Research and Library Services

Northern Ireland Assembly

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THE 'SUPPORTING PEOPLE' PROGRAMME

Research and Library Services

This paper provides a broad overview of the 'Supporting People' programme. It includes background information on the programme's development, remit and objectives and explores some of the key challenges currently facing the 'Supporting People' programme.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Supporting People is a UK-wide programme, introduced in Northern Ireland in 2003, which commissions and delivers housing support services that are designed to improve the quality of life and independence of vulnerable people. There are currently 121 providers delivering services under the Supporting People programme in Northern Ireland to around 23,000 people.

- The Supporting People programme and the implementation of the 5 year Supporting People Strategy is administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). NIHE has developed a Commissioning Body responsible for the commissioning of services and below this four Area Supporting People Partnership Groups to identify housing support service needs and priorities in their local areas.

- The 5 year Supporting People Strategy is informed by other strategic documents including, for example, the NIHE Homelessness Strategy; Community Care Agenda (People First); The Probation Board for Northern Ireland Accommodation Strategy; the NI Domestic Violence Strategy; Community Safety Strategies; and the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability.

- One of the most significant and recurrent themes raised by providers of Supporting People services over recent months is the baselining of the Supporting People budget at £61 million per annum over the 2008-2011 period. This issue was recently debated in a motion on the Supporting People Fund in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 21 October 2008.

- The Committee Representing Independent Supporting People Service Providers (CRISPP) and the Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (CHNI) published a joint briefing paper highlighting concern at what they perceive to be a lack of inflationary increase and a net cut in funding in the Supporting People budget. They have subsequently published the findings of a survey of Supporting People providers which indicates that 50 Supporting People schemes could be at risk by 2010-11 as a result of the baselining of the Supporting People budget.

- The Supporting People programme will also undoubtedly face new challenges as a result of the Review of Public Administration. For example, the establishment of a single Regional Health and Social Service Board and the creation of five local commissioning groups may mean that the programme will embark upon a process of engagement with new structures in identifying need and commissioning services.

- The Supporting People programme and Supporting People providers also face continuous new challenges in integrating the objectives of emerging strategies, policy directions and regulatory standards. The Audit Commission has recently announced that it will conduct an evaluation of the Supporting People programme in England the outcome of which may be of interest to the commissioners and providers of Supporting People Services in Northern Ireland.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide a broad overview of the 'Supporting People' programme. **Section One** (p1-9) provides information on the programme, exploring its remit, development and objectives and may be a useful reference source for those seeking background information on the programme. **Section Two** (p10-13) examines some of the key challenges currently facing the programme including a number of issues identified by stakeholders.

SECTION ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE 'SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME'

WHAT IS THE 'SUPPORTING PEOPLE' PROGRAMME?

2. The 'Supporting People' programme is a UK wide reform of the way in which housing support services are commissioned and funded. The programme was launched in Northern Ireland in April 2003 by Des Browne MP, the then Minister with responsibility for Social Development[1]. The purpose of the programme is to develop housing support services that will enable vulnerable people to access accommodation suitable to their needs and to assist them in living as independently as possible.

3. The definition of 'housing support services', as set out in the Housing Support Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2002[2] is,

   "any service which provides support, assistance, advice or counselling to an individual with particular needs with a view to enabling him to occupy, or continue to occupy, as his only or main residence, housing accommodation in Northern Ireland".

4. The types of services covered by the 'Supporting People' programme include, for example, a housing warden service, general counselling and befriending services; help to deal with claims and social security benefits; parenting and household management skills training; assistance to engage with individuals, professionals and other bodies; and assistance to manage money properly.

5. The 'Supporting People' programme in Northern Ireland is targeted at 11 client populations including people with learning disabilities; people with mental health problems; older people; young vulnerable people and people leaving care; people at risk of domestic violence; people who are homeless; black and minority ethnic groups; people at risk of offending or re-offending; people with physical and sensory impairments; and, people with alcohol and/or drug addiction problems.

6. Organisations providing eligible 'Supporting People' services in Northern Ireland include, for example[3]:

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[1] Department for Social Development. News Release. 'Housing support receives £153m boost'. 25 April 2003. http://archive.nics.gov.uk/sd/030425a-sd.htm
[2] The Housing Support Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20023154.htm
[3] Information extracted from the 'Housing Association Guide', Part 5, Appendix 2. Published by the Department for Social Development. www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/registered_housing_associations/ha_guide/hag.pt5/hag.pt5.app2

- The Northern Ireland Housing Executive – providing housing services for the homeless;
- Registered Housing Associations – providing sheltered housing and other support housing services;
- Community and Voluntary organisations and other bodies managing temporary hostels or women's refuges;
- Health and Social Service Trusts supporting people with physical and mental health problems; and
- Community and voluntary organisations and other bodies supporting people with mental health problems, young people leaving care and ex-offenders.

7. In Northern Ireland, there are currently 121 providers delivering services under the 'Supporting People' programme to around 23,000 people in approximately 827 accommodation based schemes. Additionally there are 84 floating support schemes providing services throughout Northern Ireland[4]. The programme is administered by the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland and by Local Authorities in England, Wales and Scotland.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF 'SUPPORTING PEOPLE'

8. The 'Supporting People' concept originated in a 1998 consultation document published by then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) entitled *'Supporting People: a new policy and funding framework for support services'*[5]. This policy shift was prompted by a 1997 High Court ruling which held that the purpose of Housing Benefit was to cover the payment of rent and should only be used to pay for housing support services in very restricted circumstances. Prior to this ruling housing support services were primarily funded through Housing Benefit and through a variety of other funding sources across several Government Departments.

9. In Northern Ireland these funding sources included Housing Benefit, Income Support and Special Needs Management Allowance[6] provided by the Department for Social Development; Northern Ireland Housing Executive voluntary sector homeless funding; Probation Board linked funding; and by individuals with incomes above benefit thresholds paying charges personally[7].

10. In addition to uncoordinated funding arrangements, housing support services were often commissioned and delivered largely on an ad hoc basis by a mixture of statutory and voluntary bodies. The 'Supporting People' concept aimed to 'deliver a strategic integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in

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[4] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2008) Annual Report: 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008, p26 www.nihe.gov.uk/annual_report_2008.pdf
[5] DETR (1998) Supporting People: A new policy and funding framework. Department of Employment, Transport and Regions.
[6] Special Needs Management Allowance (SNMA) was paid by the Department for Social Development to registered housing associations to cover the additional costs incurred in managing supported housing.
[7] Department for Social Development (2001) Towards Supporting People in Northern Ireland,

response to identified local needs, replacing the previously complex and uncoordinated arrangements'[8].

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME IN NORTHERN IRELAND

11. In May 2001 a consultation paper entitled 'Towards Supporting People' was published by the Department for Social Development. This paper set out the Department's proposals for developing the 'Supporting People' policy and funding framework for Northern Ireland. A Working Group was established with representatives from the Department for Social Development, Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, the Probation Board and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to develop policy and funding arrangements.

12. The consultation paper highlighted that prior to the development of 'Supporting People', housing support services in Northern Ireland had the following key features:

- Provision of services tended to be influenced by the availability of funding and not necessarily by local assessment of need;

- Services were in many cases driven by imaginative responses by voluntary and community sector agencies;

- Revenue funding arrangements for supported housing services were 'complex and fragmented' and which led to gaps in service provision and shortcomings in the delivery of community care;

- Due to the complexity of service provision and funding, housing support services were often not directly linked to Housing Executive, Health and Social Services or Probation Board priorities or strategies; and

- There was no over-arching government strategy to integrate the work of the various government departments and agencies involved in the funding and provision of housing support services.

13. In response to these issues the 'Towards Supporting People' consultation set out the Government's plans to introduce a 'Supporting People' policy and funding framework bringing together the various funding streams, including Housing Benefit paid for support services, into a new single budget. Resources would be allocated by the Department for Social Development to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, who as the lead agency, would work in partnership with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety and the Probation Board deliver needs based housing support services.

14. It was proposed that funding streams to be transferred to the new single budget would include, Transitional Housing Benefit and Income Support paid in respect of support services; the Special Needs Management Allowance (SNMA) paid by the Department for Social Development to Housing Associations for designated supported housing services; Probation Board accommodation linked funding of hostel services; and Northern Ireland Housing Executive Homelessness

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[8] Audit Commission website www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/sup.asp?CategoryID=english%5E1628

Voluntary sector funding. Services which would not be eligible for funding under the proposals included, for example, personal care services (e.g. home help service or help with feeding, bathing, washing and personal hygiene).

15. The combination of existing funding into a single source was placed into statute by the Housing Support Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.   This was originally introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly as the Housing Support Services Bill but was passed at Westminster during suspension of the Assembly.

16. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as the lead organisation for 'Supporting People' published its draft 'Supporting People' Strategy[9] for consultation in April 2004 as a first step in the development of a strategy direction for housing support services.   The final strategy entitled 'Supporting People, Changing Lives: The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010'[10] was launched by David Hanson MP, the then Minister with responsibility for Social Development, on the 20 September 2005[11].

17. The overall aim of the 'Supporting People' Strategy is to *"commission housing support services that will improve the quality of life and independence of vulnerable people'.* In addition to this, the Strategy also has four key objectives and six overarching principles:

    KEY OBJECTIVES
    - To commission relevant housing support services;
    - To develop services in line with service user's needs and aspirations;
    - To ensure value for money services; and
    - To continuously improve the quality of services.

    PRINCIPLES
    - To promote the **independence** of vulnerable people;
    - To enable vulnerable people to **choose** where an how they want to live;
    - To enable the **inclusion** of vulnerable people in wider society;
    - To commission, deliver and monitoring housing support services in **partnership** with statutory agencies, service users, their representatives and service providers;
    - To commission services on the basis of the needs of service users and agreed principles (**equity**); and
    - To ensure that there are transparent processes for commissioning, funding, and monitoring services.

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[9] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2004) Supporting People in Northern Ireland. Draft Strategy 2004-2009. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications/supporting_people-4.htm?page=1

[10] Department for Social Development (2005) Supporting People, Changing Lives: The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications/supporting_people-4.htm?page=3

[11] Department for Social Development. News Release. 'Five Year Plan for Supporting People Launched'. 20 September 2005. http://archive.nics.gov.uk/sd/050920b-sd.htm

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'SUPPORTING PEOPLE' STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

18. The Department for Social Development has overall responsibility for the 'Supporting People' programme in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is the **Administering Authority** and as such has responsibility for the:
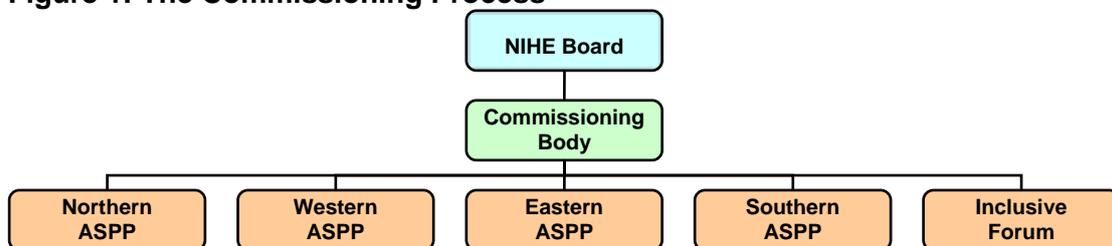
   ▪ Implementation of the programme;

   ▪ Strategic planning of service development based on need;

   ▪ Commissioning services in partnership with the four Health and Social Services Boards and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; and

   ▪ Developing and implementing a five year strategy for the 'Supporting People' programme.

19. The Board of the NIHE has administrative responsibility for the 'Supporting People' programme, however, NIHE have developed a **Commissioning Body** who are responsible for the commissioning of services, subject to the approval of the NIHE Board. The Commissioning Body comprises of representatives from NIHE, the four Health and Social Services Boards and the Probation Board Northern Ireland (PBNI). Representatives from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) sit on the Commissioning Body in an observer role. The Commissioning Body delegates its day to day management of the programme to the NIHE's Supporting People Team.

20. Below the Commissioning Body, sit **four Area Supporting People Partnership (ASPP) Groups** (see figure 1). The boundaries for the ASPP Groups are coterminous with the four Health and Social Service Boards. The purpose of the ASPP Groups are to identify housing support service needs and priorities in their local areas. The ASPP Groups are chaired by their respective Health and Social Services Boards and membership of the groups comprise of representatives of local HPSS Trusts, Probation Board and the Housing Executive.

21. In addition to the ASPP Groups, an **Inclusive Forum** provides a mechanism for service users and providers to identify client specific needs.

Figure 1: The Commissioning Process[12]

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │ NIHE Board  │
                    └─────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │Commissioning│
                    │    Body     │
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 ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐
 │ Northern │ │ Western  │ │ Eastern  │ │ Southern │ │ Inclusive│
 │  ASPP    │ │  ASPP    │ │  ASPP    │ │  ASPP    │ │  Forum   │
 └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘
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[12] Structure extracted from Supporting People, Changing Lives: The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010, p12.

STRATEGIC LINKS

22. The Supporting People Strategy and the commissioning of services is informed by a number of other strategic documents which identify Government objectives for the enhancement of the health, protection, well-being and accommodation needs of vulnerable people. The three main strategic documents identified as informing the Supporting People Strategy are the NIHE Homelessness Strategy[13], the Community Care Agenda (People First)[14] and the PBNI Accommodation Strategy[15]. It is also stated that the Supporting People Strategy was developed within the context of meeting the objectives of the Programme for Government.

23. Other strategic directions which are said to have influenced the Supporting People Programme include, for example, regional strategies such as the Community Safety Strategies[16] and the NI Domestic Violence Strategy[17], and local needs based strategies, for example, the Southern Health and Social Service Board's 'Strategic Vision for Health and Social Care of Older People'[18] and the Eastern Health and Social Service Board's 'Accommodation and Support Strategy for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People'[19].

24. Perhaps one of the most significant challenges facing the 'Supporting People' programme in terms of strategic direction, is the progression of the recommendations of the Bamford Review[20] in regards to the housing support service needs of people with learning disabilities or mental health problems and the resettlement of people from long stay hospitals. The Bamford Review recommended that in regards to housing[21]:

- DSD and housing providers should develop a housing strategy to ensure people with mental health problems and learning disabilities can, where possible, live in the accommodation of their choice, subject to normal financial constraints;

- People with mental health problems or learning disabilities should have the choice to live independently but the use of specialised group housing has a role to play, for example as step-down accommodation after leaving hospital; and

- DSD should ensure participation of people with mental health problems or a learning disability in the planning of housing services.

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[13] See www.nihe.gov.uk/index/sp_home/strategies/independent_living-2/homelessness_strategy.htm

[14] See www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ec-community-care

[15] Probation Board for Northern Ireland (2003) Accommodation Strategy for Offenders.

[16] See www.communitysafetyni.gov.uk/localCommunitySafetyStrategies.htm

[17] See www.nio.gov.uk/tackling_violence_at_home_-_strategy_for_addressing_domestic_violence_and_abuse_in_northern_ireland.pdf

[18] Southern Health and Social Services Board (2002) Strategic Vision for Health and Social Care Services for Older people, 2002-2007).

[19] Eastern Health and Social Services Board (2002) Accommodation and Support Strategy for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People.

[20] Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability - www.nio.gov.uk/tackling_violence_at_home_-_strategy_for_addressing_domestic_violence_and_abuse_in_northern_ireland.pdf

[21] Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (2007) Promoting the Social Inclusion of People with a Mental Health Problem or Learning Disability, pp21-25. www.rmhldni.gov.uk/promoting-social-inclusion.pdf

25. In relation to long stay hospitals and people with learning disabilities, recommendation 27 of the 2005 'Equal Lives' report published by the Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability stated *"Resettlement of long-stay patients from hospitals within the context of supported living principles must be progressed as rapidly as possible. By June 2011, all people living in a learning disability hospital should be relocated to the community. Funded need to be provided to ensure that on average 80 people with be resettled per annum over the five year period from 2006-2011"*[22].

26. The resettlement of people with learning disabilities from Muckamore Abbey Hospital to supported independent living in the community has been an area of particular concern. In response to an Assembly Question tabled in September 2008[23], the Minister for Social Development has stated that to facilitate this, DSD will develop 38 new units at a cost of £4.6m during the next three years.

FUNDING, PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

FUNDING

27. The Supporting People budget for the financial years 2008-2011 is £61m per year or £183m over three years. The Department of Social Development allocate this funding to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the form of the **Supporting People Grant**. The NIHE as the Administering Authority use this fund to contract eligible housing support services from providers.

28. Support services can be classified as 'short term' or 'long term' according to their aims and objectives. Short term schemes have a maximum intended duration of up to two years and are defined as those services which are intended to move people on to more independent living. Short term services are not means tested, the rationale for this decision was to avoid creating disincentives to taking up work and that it was not administratively efficient for providers to means test for charges in short term schemes. However, this charging policy will be kept under review[24].

29. The Supporting People budget also funds a number of floating support services in Northern Ireland. Floating support is defined as 'assistance provided in a person's own home by a support worker', the NIHE has compiled a directory[25] of floating support services by area and by client population. Floating support services are offered by a wide range of groups, for example, the Simon Community, Women's Aid, Health and Social Care Trusts, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), and Triangle Housing Association.

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[22] Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (2005) Equal Lives: Review of Policy and Services for People with a Learning Disability in Northern Ireland, p64. www.rmhldni.gov.uk/equallivesreport.pdf

[23] Answer to Assembly Question AQW 465/09 tabled on the 15 September 2008 by Dawn Purvis MLA.

[24] Department for Social Development (2005) Supporting People, Changing Lives: The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010, p77.

[25] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2008) Floating Support Directory. www.nihe.gov.uk/supporting_people_floating_support_directory.pdf

PERFORMANCE MONITORING, CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

30. As of April 2008, all Floating Support providers are required to attribute at least 75% of their total staff hours to the delivery of 'Direct Support' (Direct Support includes appointments with clients, telephone advice calls, travelling, administration including the production of support plans, liaising with other agencies on clients behalf, providing housing support for clients within a group setting). Direct supervision does not include or training of floating support staff. Organisations funded through the Supporting People programme to deliver floating support services must submit monitoring information on a monthly basis.

31. The process of monitoring and quality assuring housing support services has been described as one of the most significant aspects of the Supporting People programme. The vision for the monitoring and review of Supporting People services is to develop a system which leads to the continuous improvement of services[26].

32. A framework for the monitoring and review of Supporting People Services is being developed and aims to facilitate a common approach to service standards and management information, the identification of standards against which services can be monitored and continuous improvement. This involves the following components:

- **Accreditation:** providers of Supporting People services must be accredited to verify that they are suitable and competent organisations (e.g. financially competent; have in place effective employment policies in relation to staff development, health and safety; staff supervision); can demonstrate a track record or competence to deliver services;

- **Quality Assessment Framework (QAF):** is a set of national defined standards to ensure high quality services, the QAF is said to be a mechanism by which providers can improve their services by self-assessing their individual services against the whole QAF and develop continuous improvement plans to achieve higher standards. The QAF provides a means by which the NIHE can assess the quality of the services being provided[27];

- **Performance Monitoring:** NIHE collect quarterly data from providers on a number of performance indicators, i.e., service availability, service utilisation, throughput, length of stay, departures from short term accommodation based services[28].

- **Validation Visits:** visits carried out by the NIHE Supporting People team to review evidence submitted by the providers to assess whether specific standards have been achieved and to verify if the QAF self assessment is accurate.

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[26] Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Monitoring and Review of Supporting People Services: Briefing Paper No.1. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications/supporting_people-4.htm?page=2

[27] Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Monitoring and Review of Supporting People Services: The Quality Assessment Framework. Briefing Paper No 2. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications/supporting_people-4.htm?page=2

[28] Information extracted from NIHE website - www.nihe.gov.uk/index/wwu_home/supporting_people-3/wwu-sp-contractperformance.htm

> ▪ **Service Reviews:** these are essentially contract reviews conducted by the NIHE Supporting Services team on individual services. They pull together the strands of the monitoring and review framework and examine in detail the services being provided. The possible outcomes of the service review include recommissioning the existing service; transferring the service to another provider; recommend major changes to remodel the service; or discontinue the service[29]. In 2007-2008, 102 service reviews were completed by the NIHE[30].

CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

33. As a result of findings from the process of provider accreditation and the service review programme in 2005, Supporting People identified a need for the further development of both organisational capacity of provider organisations and employees within the sector. As a result, Asset Skills and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) were commissioned to undertake work in assessing the generic organisational development issues and training needs of provider organisations. From this programme was rolled out in 2006, 25 provider organisations have participated in the 'Innovation and Capacity Building Programme' to date[31].

34. The Supporting People programme was also identified as an area for business improvement in the NIHE 'Modernising Services' programme. The Modernising Services programme is aimed at applying up-to-date technology and business practices to deliver more efficient and effective services. The 'Supporting People Modernisation Project' is currently in progress and is due for completion by October 2008. Key activities include the development of options for new administrative arrangements for the Supporting People programme; a process of wider consultation with staff and other key stakeholders; and the development of more integrated and sophisticated ICT system. Changes to the administration for Supporting People will be implemented on a phased basis throughout the life of the project[32].

35. The Supporting People Modernisation Project Team have also recently developed a draft Supporting People Communications Strategy which is intended to provide further clarity and focus on the way in which Supporting People communicates with its partners and provide standards against which communication can be measured. Proposals in the Strategy include the establishment of a Communications Steering Group. The draft Strategy document also states that a separate Strategy is being developed to ensure that service users are meaningfully engaged in decisions regarding the Supporting People Programme[33].

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[29] Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Monitoring and Review of Supporting People Services: Briefing Paper No.1. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications/supporting_people-4.htm?page=2

[30] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2008) Annual Report: 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008, p26 www.nihe.gov.uk/annual_report_2008.pdf

[31] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2008), Annual Report 2007/08, Ibid.

[32] Information extracted from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website - www.nihe.gov.uk/index/wwu_home/supporting_people-3/modernising_services.htm

[33] Draft Supporting People Communications Strategy available to download from Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) website www.nifha.org/research-and-policy/supporting-people/minutes-and-meetings/

SECTION TWO: KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

<u>SUPPORTING PEOPLE BUDGET</u>

36. One of the most significant and recurrent themes raised by Supporting People providers and their representative organisations over recent months is the baselining of the Supporting People budget at £61m per annum over the 2008-2011 period. This issue was recently debated in a motion on the Supporting People Fund in the Northern Ireland Assembly on <u>21 October 2008</u>[34]. In her speech, the Minister stated that in the last year of direct rule the budget for Supporting People was £58m and that the £61m allocation actually constituted an increase in resources, rather than a decrease.

37. The Minister has further stated that "baselining the budget does not necessarily freeze individual budgets and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive may make in-year bids for additional resources in the usual way"[35]. The Minister has also stated that the Supporting People fund will not be subject to the 3% efficiency saving target introduced in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

38. The **Committee Representing Independent Supporting People Service Providers** (CRISPP)[36] and the **Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland** (CHNI) published a joint briefing paper in October 2008 highlighting concern at what they perceived to be a lack of inflationary increase and a net cut in funding in the Supporting People budget[37]. The paper raises a number of issues:

   - That the decision to baseline the budget was based upon the fact that there were underspends in the programme over the previous three years (2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07) but that these underspends resulted from a slippage in the completion of Housing Association new build schemes, for which Supporting People had budgeted revenue costs. The budget for this could not be drawn down, Supporting People is not permitted to use any such savings on non-recurrent funding in-year (e.g. staff training) and is not permitted to carry underspends into the following financial year.

   - That organisations providing Supporting People services have already absorbed above inflation increases in costs in the past number of years. A survey conducted in September 2008 by the Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (CHNI) and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) found that Supporting People providers of all sizes indicate that they felt a shortfall in funding would

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[34] See www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2008/081021.htm#6 for the Official Report of the debate.

[35] Answer to Assembly Question AQO 526/09 tabled on the 23 September 2008 by Anna Lo MLA.

[36] CRISPP is a regional body comprising of representatives across statutory, private and voluntary organisations that are directly involved in the provision of Supporting People services. CRISPP is jointly chaired and facilitated by the Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (CHNI) and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA).

[37] CRISPP & CHNI (2008) A Joint response by CRISPP and CHNI on the impact of the 'Programme for Government' on the Supporting People budget for financial years 2008-2011. www.chni.org.uk/UserFiles/File/2008-05-30_crisppPaper%20on%20SP%20baselining.doc%202.doc

> impact negatively on staff retention and staff recruitment. Many providers are contractually committed to NJC terms and conditions in respect of salary and incremental increases and feel that they may be left with a choice of either increasing wages and employing less staff or keeping wages static and lose experienced, well trained staff. There is a concern that this will in turn impact upon the delivery of services to clients.

> ▪ That organisations are already under pressure to fund increases in other (in)direct overheads and that services will in the coming year face significant cost increases in the community year for enhanced regulatory compliance.

39. As a following up to their briefing paper, CHNI and NIFHA conducted a survey to anticipate the impact of perceived static funding on service viability[38]. Key findings from the survey included:

> ▪ By 2010-11 it is estimated that 73% of respondent's schemes will be in deficit. Of those likely to experience a shortfall, 50% will be in deficit due to Supporting People funding shortfalls;

> ▪ By the end of 2010-11, respondents have stated that 50 of their schemes will be at risk and their organisation will seek to withdraw from their Supporting People contract;

> ▪ 42% of respondents have indicated that they would, or would be likely to, reduce investment on training and development; and

> ▪ 39% of respondents stated that they would be looking to reduce the number of support hours being delivered by their services and 59% stated that they consider it likely or definite that staffing levels will have to decrease by 2010-11.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

40. The Supporting People programme will undoubtedly face new challenges as a result of the Review of Public Administration. In October 2007, the then Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster, published the 'Emerging Findings' from the interim evaluation of the original RPA transfer proposals. The interim evaluation indicated that the housing functions including the Supporting People Programme would not be transferred to local councils. This approach has been welcomed by NIHE[39].

41. However, it remains to be seen how other sectoral changes emerging as a result of RPA will impact on the Supporting People programme. For example, the establishment of a single Regional Health and Social Services Board to replace the four existing Health and Social Services Boards and the creation of five local commissioning groups. Such changes may mean that Supporting People will

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[38] CHNI & NIFHA (2008) Funding Supporting People Services Provider Perceptions Survey. 90% (104) of supported housing providers were asked to complete a postal questionnaire with a 37% response rate.
[39] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2008) Corporate and Business Plans 2008-2009 to 2010-2011. p31. www.nihe.gov.uk/index/sp_home/consultation/consultation_archive.htm

have to embark upon a process of engagement with new structures in the identification of need and in the commissioning and delivery of services.

RECENT STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

42. The Supporting People Strategy and the commissioning of services is informed by a number of other strategic documents which identify Government objectives for the enhancement of the health, protection, well-being and accommodation needs of vulnerable people. The Supporting People programme and Supporting People providers face continuous new challenges in integrating the objectives of emerging strategies, policy directions and regulatory standards.

43. The most recent of these include (although this is not an exhaustive list):

- the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability[40];
- the Semple Review of Affordable Housing[41];
- Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan[42];
- 'Lifetime Opportunities' the Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy;
- 'Care Matters'[43] the DHSSPS vision for looked after children including children in care;
- 'Positive Steps'[44] and 'Partners for Change' strategies and action plans which undertake to build upon the relationship between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- various Health and Social Service Board and Trust strategies and action plans for client groups (e.g. older people, people with disabilities); and
- compliance with the new Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation (a new vetting and barring scheme covering those who work or volunteer, or seek to work or volunteer, with children or vulnerable adults is due to be introduced October 2009)[45].

AUDIT COMMISSION EVALUATION OF THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME IN ENGLAND

44. The Audit Commission has recently announced that it will conduct an evaluation of the Supporting People programme in England. As part of the evaluation the Commission will review issues such as[46]:

- The impact of the programme to date including programme outcomes for diverse groups of vulnerable people;
- programme governance including the nature partnership working;
- commissioning, procurement and performance management;
- improvements in value for money;

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[40] See www.rmhldni.gov.uk/
[41] See www.dsdni.gov.uk/hsdiv-housing-affordability.htm
[42] See www.dsdni.gov.uk/cv-homeless.pdf
[43] See www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/care-matters-ni-3.pdf
[44] See www.dsdni.gov.uk/partners-for-change-2006-08.doc
[45] See www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/svg/svg-resource-library.htm for further information on the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation.
[46] Audit Commission. Supporting People evaluation. www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/supevaluation.asp?CategoryID=english^1628

- the level of user and carer involvement in future service and strategy development; and
- how housing related support services fit in with wider Government priorities across local and national government.

The evaluation will also explore the ongoing challenges and barriers to improvement in services, examining issues of most concern such as:

- leadership and governance structures;
- programme and performance management, including adequate contract monitoring;
- poor service user involvement;
- inadequate access to services and information for users and potential users; and
- issues relating to the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

45. As Supporting People is a national programme rolled out across the UK, the findings and outcomes of the Audit Commission evaluation may be of particular interest to the commissioners and providers of Supporting People services in Northern Ireland.