The funding to be retracted in 2008/2009 relates to Adult Social Care managed services with external services being dealt with in the following year.
- 7.5 The retraction of ineligible funding will not impact upon the provision of services, and therefore individual service users, as alternative funding to maintain the existing levels of service provision has been put in place by Adult Social Care.

8.0 Supporting People Programme Governance Arrangements

- 8.1 The Audit Commission recommended that improvements were made to the way Supporting People stakeholders could contribute to the delivery and development of the programme.
- 8.2 The programme's governance structure is tiered to ensure that the views and aspirations of service users and service providers are considered within decision

making. This governance has been strengthened. Membership of the Core Strategy Group (which includes representatives of all key stakeholders including providers and service users) has been augmented with representation from the Leeds ALMOs, Safer Leeds, Youth Offending service, Children's Services and Jobs and Skills. Members of the Core Strategy Group also now sit in an observatory capacity at Commissioning Body. These representatives are charged with creating more effective links between the Supporting People Provider Forum, Core Strategy Group and the Commissioning Body.

9.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

- 9.1 The Housing Strategy and Commissioning section have prepared the statement of grant usage for 2007/08 that was submitted to the CLG. The statement was ratified by the Council's Internal Audit section and the Supporting People Commissioning Body prior to submission. The statement specified the value of ineligible spend in 2007/08 and gave updated details of retraction arrangements. No feedback, indicating any concerns, has been received from the CLG.
- 9.2 The Council has to date received no communication with an Audit Commission Relationship Manager. However, it is assumed that the Audit Commission will require a progress update at some point.
- 9.3 The Supporting People Commissioning Body has agreed that decisions relating to service commissioning will be made within the context of the Leeds Strategic Plan and the Leeds Local Area Agreement.

10.0 Legal and Resource Implications

- 10.1 The Environment and Neighbourhoods and Adult Social Care Directorate were aware that any changes to the original retraction arrangements would have significant financial implications for the Council. Concurrent to the development of the revised retraction arrangements, work has been carried out between the Housing Strategy and Commissioning section and Adult Social Care to maximise the income that can be generated by Adult Social Care within the existing Supporting People contracts held by the Directorate.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 Significant progress has been made to fulfill the action points for service improvement set out by the Audit Commission. However it is recognised that the emerging policy agenda relating to the Leeds Strategic Plan and the Leeds Local Area Agreement will impact upon the future direction of the Supporting People programme and specifically on how the Supporting People partnership decides to use funding to commission new services to meet the city's strategic objectives.

12.0 Recommendation

- 12.1 To note the contents of this report.