



Independence and Opportunity

Our Strategy for Supporting People



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

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Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236
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Textphone: 0870 1207 405
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or online via the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

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Ministerial Foreword

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

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

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

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

The strategy focuses on four key areas:

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

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

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

Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Keeping people that need services at the heart of the Programme

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

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

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

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

Enhancing partnership with the Third Sector

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

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

The Office of the Third Sector recognise in their action plan,² the work Supporting People has already done to engage the Third Sector. We will continue to work with the Office of the Third Sector as they take forward this work.

We will commit to:

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

² Partnership in Public Services, Cabinet Office, 2006.

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

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

Delivering in the new Local Government landscape

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

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

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

In addition we will:

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

Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

1. Our Vision for Supporting People

Supporting Independence and Opportunity

- 1.1 The Government is committed to making sure that every citizen has the opportunity to live a fulfilled, active and independent life.
- 1.2 Having the right housing available at the right time is an essential part of meeting this commitment. That is why we have maintained a focus on the important role of housing in increasing opportunity and improving quality of life.
- 1.3 Our Decent Homes initiative is ensuring that homes across the public, social and private sectors are safe, secure and warm. Programmes like the Disabled Facilities Grant and Warm Front are helping people to make the necessary, practical changes they need to have the right home environment.
- 1.4 But while having a safe, warm, decent home is important, having a stable home, is also an essential requirement for each individual's general well-being and peace of mind.
- 1.5 Everyone needs a stable roof over their head, in order to keep or find a job, build a social network, or participate in a range of other opportunities. If they are worrying about where they will live, the worry and disruption can easily prevent them from accessing opportunities in the first place, and could even cause the loss of their current job or existing social networks.
- 1.6 These problems and uncertainties can affect any one of us, but it is most likely to happen to the more vulnerable or disadvantaged members of our society. Often, assistance at the right time can prevent a full-scale, long-term crisis.
- 1.7 That's where our Supporting People programme comes in. Supporting People ensures that individuals:
 - Have the life skills they need to live independently, such as cooking and budgeting.
 - Are given support in gaining and maintaining settled accommodation.
 - Are given help to identify training and job opportunities.
 - Are able to access necessary utility services they need in their home, such as gas and electricity.
 - Are given help to claim the right benefits.
 - Are given the help they need to ensure that their existing accommodation continues to meet their accessibility and/or safety needs.

Why we needed to introduce the Supporting People programme

- 1.8 The Government created the Supporting People programme in 2003. It did away with the then confusing array of funding and commissioning arrangements and brought together innovation in service delivery from providers in the Third, public and private sectors with the strategic direction and vision of local commissioning partnerships between local authorities, health and the probation service. The programme is supported and implemented through local authority systems and structures.

Supporting People's success story

- 1.9 In the four years since it was launched, Supporting People has delivered real improvements on the ground, and its success has been recognised by the Audit Commission's 2005 report on the Programme.
- 1.10 Work has been undertaken to evaluate the financial benefits of the programme. Emerging findings suggest that there are savings to be made to the public purse in housing, health, social services and criminal justice. We will publish a report of the findings later in the year.
- 1.11 There is also a growing body of evidence that suggests that Supporting People makes a real positive economic impact.
- 1.12 More than a million people a year are benefiting from better, more user focused services and stronger partnerships brought about by Supporting People.
- 1.13 Home Improvement Agencies, which help people, mostly older homeowners to make their homes more accessible by arranging adaptations and improvements to their property, are now working in 92% of local authority areas – up from 54% in 1999.
- 1.14 The support available for survivors of domestic violence and for teenage parents has also increased significantly over the life of the programme, with much greater use being made of housing related support, creating services which can help individuals effectively.
- 1.15 By continuing to improve the operational and strategic links between the various agencies and partners, Supporting People is ensuring that the right help is getting to the right people, more quickly and effectively, and at the right time. Part of this central government role is the accumulation and dissemination of best practice in delivery of Supporting People. Communities and Local Government will continue to encourage this.
- 1.16 The programme has helped to highlight the importance of having local preventative and early intervention services available. There is more clarity about the role that transitional support services, such as hostels and foyers can play; and why plans for housing support must be related to the wider housing strategy and availability of next stage 'move on' accommodation.

How we got to this point

- 1.17 In November 2005, we published our preliminary views on how best to move forward with Supporting People, which began an extensive public consultation process, where we encouraged as many people as possible to share their ideas with us.
- 1.18 We got more than 1000 written responses, including more than 600 from individual service users.³ A number of messages came through clearly: Supporting People is an important programme which should continue to provide support to people who need it; the idea of having a strategy which would provide a clear vision for the future delivery of housing support services was welcomed but that strategy had to focus on the outcome for individuals, and change had to be managed in a way which did not undermine that.⁴
- 1.19 We set out our preliminary conclusions from the consultation in July 2006, in our Next Steps statement,⁵ and committed ourselves to publishing a strategy for Supporting People in 2007.

³ *Help Us Make Supporting People Even Better*. ODPM, January 2005.

⁴ For a full summary of the responses, see *Creating Sustainable Communities: Supporting Independence – a Summary of your Responses and How to make Supporting People work better – a report about what you told us*. Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2006.

⁵ *Supporting Independence: Next Steps in our Supporting People Strategy*. Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2006.

2. Keeping people that need services at the heart of the Programme

John's Story – Odyssey Trust UK, based in LB of Islington

John served a four year sentence for supplying class A drugs and was released on a home detention curfew to a Supporting People funded, accommodation based community drug rehabilitation programme, as one of his licence conditions was to address substance related offending.

With support from his key worker, John started to engage with a counsellor on a 1:1 basis which has enabled him to deal with his past and plan for a substance free future. John enjoyed the communal spirit during his time in supported accommodation and became a respected community member who was always willing to support his peers.

Now, after being drug free for over 6 months and having completed his drug treatment, John and his resettlement worker decided that he was ready to move into his own independent accommodation. With the help of his Supporting People funded programme, John received 2 grants which have helped him with clothing and study materials.

John was keen to apply for training courses both in the volunteer field and within the social care field, and has completed a basic counselling course at his local college, which as a added bonus has helped him to structure his free time. John still lives in his flat and is a volunteer for a south London drug-service and is actively looking for full-time employment in this field.

- 2.1 The people who use its services are at the heart of the Supporting People programme. They are also therefore, at the heart of this strategy. In this chapter, we set out what people should be able to expect from Supporting People.

How we will support service users

What Central Government will do:

We commit to:

- Work with Local Authorities and providers to encourage the development of service user involvement plans, and 'Charters for Independent Living' to provide clear and accessible standards for Supporting People services.
- Work with authorities and agencies to develop and pilot an integrated assessment process whereby people can be assessed for health, social care and housing support at the same time.
- Provide data from Supporting People Client Records to support local analysis of demographic trends and housing needs.
- Develop a model to help local authorities target people who would benefit from preventative services.
- Increase access to information by enhancing our national Supporting People Directory of Services, improving the Directory's usability and its links to other key sites.
- Encourage service users to exercise choice and control over the type of services they receive through the development of an outcomes set for Support People.
- Explore how to help service contribute to the direction of their lives through the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion pilots.

How we expect Local Authorities/Providers to help

We expect Local Authorities to:

- Work collaboratively; to plan services at the sub-regional and regional levels – which is vital if they are to successfully meet the needs of mobile groups and deliver housing support services more efficiently.
- Engage with, and learn from, the Individual Budget pilots and other choice led personal funding mechanisms, and to consider how they might take forward a similar approach across the relevant service and funding streams in their area.

We expect both Local Authorities and Providers to:

- Work with us to develop a template for charters to enable independent living.
- Ensure that there is effective communication with service users and to explain changes properly to service users.
- Consider how services will need to respond to local demographic changes within their regional housing strategies and sustainable community strategies.

Putting the service user in charge

- 2.2 There is no prescriptive list of what housing-related support should mean. For some, it could be help learning how to cook or budget, for others, it could be the sort of ongoing support provided by a warden; or it could be crisis support provided by hostels and refuges, as a step on the road back to living an independent life again.
- 2.3 Each person is different and has different needs. That is why Supporting People is a flexible programme, which can provide any housing related support, which helps an individual to live independently in their own home and community.
- 2.4 Supporting People already has a strong track record in delivering personalised services and interventions which are tailored to the needs of each individual.
- 2.5 Home Improvement Agencies, for example, tailor their solutions to the particular needs of each individual and the condition of their home. In contrast, outreach teams work in ways which take into account the potentially chaotic lifestyles of individuals they need to engage with.
- 2.6 Supporting People also has an established history of offering choice and control. Through the Quality Assurance Framework and support planning, individuals can have a clear say over what support they receive and over how and when they receive it. This can range from something as simple to agreeing the time of a visit, to being able to agree what sort of support services are needed.
- 2.7 We also created the national Directory of Supporting People services, which enables people – and their families and advocates – to look through an online database, to see what support services and options are available to them, both in their own area, and across the country.
- 2.8 Local authorities are also working to make the way they commission services more appropriate and responsive to what people want. This work is being informed by local authorities' service user forums and the completed service review process.

Challenging barriers to joined-up interventions

- 2.9 The Supporting People consultation has shown us that while they value being given support to live independently, service users want to have more joined-up services and solutions instead of many separate visits and interventions from different service streams and agencies.
- 2.10 Service users are also frustrated when service providers only take responsibility for one part of an issue. They expect consistent services wherever they are and cannot understand why that is not happening.
- 2.11 These issues are not unique to delivery of Supporting People services, and it is not the sole responsibility of those involved in the delivery of Supporting People services to find solutions to them. But more needs to be done to ensure genuine choice and control at the point of access to a service; and to ensure that individuals will be able to access all parts of the service via that initial point.

Getting more service users involved and empowered

- 2.12 In *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, we set out how we will strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of local authorities to the needs and priorities of their local citizens including through local charters. This will be at the core of both the future framework for local services, and the system by which local authority performance will be assessed and compared.
- 2.13 We are committed to encouraging more vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities to get involved in this process.
- 2.14 Consequently, we will work across Government, with local authorities and with stakeholders to explore the mapping and practicalities around establishing 'Charters for Independent Living'. The ambition is that these would provide clear, accessible statements of the standards people can expect and access.
- 2.15 We will work with authority and provider representatives to develop a national template for local Charters, to ensure that they are consistent. Particularly in relation to supporting choice for those whose needs are not easily bound by local administrative boundaries.

Developing more integrated assessments

- 2.16 In *Supporting Independence*, we recognised the importance of including Supporting People services within the wider health and social care assessment processes. As well as helping those individuals who might need to receive a combination of services, this will also help to ensure that people are signposted to the right services in the first place.
- 2.17 The Department of Health is currently leading cross-Government work to develop a Common Assessment Framework for Adult Services, with The Department for Education and Skills leading in respect of Children's services. We are supporting this with the aim of exploring the inclusion of housing and housing-related support. This would mean that people could be assessed for health, social care and housing/housing related support at the same time, avoiding multiple assessments.
- 2.18 As Supporting People brought together a range of pre-existing services, it has also brought together a number of different approaches to assessment, with procedures varying across, and often within, authority areas.
- 2.19 Some authorities, such as Brighton and Hove have begun to develop a more consistent approach to assessments. We hope to incorporate the emerging findings from their work into our discussions for developing a national model.
- 2.20 We are also supporting work by Nottingham City Council to develop and pilot a single needs assessment process for Supporting People, health and social care. Nottingham City Council have devised a centralised integrated assessment process and a needs assessment form. They began piloting it in April this year. They will analyse the findings of the pilot and will produce a report in December 2007.

Meeting the needs of mobile groups and individuals

- 2.21 Individual service users do not always recognise local administrative boundaries. Consequently, there is a need to look at ways of ensuring that local boundaries and differences don't become unnecessary obstacles to choice and control.
- 2.22 In our consultation document *Supporting Independence*, we stated our clear expectation that local authorities should plan to meet the needs of mobile groups, by working more collaboratively to plan services at the sub-regional and regional levels. That expectation remains.
- 2.23 We have stated in the grant conditions that people seeking help through Supporting people funded services should access these where they need to do so. This particularly affects mobile groups, including homeless people and rough sleepers. It does not conflict with authorities putting in place positive approaches on re-connection.
- 2.24 It is also important to continue to ensure cross-boundary access for short term services, many of which are targeted at groups who tend to be mobile, and located where those people are most likely to be found. As such, these sorts of services have usually been set up to deal with individuals and needs, which cannot be constrained by administrative boundaries.

Developing better communication and consultation with service users

- 2.25 The responses to our consultation made clear that service users valued the opportunity to give their views, but only when they felt there was some genuine interest in what they had to say.
- 2.26 The consultation also highlighted that users were unhappy about only being asked about what the commissioner or the provider wanted to know, instead of being given the chance to discuss what concerns them. And they particularly disliked not being told why something, particularly a change, had happened.
- 2.27 We will work with authorities and providers to encourage development of service user involvement plans and charters, which will clearly set out when service user views should be sought, for what purpose, and how the results will be fed back.
- 2.28 Charters should also be used to clarify the roles of, and relationship between, authorities and providers in communicating with service users. Evidence suggests that while some authorities have implicitly relied on service providers to carry out communication and consultation for them, others have made this an explicit expectation.
- 2.29 While it is ultimately the responsibility of the authority to ensure service user views are captured via an established service user consultation process and forums, it is important for providers to have meaningful involvement, particularly where they have the trust of the service users. However, local authorities will need to be clear about what they expect from providers, and providers will need to be clear about what they are prepared to do.
- 2.30 Just as we expect authorities and providers to explain changes to service users, we also need to make sure that we are communicating properly with service users.

- 2.31 With this in mind, we have established our own service user involvement charter, which will be published on the Supporting People website.
- 2.32 As part of this charter, we have committed ourselves to:
- Publishing key documents (including this strategy) in easy read formats, to ensure accessibility for service users.
 - Attending service user events in each region at least annually, to allow service users and other stakeholders to pass views direct to us.

Exploring alternative service provision models

- 2.33 Historically, individuals trying to access public services have not been given much choice about the type of service they get, and how it is delivered. Through our public service reform agenda, we are committed to putting the service user – who is ultimately the customer for the service – in control.
- 2.34 One example of an alternative service provision model, currently being tested, is the Individual Budget. Under the Individual Budget pilots, service users are offered the relevant resources as a single, integrated funding package. This can either be a cash sum, or a notional sum representing the services on offer, or some combination of the two. But however the funding is provided, the individual has the freedom to decide how best to use it to meet their particular needs and circumstances.
- 2.35 This ‘Individual Budget’ approach is currently being piloted across six funding and service streams, one of which is Supporting People.⁶
- 2.36 A rigorous assessment of the pilots is enabling local authorities and the Government, to identify what the practical issues and barriers might be, and how best to put in place the right infrastructure of advice, support and advocacy to help individuals make choices and take control.
- 2.37 While it’s too early to have definitive evidence on the practical issues emerging from the pilots, the emerging findings suggest that there are real benefits both in terms of the individuals themselves, and also in terms of finding more effective, and potentially cost-effective approaches.
- 2.38 The Individual Budget pilots are testing the benefits of that service model primarily with individuals in more stable, long term service need. However, the potential benefits of the approach may go wider.
- 2.39 Potentially this model could also be right for meeting some short-term needs, for example, for individuals resettling or reintegrating in the community, and we will continue to explore this area. But it will not be right for all people and all circumstances. So we also need to test out other ways of adopting a similar approach.

⁶ The other five are Disabled Facilities Grant, Access to Work, Independent Living Fund, Integrated Community Equipment Service and Social Care.

- 2.40 There is increasing recognition of the necessity for individual responses to people with complex and multiple needs facing chronic exclusion as recently highlighted in the Government report *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion*.⁷
- 2.41 The Adults facing Chronic Exclusion Pilot Programme will test new approaches by bringing financial and other resources together in ways aimed at overcoming existing barriers to successful outcomes. Drawing on the expertise and experience of skilled worker roles, it will evaluate the extent people, who would otherwise face such chronic exclusion, can increasingly contribute to the direction and pace of travel in their life course.
- 2.42 It will also stretch services to effectively empower service users to achieve better control and improved progress towards increased and sustained quality of life for themselves, their families and communities.

Helping service users to make the right choices

- 2.43 Choice and control over services needs to be underpinned by access to the right information about the different options. Evidence from both the *In Control*⁸ and Individual Budget pilots has shown that for some people, having choices can potentially be difficult and stressful, as well as welcome.
- 2.44 The Individual Budget pilot is currently working closely with local partners to explore the best ways of helping people to make the right choices for themselves. Many pilot sites have organised ‘brokerage awareness’ day for their local partners, and are starting to test various methods of delivering the concept, for example:
- Essex currently has six independent support planners and brokers in place, and is trying to develop more local capacity in ‘peer’ support planning, to support existing Individual Budget service users.
 - Lincolnshire has included brokerage as part of their direct payment support contract, and a number of their voluntary organisations and user groups have shown an interest in further developing their brokerage work.

Enhancing the Supporting People Directory of Services

- 2.45 We are also enhancing our national Supporting People Directory of Services to ensure that it meets the information and technical needs of service users.
- 2.46 To this end we have asked people from across the different client groups for their input about what they would like the Directory to deliver for them, and have also considered how the Directory will be used in practice.

⁷ Published September 2006 – sets out actions being taken across government to improve the life chances of those who suffer, or may suffer in the future, from disadvantage

⁸ In Control is a partnership between families, individuals, services, local authorities, Government and many other organisations working together to define best practice in Self-Directed Support.

Based on our conclusions, we will:

- Make more information about – and links to – Individual Budgets, Self-Directed Support Network and related websites, available on the Directory, alongside service contact details for users who want further information.
- Build awareness of the Directory as an information resource, to help users looking at potential support options, particularly through the Individual Budget pilots work.
- Make the Directory more user-friendly. A project to improve the Directory’s usability and enhance its links to other key sites is already well underway, and is scheduled for completion in Summer 2007.
- Develop a longer-term Directory integration strategy, with a view to enabling people to search for a range of other services, alongside those funded by Supporting People. We will explore close integration with the Directgov Website, as an avenue for achieving this.

Katie’s Story (from Supporting People – Barnsley)

Katie had spent many years moving from one supported living scheme to another, and has had some difficulties adjusting to living with other people.

But with support from social services and Supporting People, Katie secured a tenancy closer to her mum, which has made an enormous difference to her life.

Katie has developed her own support plan which has allowed the Supporting People team to identify the contribution that Supporting People services can make.

Supporting People funding has enabled Katie to employ a personal assistant for 19 hours a week, and with support from her personal assistant she has developed her confidence in managing her tenancy, paying her bills and in generally keeping on top of the life’s everyday issues.

Katie wanted to develop her confidence and try different things within her community. Thanks to SP, Katie is able to try out some community educational courses, and is currently trying out a work placement in a senior’s residential home. Both Katie and her mum are very happy with how things are going.

3. Enhancing partnership with the Third Sector

- 3.1 Supporting People was built upon the services developed and rolled out by providers, two thirds of which are Third Sector, before 2003. As well as creating clear benefits for service providers and users, moving into the Supporting People programme has also created a number of new challenges, particularly in working effectively and in partnership with the local authority as purchaser and manager of the services.
- 3.2 Providers now better understand how local authorities operate, how that relates and adds value to broader public services, and where the opportunities lie for further improvement.
- 3.3 However, challenges remain, particularly in the areas of delivering greater user choice and control, better value for money and a more professional approach to service delivery. This chapter sets out what we expect of providers, and what central and local government will do to support this expectation.

How we will enhance our partnership with the Third Sector

What Central Government will do:

We commit to:

- Minimise obstacles preventing good quality providers from across public, private and Third Sector organisations from competing fairly to deliver housing support services.
- Make funding more sustainable and stable – we have committed to making a three year funding announcement for local government after the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- Invest in the skills of commissioners, improve commissioning from the third sector, develop cross-Whitehall models for joint commissioning to ensure the sector can be certain of high quality commission, as set out in the OTS Third Sector Action Plan.
- Continue to work with national organisations such as the National Housing Federation, HACT, Foundations and Sitra to support and build capacity in the sector. Funding of £500,000 has been made available to take this work forward.

How we expect Local Authorities to help us

We expect Local Authorities to:

- Pass on three year funding certainty to Third Sector providers, explicitly including Supporting People contracts when appropriate.
- Comply with their commitments under the Compact,⁹ and with full cost recovery – commissioners and funders should be prepared to meet the full costs and reasonable overheads associated with Third Sector Delivery.

⁹ Compact is the agreement between government and the Third Sector, in recognition of the important role that the sector can make in developing and delivering strategy and services.

- Continue to support innovation, challenge and benchmark processes and costs against each other, to identify potential areas for further improvement.
- Ensure that their providers have the level of support they need, including capacity building.
- Continuing to work with national organisations such as the National Housing Federation, HACT, Foundations and Sitra to support and build capacity in the sector.

How we expect Providers to help us

We expect Providers to:

- Work with local authorities to include service user views in strategy setting, service design and performance management.
- Support and contribute to the ongoing work to ensure that existing services represent the best possible value for money – and to help us innovate, change and challenge service provision where this is not yet the case.
- Continue to ensure that any costs arising from the authority's administrative requirements are transparent.

The Role of the Third Sector

- 3.4 The Third Sector has a long history of campaigning for social change and of innovating and working creatively to bring together the resources and services to make change happen. Third Sector organisations have also proved themselves to be particularly adept at working with disadvantaged and vulnerable people, in disadvantaged areas and communities.
- 3.5 It is these strengths that the Government wants to draw on and harness, and as such, the Third Sector is being asked to play a key role in shaping how public services will be delivered in the future.
- 3.6 The Communities and Local Government Third Sector Strategy. Discussion Paper¹⁰ sets out our proposals and also seeks views on how we can engage better with the third sector.
- 3.7 Considerable work has already been done to support contracting opportunities for the Third Sector. This includes clear guidance set out in the *National Procurement Strategy for Local Government*¹¹ and *Think Smart, Think Voluntary Sector*.¹² For Supporting People, we have also issued our *Guide to Procuring Care and Support Services*.¹³
- 3.8 But there is more to do to improve what happens in practice. The Office of the Third Sector Action Plan sets out the work which Government will take forward to accomplish this.

10 *Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government*, Communities and Local Government, June 2007.

11 Sets out how councils can improve the delivery and cost effectiveness of high quality services through more effective, prudent and innovative procurement practices. Published October 2003.

12 Good practice guidance on procurement of services from the voluntary and community sector. Published June 2004

13 Communities and Local Government document developed by Leeds and Plymouth City Councils as part of their work on the Value Improvement projects. October 2006.

Our Expectations on Providers

- 3.9 The continued successful delivery of Supporting People will require a strong, positive contribution from service providers, working in partnership with their service users, other providers and with commissioners, to identify necessary improvements, innovations and changes.
- 3.10 We expect providers to work with authorities to include service users views in strategy setting, service design and in performance management.
- 3.11 It is important that providers continue to support and contribute to the ongoing work to ensure that existing services represent the best possible value for money – and to help us to innovate, change and challenge service provision locally and nationally where this is not yet the case.
- 3.12 We would also like to see more partnership and collaboration, as part of the ongoing effort to improve services and value for money. Developing consortium approaches, for example, where one organisation holds the main contract as an umbrella for others (including smaller and specialist organisations), can provide a number of opportunities to streamline delivery and improve efficiency through reduced overheads.
- 3.13 Buddying arrangements and support networks can also help to transfer and share learning, and in the process, build more capacity.
- 3.14 We also want to encourage local authorities to continue to challenge and benchmark processes and costs against each other, to identify potential areas for further improvement.
- 3.15 Where partnership working between commissioners and providers are effective, the beneficial effects in terms of service design and delivery can often be seen.

Having the right level of reporting, accountability and transparency

- 3.16 It is important to have the right level of reporting and accountability to ensure that any money is being appropriately spent. These ‘checks’ have to be proportionate, and properly aligned with the provider’s governance and internal management arrangements.
- 3.17 Providers should continue to ensure that costs arising from the authority’s administrative requirements are transparent, in order to reduce administrative requirements and release more resources for investment in direct service delivery.

Support and Capacity Building

- 3.18 From the outset of Supporting People, we have worked closely at the national level with provider representative bodies, such as the National Housing Federation, HACT, SITRA, Foundations and Homeless Link, both to develop and deliver the Programme itself, and also to deliver capacity building and support for service providers.

3.19 We will continue to work closely with the national organisations, and to invest through them in capacity building and support. This will include:

- Involving provider representatives on the project board for the development and delivery of the National Value Improvement Programme.
- Ensuring Supporting People representation on wider Third Sector stakeholder groups and initiatives, to ensure that cross-Government initiatives are appropriate to – and deliver benefits for – this service area.
- Working with Supporting People stakeholders to identify and share positive practice across the provider sector and in local authority work; and also supporting providers through the establishment of regional champions.
- Providing financial support to deliver training and advice to the Supporting People community, as any new initiatives and policies that might impact on the programme are developed and rolled out.

3.20 We expect local authorities to ensure that their providers have the level of support they need, including capacity building.

4. Delivering in the new local government landscape

- 4.1 Local authorities are ideally placed to provide a clear, strategic lead across all public services in their area and to ensure that these services work effectively to the benefit of local people. At the same time, local authorities must also be responsive to the needs and expectations of their local community, and must put these needs at the centre of their decision-making processes.
- 4.2 Providing the right housing support must be a core part of how authorities meet the needs of their local people.
- 4.3 In *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, we set out the changes we want to make to empower and equip local authorities to meet the needs of their local communities. This chapter sets out what we expect from local authorities who are delivering Supporting People, and the changes we are making to help them deliver an integrated service for the people that most need it.
- 4.4 Local authorities will also play an increasingly important role in planning for the major demographic challenge of our time, an ageing society. The preventative services delivered by Supporting People are pivotal in addressing the needs of these groups before crisis point and managing wider local authority pressures, such as social care costs. The Government will produce a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society to support local authorities with this challenge.

How we will deliver in the new local government landscape

What Central Government will do:

We commit to:

- Work with colleagues across Government to agree how Supporting People will contribute to the Performance Management Framework.
- Fully implement a Supporting People outcomes set by Summer 2007 to support the Local Government Performance Framework.
- As part of Local Area Agreements test the impact of delivering Supporting People funding through the new area based grant.
- Enhance the existing regional networks, and extend their 'reach' nationally by appointing Regional Champions.
- Work with Government Offices and local government to ensure that we have a clear understanding of any growth in existing service needs, and can also identify any new need for services in growth areas.
- Continue reducing the burdens and bureaucracy of the Supporting People programme for local government and service providers.

How we expect Local Authorities to help us:

We expect Local Authorities to:

- Bring together and lead the wider range of commissioners, providers and stakeholders whose contributions are crucial for effectively delivering Supporting People.
- Ensure that the remit and responsibilities of the Commissioning Body remains clear and up to date, and that the Commissioning Body is receiving timely and accurate information.
- Make housing support part of their coordinated approach to delivering for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in their area – which means ensuring that Supporting People is integrated within their future Local Area Agreement frameworks.
- Adhere to full cost recovery principles for service providers in commissioning services.
- Prepare to deliver their Supporting People programmes through their new area based grant by April 2009, subject to the CSR and pilot evaluation.

Forging new relationships and making the right links

- 4.5 As the strategic leaders for their local area, we expect local authorities to look beyond the scope of the Supporting People programme, to discuss how housing support can and should help to deliver the wider Sustainable Communities strategy, amongst others.
- 4.6 It will be particularly important for local authorities to make the right strategic links and alignments between Supporting People and their own housing and other strategies and wider regional housing strategy. As well as ensuring that the right kind of support is in place, this will also ensure that the wider housing stock is being used appropriately to support vulnerable people.
- 4.7 For example, rent deposit schemes and more appropriate use of the private rented sector, could provide more opportunities and support for individuals who are ready to leave supported accommodation to resettle and reintegrate within the community. As well as helping the individual themselves, this could also help to free-up more capacity within the supported accommodation service.

Developing stronger, more effective governance

- 4.8 Oversight and governance for Supporting People lies with the Commissioning Body, rather than directly with the authority. This partnership approach is important, and was established as a way of bringing together the strategic input and perspectives of the local authority itself, as well as Probation, Primary Care Trusts and, where relevant, district authorities.

- 4.9 This approach has delivered significant benefits, and is strongly supported across all stakeholders.
- 4.10 In *Strong and Prosperous Communities* we clearly set out the key role that Local Strategic Partnerships should play in overseeing joined-up local service delivery, particularly in relation to Local Area Agreements.
- 4.11 All Commissioning Bodies and authorities should have a clear understanding about how the Commissioning Body fits in with – and contributes to – this wider local ‘partnership of partnerships’.
- 4.12 The right level of corporate support and understanding within the authority is also essential. The Audit Commission’s national report on Supporting People identified that where Supporting People was not viewed or understood by local authorities as a mainstream part of delivering services for local communities, it was not being effectively delivered. In turn, this led to opportunities being missed in terms of using the Programme to support and achieve the wider community objectives.
- 4.13 Conversely, where corporate knowledge and understanding was strong, Supporting People was a catalyst for wider change and improvement in cross-functional working and preventative approaches to support the people that most need it.
- 4.14 There have been improvements in this area since the national report was published in October 2005. The Audit Commission acknowledges that many more authorities now understand, and are taking action on, the critical importance of the right ownership and governance arrangements.

Integrating Supporting People into Local Area Agreements

- 4.15 From 2008–09, all authorities will have prepared a Local Area Agreement (LAA), in negotiation with the Government Office and consultation with the local community and stakeholders, to reflect the new performance framework. Delivery of the LAA will be underpinned by a duty on relevant local partners to cooperate.
- 4.16 The current LAA outcomes framework and all other performance indicator sets associated with existing target setting regimes that apply to local government will be replaced by the new national indicator set of approximately 200 indicators as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. LAAs will consist of a base set of pre-existing statutory educational and early years targets, up to 35 improvement targets based on the national indicator set and may also include purely local targets. These will be in place by spring 2008.
- 4.17 It is important that we lay the necessary groundwork to ensure that Supporting People can be properly integrated within this future framework. We have already seen from some local areas the benefits and improvements which can arise from aligning funding, services and commissioning decisions through the LAA. We have also seen from others the challenges of including Supporting People within this new local arrangement.

- 4.18 The new performance framework and future LAA improvement targets where appropriate offers significant potential benefits for service users, as well as for local authorities and their partners. We want to make sure that we get the most from these benefits for those who do – or could – receive Supporting People services and enable those at the local level to work in a flexible, efficient and innovative way to make this happen.
- 4.19 We will therefore work with authorities to explore the impact and benefits of delivering Supporting People funding through the new area based grant. In 2008/09 we will be offering selected authorities – through amended grant conditions – the same freedoms that they would if their funding were paid under the same power as the general LAA grant. This will, for a time-bound period, “remove the ringfence”, with performance measured using the relevant national performance indicators. We will then analyse the impact of this to inform decisions about the most appropriate and effective future delivery mechanism.
- 4.20 *Strong and Prosperous Communities* set out the Government’s ambition to deliver the Supporting People programme through the Local Area Agreement framework at the earliest opportunity. Our intention would be to achieve this by April 2009, subject to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 and evaluation of the testing period.
- 4.21 The White Paper also identified the potential of Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) as a mechanism for collaboration across and between authorities.
- 4.22 Thinking on MAAs is at an early stage, and at present these will remain voluntary. We will work with the local authorities that are developing this approach to explore the potential of MAAs as a possible tool for addressing cross-boundary issues, and providing services and solutions for mobile groups.

Developing new PSAs

- 4.23 As set out in the Budget 2007 the Government intends to move to less than a third of the number of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) than in the current spending review period. In *Strong and Prosperous Communities* the government also committed to a core set of around 200 outcome-based national indicators to underpin delivery of the PSAs and Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs) where Local Government has a role in delivery of them.
- 4.24 This national set will become the basis for negotiating local improvement priorities and targets through the Local Area Agreement. It will also contribute to central government’s priority of ensuring that burdens and bureaucracy are significantly reduced for local government.
- 4.25 Public announcements of new PSAs and indicators will follow the outcomes from the Comprehensive Spending Review with the new style of LAAs being rolled out in spring 2008.

Developing a Supporting People outcomes set

- 4.26 As a direct result from calls which came from the National Supporting people consultation, we have also developed a Supporting People outcomes set in partnership with authorities and providers, to improve service delivery and support local performance management including Local Area Agreements.
- 4.27 The outcomes set has been designed to both remain consistent with wider Government outcomes work, particularly in relation to *Every Child Matters* and work around social exclusion and; to be collected by service providers and collated and analysed by St Andrew's University to ensure no additional burden is placed on authorities.
- 4.28 The set uses a set of five high-level outcomes, each of which is measured through a small basket of supporting indicators specifically related to independent living. The five high-level outcomes are:
- Achieve economic wellbeing
 - Enjoy and achieve
 - Be healthy
 - Stay safe
 - Make a positive contribution
- 4.29 An initial version of the outcome set has been piloted by service providers in a number of local authority areas, with the aim of checking the outcome's relevance and exploring arrangements for collecting any relevant performance information.
- 4.30 We rolled out the outcomes set for short term services in May (and plan to include long term services in the Summer). Although the outcomes set is not mandatory, authorities are being encouraged to introduce it to service providers in their area, in order to avoid placing any further burden in relation to collecting additional outcomes data and support the new Local Government performance framework.
- 4.31 Existing Key Performance Indicators 1 and 2 which measure (1) service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living and (2) Service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements, will continue to be collected, and will act as a valuable tool to provide the bigger picture on the effective delivery of the programme.

Minimising the burdens and bureaucracy for local government

- 4.32 As we set out in *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, the Government also intends to move to a more risk-based approach to local authority and service inspection.
- 4.33 From April 2009, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), and will assess risks to future

performance rather, than assess past performance. During the period before the new performance framework is implemented and beds down, we will continue to use the current Supporting People inspection as our method for measuring performance, this will end by March 2009.

- 4.34 There will be a reduced use of rolling inspection processes – there will be no further specific Supporting People service inspections –, and these too will be linked to areas of key risk or vulnerability. We will continue to work with the Audit Commission, building on the experience and success of their inspection programme, to consider the need and case for additional inspection beyond the risk-based approach.

Introducing a stronger statutory basis for Supporting People?

- 4.35 In *Next Steps*, and in response to calls through our consultation on the development of this document, we said that we would consider the case for having a stronger statutory basis for Supporting People services.
- 4.36 In partnership with authorities and providers, we have undertaken work to look at different approaches to a statutory duty. All the approaches considered raised concerns, particularly around reducing the flexibility and affordability.
- 4.37 Based on this assessment, we do not at this stage, consider it appropriate to introduce new legislation around housing support. We believe that the approach set out in this strategy, making appropriate and effective use of the new performance framework and LAA duties, strikes the right balance between local flexibility and ensuring services for people that need them.
- 4.38 In addition, we are committed to exploring whether the development and implementation of charters for independent living might provide the means to empowering service users and their advocates and carers in understanding, accessing and influencing service standards – as well as local authorities in providing them.

Promoting and sharing positive practice

- 4.39 Thanks to the networking opportunities provided by the regional lead officer groups; the work done in 2004/2005 by the four Supporting People Beacon authorities; and our own positive practice seminars, run in partnership with the Audit Commission, many useful experiences and lessons learned have already been widely disseminated.
- 4.40 We want to build on this by enhancing the existing regional networks, and also to extend their ‘reach’ nationally by appointing Regional Champions. The Champions will act as expert points of contact for Supporting People in their region, and will help to put other local authorities in touch with examples of – and resources for – improved practice.
- 4.41 Each Regional Champion will be asked to lead nationally, on a specific topic or theme for Supporting People. More broadly, they will also be aligned to the wider Regional Improvement Partnership and the National Improvement strategy, which will help to transfer knowledge and learning between Supporting People and other related service areas.

- 4.42 Authorities have already been invited to express an interest in becoming Regional Champions, and the successful applicants will be awarded Champion Status for 2007/08.

Funding and Investment

- 4.43 Funding will be determined by the Comprehensive Spending Review. Decisions on how we will approach any new investment that might be required in order to meet our regional and national service needs will be taken after that.
- 4.44 We consider new investment in local priority services to be a matter for the local authority and its commissioning partners. In the future, instead of limiting any new investment in housing support to Supporting People money, we would prefer local authorities to consider how housing support fits as part of delivering their local objectives and priorities. And then to invest in housing support accordingly, from across a wide range of local funds.
- 4.45 For regional services, we would prefer that local authorities work collaboratively with Regional Assemblies, in considering how supported housing and housing support form part of setting and delivering regional housing strategies, and that regional housing strategies consider possible cross-linkages with Supporting People administering authorities 5 year strategies.
- 4.46 We have commissioned analysis, together with the Housing Corporation and the Care Service Improvement Partnership, to better understand how this was addressed through previous Regional Housing Strategies, and the National Affordable Housing Programme. We will also identify and share positive practice to help inform better joint working.
- 4.47 The findings from this work will enable us to consider whether there is a case for changing how revenue for housing support is made available, including to support investment in sheltered and supported housing, as part of any future housing investment programmes.
- 4.48 We are also considering the implications of housing growth for the Supporting People programme. We will work with Government Offices and local government to ensure that we have a clear understanding of any growth in existing needs, as well as identifying any new need for services in growth areas.
- 4.49 When it comes to services of national importance, we accept that there is a case for direct Government investment. We will discuss how, subject to the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government should make funding for these sorts of schemes available.

5. Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy

- 5.1 As we stated in *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, we expect authorities to ensure that local services are provided as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- 5.2 For Supporting People, where local authorities continue to aspire to grow services to address unmet local needs, that means continuing to put the emphasis on optimising efficiency. In its first five years, the programme has delivered a £345 million efficiency improvement without significantly affecting service availability, and whilst continuing to make improvements in quality and outcomes.
- 5.3 In the process, authorities have gained a much better understanding of costs, and identified unmet needs and priorities for further services and investment. It's essential that this work continues.

How we will build on work to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy

What Central Government will do:

We commit to:

- Put in place a national Supporting People Value Improvement Programme (SPVIP).
- Establish via the national improvement strategy a process that will encourage and support all authorities in developing value improvement projects – working closely with regional excellence partnerships and with national provider representatives, to ensure that service providers have enough appropriate local support to participate in – and take advantage of – any opportunities offered through local projects.
- Reduce any monitoring requirements to a necessary minimum, in tandem with the introduction of the Local Area Agreement coordinated reporting route.

How we expect Local Authorities/Providers to help us:

We expect Local Authorities to:

- Make appropriate use of their local work to include and take forward the objectives set out in the SPVIP, particularly in relation to maximising value for money, and encouraging local projects where none are yet in place.
- Recognise the costs associated with their information requirements, and to think about whether they really represent best value for money.
- Benchmark service costs, to identify areas where further potential improvements could be made.
- Work together regionally to benchmark administrative requirements and costs, to try to minimise these costs and free-up more money for frontline delivery.

We expect both Local Authorities and providers to:

- Consider how they could improve efficiency and administration through the application of Business Process Improvement and mobile technology.

The Value Improvement Programme

- 5.4 In order to stimulate and ensure further work around value for money and service improvements, we have put in place a national Supporting People Value Improvement Programme.
- 5.5 We initially created our Value Improvement Programme as part of our response to the 2004 Independent Review of Supporting People, to help us establish the scope for efficiency and value improvements through better commissioning and procurement, service configuration and contract management.
- 5.6 The Programme led to the creation of 11 Value Improvement Projects,¹⁴ which focused on improving local service delivery. The projects included:
- Work to integrate care and support in Essex.
 - Work to reconfigure homelessness services in Southampton.
 - Work on regional commissioning in the North-West, led by Knowsley.
 - Work to establish an integrated young persons' service in Leicester.
- 5.7 These initial 11 local projects demonstrated that there was a great deal of scope to improve quality, outcomes and service design, while also releasing savings for new investment – and we are keen to explore this area further with a national programme.
- 5.8 Unlike the initial projects, the national programme will not be based on bids to Government. The purpose of the programme is to ensure that each authority is maximising value for money, to stimulate local projects where none are yet in place, and to provide the critical challenge and support, which was available and contributed to the success of the first 11 projects.
- 5.9 A national Value Improvement Programme manager has been appointed to lead and coordinate the work, including helping to share relevant learning across and between authorities.
- 5.10 We will also work closely through the national improvement strategy with: the regional excellence partnerships, who will continue to provide support and coordination for value improvement in services within their areas; and with national provider representatives, to ensure that service providers have enough appropriate local support to participate in – and take advantage of – any opportunities offered locally.

Reducing Bureaucracy

- 5.11 Many local authorities are already taking advantage of the end of service review processes to reshape their contract management arrangements.

¹⁴ Learning from the projects are available at www.spkweb.org.uk. The Leeds and Plymouth projects form the basis for the Guide to Procuring Care and Support Services.

- 5.12 But there is more to do. Local authorities need to be aware of the costs associated with their information requirements, and to decide whether they really represent best value for money.
- 5.13 For the Government's part, we have already reduced the monitoring requirement on local authorities and by not requiring a further round of service reviews, we don't expect that authorities will need to carry out the same sort of detailed data collection and reporting of information from providers, as occurred previously.
- 5.14 We want to go further, and ensure that any Government requirements are reduced to a necessary minimum. Over time, the transition to delivery through the Local Area Agreement framework will support this, by ensuring that authorities are providing any Supporting People information through the coordinated local government reporting route.

Using new technology and business processes to improve efficiency

- 5.15 Authorities and providers should also consider how they could improve efficiency and administration, through the application of Business Process Improvement and mobile technology.
- 5.16 Many authorities and providers have already tested the potential of BPI and technology solutions for other service areas, and have identified significant efficiency and service improvements.¹⁵ We encourage authorities and providers to work collaboratively to extend the approach and benefits to Supporting People.

Case Study – Havering Assessments Using Mobile Technology

The London Borough of Havering has successfully improved service quality and efficiency by moving from a paper-based approach to using an electronic assessment form. Workers undertaking care assessments for older people are able to fill out the form with the client during a visit. On completion the information can be uploaded to the council's system. Benefits from this include:

- A quicker way of completing forms than the written/manual approach.
- A significant reduction in waiting times between first contact and completion of assessments.
- More flexible working, in particular allowing assessors to undertake work in any location instead of always having to return to the office between visits.
- Senior managers are able to view the quality of assessments, ensuring customers receive equitable services that are sensitive to their diverse needs.
- Support for safer mobile working, with warnings of potential hazards (e.g. in the client's home) and the facility to set an 'alarm' that alerts staff to a potential danger.

¹⁵ Further information can be found at www.projectnomad.org.uk.

Conclusion

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

This strategy is not an end point. There are further challenges ahead for all of the Supporting People community. But it is an important step in the ongoing development and evolution of Supporting People. Development that will have at its core the four themes set out here: Keeping people who need support at the heart of the programme; Enhancing partnership with the Third Sector; Delivering in the new Local Government framework, and; Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy.

For further information

www.spkweb.org

Alternatively, you can contact us at

Supporting People Policy and Strategy team,
1/F5
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

020 7944 2556

email: Supporting.People@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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