



A – Z Introductory Guide to Health and Social Care in Scotland

Supporting People

Brief description

Supporting People is the integrated policy and funding framework for housing support services. It provides ring-fenced funding for housing support services which may be delivered in supported accommodation or as a visiting service for people living in their own home.

National Policy and Key Developments

What is Supporting People?

Previously housing support services were funded from a number of sources, including Housing Benefit (the Transitional Housing Benefit Scheme), Special Needs Allowance Package (SNAP) and Resettlement Grant. On 1 April 2003, these resources were transferred to the Scottish Executive and then onto local authorities, who are now responsible for the new arrangements. Housing support services are no longer funded by Housing Benefit. Instead, local authorities and their partners, including health agencies, service providers and service user groups, assess the overall levels of need in their area and commission appropriate services to meet those needs, funding them on a contract basis. Strategic planning for Supporting People (SP) is linked to the Local Housing Strategy and other local plans for community care, health improvement, social inclusion etc. Services are also subject to quality monitoring, through registration and inspection by the Care Commission, and contract compliance procedures

What is Housing Support?

Housing support involves one or more of 21 specified tasks that are collectively designed to enable someone to maintain their tenancy in or occupancy of their home. It focuses on providing advice and support, rather than practical assistance, and should be provided as part of a planned programme of support. Only services that provide one or more of the 21 specified tasks are eligible for SP funding.

Housing support providers who also provide personal care and support or practical home help assistance require funding from other sources to do this work.

Background to SP

- The initial SP budget for each local authority was based upon the cost of housing support services within their area, immediately prior to 1 April 2003, under the previous Transitional Housing Benefit system.
- Before the introduction of Supporting People, housing support was poorly defined and services were highly variable in respect of both quality and the nature of the service provided.
- No systematic approach existed to assessing housing support needs and planning how to respond to them.
- The SP system is designed to address these shortcomings by requiring local authorities to operate administrative, management and planning arrangements that ensure services reflect local need, that they meet specified standards, and that they provide value for money.

How does the SP system work?

- The Scottish Executive determines Scottish policy, agrees the Scottish budget, and allocates resources to local authorities using a newly introduced formula.
- Local authorities set local strategy and administer SP funding and commissioning.
- Local authorities are obliged to conduct fundamental reviews of all housing support services in their area before April 2006 in order to determine whether they 'fit' with the authorities strategic priorities and meet other SP requirements regarding quality, cost and effectiveness.
- Providers contract with councils to deliver a specified volume (hours) of support, and in nearly all cases must be registered as a housing support or integrated support service with the care commission to be able to receive SP funds. Providers are paid directly by local authorities on the basis of their contracted hours.
- In-house Council and independent sector providers are required to deliver housing support services that meet national standards and fulfil the contract specification.

SP is a means-tested benefit and those users who are required to pay are billed directly by the local authority, not the service provider. Service users can choose a different support provider if they wish.

Key recent/current issues and developments

- A review of the SP system in England on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2004 identified a number of issues regarding the use of funds and value for money. They included; displacement of prior social work funding by the use of SP monies, extensive use of SP for learning disability services, and significant variations in unit costs between providers. The review in England concluded that

significant efficiency savings were possible because people were paying too much for the legacy services inherited from the Transitional Housing Benefit system.

- A subsequent review in Scotland identified similar issues and, as a result, Ministers imposed a similar level of efficiency savings to England, with a 7.5% reduction in the overall budget over 3 years, and introduced a new funding formula to provide a fairer distribution of resources across Scotland.
- Transitional protection arrangements mean the maximum loss for any local authority will be 18% over 3 years, while some Councils will see their budgets increase as a result of the new funding formula.
- The Executive has also introduced new guidance for local authorities on undertaking fundamental scheme reviews. The guidance is intended to provide greater transparency in the review process in order to ensure a level playing field for future funding decisions between in-house local authority provision and voluntary and private sector services.
- Arrangements have been put in place to monitor the impact of the budget changes and service reviews, both to assess the level of efficiency savings generated and the impact on service users. These arrangements have been agreed with external stakeholders and will result in a report to Ministers to inform decisions about future levels of funding.

Indication of volume/costs/trends

The latest available statistics show that:

In 2003-04, 140,207 individuals were assisted through Supporting People funding. This represents 3.4% of the population aged 16 and over.

The biggest groups of clients who received support were older people (55%), other vulnerable groups (15%) and homeless or rough sleepers (14%). Older people are the majority group for 23 local authorities and homeless people for a further five local authorities.

The largest providers of support were local authority housing (28%), registered social landlords (27%) and local authority social work departments (25%). Voluntary organisations provided 17% of support.

Implications for Joint Working

Improved joint working is a specific objective of the SP policy framework. Therefore, SP funded services should reflect a positive commitment to joined-up working between local authorities and service providers. It is recognised that progress can be slow, and that mutual participation is crucial. SP is intended to fund relatively low level, preventative support rather than to boost support levels within intensive care packages. As a component of a comprehensive strategic approach to delivering community care, SP and housing support have a vital role to play. SP policy fully supports joint working. However, as a

ring-fenced budget applies, SP accounting arrangements require that SP funds be used in a way that can be identified separately.

How can I find out more?

The Executive's Supporting People website contains information on all aspects of SP, including the three official guidance folders:

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

You can contact the Supporting People team if you require more information on policy, practice, statutory guidance and legislation, or statistics.

Housing Support services are prescribed within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Regulations and the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001.

The Supporting People Enabling Unit assists and supports independent service providers in the implementation of the Supporting People Programme. The unit is a joint initiative of Community Care Providers Scotland (CCPS) and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). The site contains up-to-date briefing papers on most aspects of the SP agenda:

<http://www.ccpscotland.org/spunit/>

Age Concern Scotland's Housing Work link:

<http://www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk/section/info.asp?p=96&s=15>