SUPPORTING PEOPLE REVIEW

Final Report

Contents

1. Ministerial Foreword

The review of the Supporting People programme is a key objective in my Department's *Facing the Future* Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland Action Plan. The effective delivery of the programme has also been one of my priorities during my time in office.

Supporting People is a complex and diverse programme which, since 2003, has provided housing support services to assist vulnerable people in Northern Ireland to live independently. There are many partners involved in its commissioning and delivery, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the 100+ service providers who deliver the programme. While this review is an important opportunity to evaluate Supporting People to date and make recommendations for the future, I also welcome it as an opportunity to acknowledge the valuable work done throughout the various aspects of the programme. I have spent a lot of time visiting schemes and projects, meeting staff, clients and tenants and hearing first-hand about the valuable work being done. It is evident both from my visits and throughout the report that the services provided are of huge benefit to clients, and offer significant practical support to allow them to live independently.

I am looking forward to continuing to work with all our partners to ensure that Supporting People can keep shaping lives for the better well into the future.

Mervyn Storey MLA
Minister for Social Development

2.   Executive Summary

2.1   The Supporting People programme was introduced across the UK in 2003. It equips and supports more than 17,000 vulnerable people each year in Northern Ireland to live independently. People can receive support in a hostel, in sheltered housing or in other types of supported housing accommodation. Support can also be provided to people in their own homes, whether privately rented, owner-occupied or social housing, through floating support services.

2.2   The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has statutory responsibility for delivering the Supporting People programme on behalf of the Department for Social Development (DSD). From its introduction until March 2015, more than £850 million was spent through the Supporting People programme.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1,700 NEW UNITS of Supported Accommodation Provided

17,000 MORE THAN PEOPLE SUPPORTED TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY LAST YEAR

Since 2003, MORE THAN £850m FUNDING

2.3　The Department for Social Development gave a commitment to review the Supporting People programme within the *Facing the Future:* Northern Ireland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2012 – 2017. The review, led by officials from the Department for Social Development (DSD), had four objectives:

    i.　provide an overview of existing provision and current expenditure broken down by category of service, and an assessment of the extent to which needs are being adequately met;

    ii.　evaluate the Supporting People policy and programme and the extent to which it has met its core aims in an economic, efficient and effective way since its launch in 2003;

    iii.　consider whether an adequate strategic, legislative and administrative framework is in place for the efficient and effective delivery of the Supporting People policy and programme in future;

    iv.　and where appropriate, make recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

2.4　The Review found that the Supporting People programme has achieved its core aims, delivering significant quality of life benefits to those who have received services, assisting the resettlement of people from institutional settings and preventing problems which could have led to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness.

2.5　Evidence was found of Supporting People services preventing crime and, more significantly in financial terms, reducing pressure on health and social care budgets. The Review team also found a significant body of qualitative evidence on the positive difference the programme has made to the lives of many people.

2.6   The Review identified a number of areas where action is needed to further improve the impact of the programme and its economy and efficiency. These are summarised briefly below in the context of each of the Review's objectives.

Objective 1 – Existing Provision, Expenditure and Need

- The current system of needs assessment is not fit for purpose and has been unable to identify adequately emerging areas of future need.

Objective 2 - Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Floating support services, in particular, deliver strong preventative benefits in a very cost-effective way and opportunities should be taken to make floating support a stronger element within the programme.

- Evidence was found of continuous improvement in the quality of services but the systems for identifying effective practice and driving innovation need significant strengthening.

- Where services fail or are no longer needed, there is not currently a robust, transparent framework for decommissioning them.

- There is a significant variation in costs between apparently similar, primarily accommodation-based, schemes which are difficult to explain convincingly.

Objective 3 – Strategic, Legislative and Administrative Framework

- The current legislation and policy framework remain fit for purpose but improvements could be made to the understanding of what is meant by *housing support* and *independent living*.

- The roles and responsibilities of different statutory agencies within the Programme are not always clear and it is important that costs and risks are shared appropriately.

- There are important lessons to be learned from the removal of ring-fencing arrangements for Supporting People funding in England.

- The structure for commissioning services is unnecessarily complex, decision-making processes are not transparent and the links between commissioning decisions and strategic priorities are not always clear.

- There are opportunities to learn the lessons from Great Britain and test, on a pilot basis, the potential for competitive tendering to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

- There are overlaps and ambiguity in the current regulatory and administrative frameworks which can create duplication of effort and additional costs.

2.7   Recommendations to address these findings are listed in chapter 7.

3   Introduction to the Review

3.1   Overview of Supporting People

In 2003, the Supporting People programme was introduced across the UK to improve the planning, development and delivery of housing-related support services to vulnerable people. The policy was implemented across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with national variations due to devolution and the different local authority structures.

3.2   In Northern Ireland, the aim of the Supporting People programme was to:

- achieve a better quality of life for vulnerable people, allowing them to live more independently and maintain their tenancies;

- provide housing support services to prevent problems that can often lead to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness; and

- help to smooth the transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.

"H's brother and wife clearly indicated...the amazing transformation they see in H from coming out of hospital into supported living and the rediscovered talents and interests and confidence that they remember from H's younger years before the onset of his mental illness... Supported Housing and the collaborative approach by all has contributed greatly to H's wellbeing and this journey of success."

-   Supporting People Mental Health client

3.3   Supporting People services provide:

- short-term accommodation-based support for those people also in housing need (e.g. homeless hostels, refuges for victims of domestic violence);

- longer-term support to enable someone to sustain a home (e.g. in accommodation-based services where housing-related support is provided to assist the person to maintain their tenancy);

- short-term support through a floating support service to assist vulnerable adults with housing-related support tasks to help them maintain independence in their own home, regardless of tenure type (typically for up to two years in duration).

3.4   The Supporting People programme funds accommodation services for a broad range of vulnerable people, who fall within the client groups as set out in the table below (as at December 2014):

Supporting People Client Group	% of contracted Supporting People units	% of Supporting People budget
Homeless people	10%	21%
People with a learning disability	8%	21%
People with mental health issues	8%	17%
Older people	59%	14%
Women at risk of domestic violence	5%	7%
Young people at risk	3%	5%
People with drug and alcohol use problems	2%	6%
People with a physical or sensory disability	3%	4%
Offenders or people at risk of offending	1%	4%
Other vulnerable people	1%	1%

3.5   As the strategic housing authority for Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive takes administrative responsibility for delivering the Supporting People programme on behalf of the Department for Social Development. The programme in Northern Ireland is a working partnership with the Housing Executive, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Probation Board, and it is delivered through approximately 100 service providers. The majority of these providers are community and voluntary sector organisations, with other providers including Housing Associations, Health and Social Care Trusts and the Housing Executive.

3.6   **The Review Requirement**

There is a commitment by the Department for Social Development to review the Supporting People programme within the *Facing the Future* Northern Ireland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2012 – 2017. While service providers have been subject to various methods of regulation and inspection throughout the lifetime of the Programme, to date there has been no comprehensive value-for-money or policy appraisal – this Review is therefore crucially important in evaluating what the Programme has achieved, and in making recommendations for continuous improvement going forward.

3.7   **The Review Objectives**

The key objectives of the Review are to:

- provide an overview of existing provision and current expenditure broken down by category of service, and an assessment of the extent of which needs are being adequately met;

- evaluate the Supporting People policy and programme and the extent to which it has met its core aims in an economic, efficient and effective way since its launch in 2003;

- consider whether an adequate strategic, legislative and administrative framework is in place for the efficient and effective delivery of the Supporting People policy and programme in future;

- and where appropriate, make recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

Each of the review objectives are considered in turn in the following chapters of this Report.

3.8 The Review Methodology

The review was led by officials from the Department for Social Development, with support from delivery partners in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, who participated in a review project working group. Supporting People providers contributed to the policy review by means of a project advisory group, offering provider, and where possible, service user input, at key stages in the project.

3.9 The evidence base for the Review has drawn from a mixture of existing data sources and new research. This has included service provider workshops and feedback; site visits; a range of papers produced by the Department and peer reviewed; and a number of reports commissioned by NIHE and DSD.

3.10 The following papers have been produced by the Department to inform the Review, and are available on the Department's website:

- Original aims and objectives of the Supporting People Programme and its legislative base;

- Lessons learned paper, highlighting developments and relevant learning from elsewhere in the UK and in Ireland;

- A PEST and SWOT analysis on the wider policy, political, financial, social and environmental factors impacting on Supporting People and the opportunities and challenges provided by this context;

- A paper outlining the findings of key relevant studies, reviews and research to date and the effect of implementing recommendations from these on policy outcomes and improving value for money; and

- An analysis of the commissioning arrangements within Supporting People.

- Feedback from Supporting People Provider Events

3.11   In addition, the Department and the Housing Executive commissioned the following pieces of work:

- [Strategic Review of Supported Accommodation in Northern Ireland](#) (North Harbour Consulting, 2011)

- [Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Floating Support](#) (RSM McClure Watters, 2012)

- [Evaluation of Accommodation-based Services](#) funded by Supporting People (RSM McClure Watters, 2015).

- Bamford Review: the experience of learning disabled people resettled from long-stay hospitals in NI (North Harbour Consulting, phase 1, 2014)

- Review of the Supporting People Business Processes (SITRA, 2015)

3.12 Summaries of the first two reports listed at paragraph 3.11 are included in the DSD paper outlining the findings of key relevant studies, reviews and research to date (referenced in paragraph 3.10 above). The third report, on accommodation-based services was published recently by the Housing Executive. The final three reports listed had not been published at the time this Review was completed.

4. Review Objective 1 –
Existing Provision, Expenditure and Need

4.1   The first objective of the Review is to provide an overview of existing provision and current expenditure broken down by category of service, and an assessment of the extent to which needs are being adequately met.

4.2   **Provision and Expenditure**

There are two elements to the funding of Supporting People. Firstly, there is investment in the construction or purchase by Housing Associations of new supported housing units (capital), and secondly, there is the delivery of services to assist vulnerable people who live independently (revenue).

4.3   From April 2003 to March 2015, the Supporting People programme has spent £727m in revenue funding and £147m in capital funding. During that time, capital funding has provided almost 1700 new units of supported accommodation. More than 80% of the revenue funds have been used to provide services in housing association owned accommodation, with the balance used to fund peripatetic floating support services.

The table below shows total **revenue and capital expenditure** by the Housing Executive on the Supporting People programme since 2003/04:

Year	Final Spend £ '000
2003/04	44,928 (revenue only)
2004/05	55,275
2005/06	90,333
2006/07	86,461
2007/08	75,061

2008/09	70,063
2009/10	71,976
2010/11	76,063
2011/12	72,856
2012/13	75,133
2013/14	75,405
2014/15	80,150

4.4 The line graph below gives a trend synopsis of **revenue expenditure** by client group, since 2004:
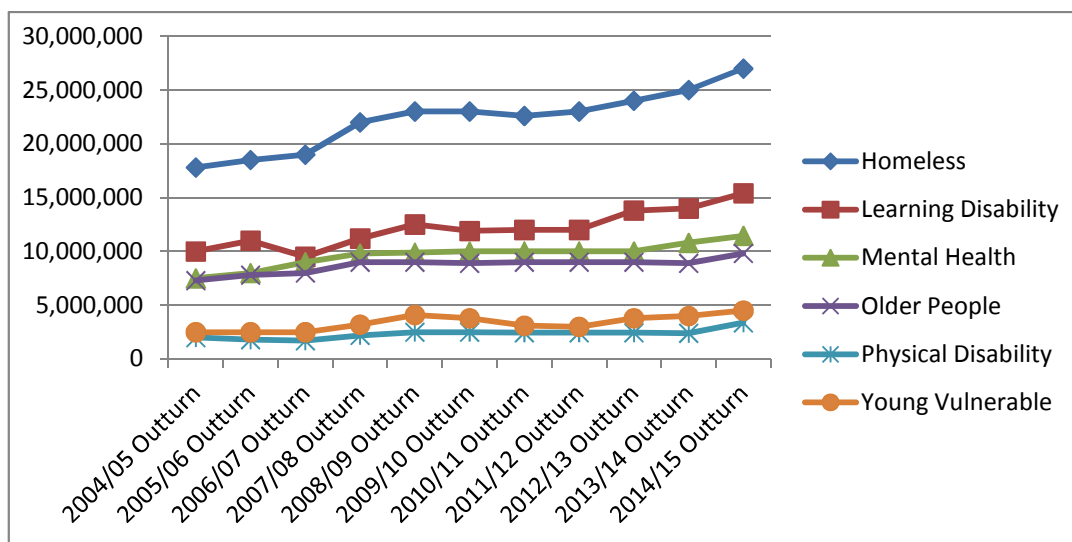
4.5 The line graph below gives a trend synopsis of the amount of **Capital Funding** that has been provided for the various service user client groups using the Supporting People programme. As the graph suggests, at the beginning of the programme there was an emphasis on the provision of sheltered accommodation for older people. As the programme developed, and following the Department of Health's Bamford Review of Mental Health and

Learning Disability, the emphasis of Supporting People shifted more toward the provision of supported housing accommodation to assist the resettlement strategy.
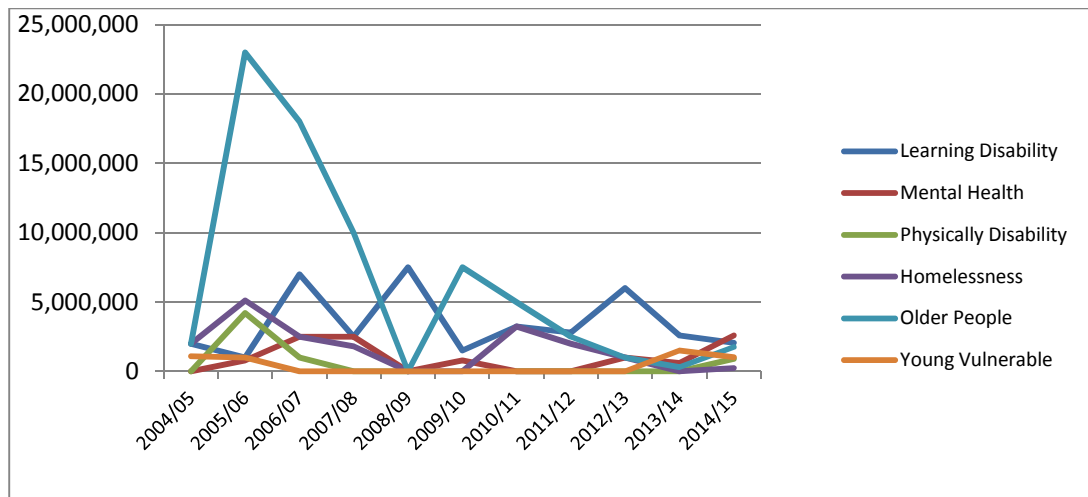
4.6   **Meeting Needs**

Supporting People currently has a target of assisting 17,000 vulnerable people to live independently each year. This was increased in 2011/12 from the original target of 12,000 people assisted. Both of these targets have consistently been exceeded year on year.

4.7   While achieving the target is positive, it is difficult to reach a firm overall assessment as to whether the programme has met needs adequately, primarily because there is currently no systematic, robust process for assessing housing support needs at a regional level. The individual case studies highlighted throughout the report, and other commissioned research, provide persuasive anecdotal evidence of needs being met, but no objective mechanism exists to verify that this is indeed the case. This has been identified as a key issue within the review.

> *"Mrs K (78 years old, and the main carer for her husband who has dementia) was allocated a support worker who liaised with NIHE in relation to the suspected asbestos in her home... A referral was also made to CAB for a benefits check to be completed. Mrs K is now confident that her home is asbestos free. In addition to the direct housing support, a listening ear and emotional support has been provided to Mrs K."*
>
> **Supporting People Older People Client**

4.8 It was recognised that through the [Homelessness Strategy](#), the Housing Executive has identified strategic needs for a range of homelessness services, although it was suggested by providers that further improvements could be made to this, particularly in better understanding the profile and needs of the homeless population.

4.9 However, the systems of needs assessment for other client groups were felt to be considerably weaker, and rely on information provided by Health and Social Care Trusts, based on their social care assessments of individual clients. While this approach might provide useful information to help determine the need for revenue services (such as floating support), it is not an adequate housing support needs assessment for overall planning purposes and it does not provide a sufficiently robust basis for making long-term decisions about capital build or infrastructure (such as hard-wired electronic assistive technology) requirements for supported housing.

4.10 The existing needs assessment system has been unable to articulate effectively at a regional level the range of emerging strategic housing support needs. Three, in particular, were identified during the review:

- the implications of an ageing population identified through 2011 Census data;
- the lack of suitable supported accommodation options in many areas for people with physical disabilities; and
- evidence emerging of latent demand for housing support from people with learning disabilities living with older carers (usually parents).

4.11 On this last point, the Review notes that the Health and Social Care Board has recently completed a bespoke needs assessment exercise to identify care needs for people with learning disabilities living with older carers.

4.12 There is, therefore, a strong case for a more robust approach to needs assessment which takes account of demographic trends and other social factors as a means of identifying both current and future patterns of need. Service-specific or local knowledge should also play a role in any future needs assessment system. In implementing any new process, there would be a case for comparing existing patterns of service to the outcomes of the needs analysis to identify gaps and overlaps.

Recommendation 1:

To introduce a new strategic, intelligence led approach to needs assessment across all client groups, which takes proper account of demographic trends and other social factors to identify current and future patterns of need.

5 Review Objective 2 – Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

5.1 The second objective of the Review is to evaluate the Supporting People policy and programme and the extent to which it has met its core aims in an economic, efficient and effective way since its launch in 2003.

5.2 This section will consider the extent to which Supporting People services have met the aims of the Programme, while also delivering value for money, taking into account both cost and the quality of service, and outcomes for service users.

Core Aim - Prevention

5.3 One of the core aims of Supporting People (per 3.2 above) is **to provide housing support services to prevent problems that can often lead to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness**. Indeed, the preventative value of the Supporting People programme was identified as a key strength in the Review, but it was acknowledged that this is difficult to quantify accurately.

5.4 There have, however, been a number of studies which have attempted to estimate the return on investment in housing-related support services. These estimates range from savings to the public purse of between £1.10 for every £1 spent on Supporting People in Scotland (2007 study), £1.68 per £1 of expenditure in Wales (2006 study) and £2.12 for every £1 spent in England (2009 study).

5.5   A similar study for Northern Ireland, commissioned by NICVA, was completed by SITRA in 2015.[1] This report estimates that every £1 spent on the Supporting People programme saves the public purse £1.90. Most of these estimated savings accrue to Health and Social Care budgets and through an inferred reduction in crime.

5.6   Evaluations by RSM McClure Watters of accommodation-based and floating support services funded by Supporting People in Northern Ireland also include qualitative evidence from service providers of the benefits of Supporting People interventions in reducing hospital admissions / re-admissions, delaying admission into residential or other institutional care and preventing tenancy breakdown, homelessness and re-offending.

5.7   **Floating Support**

The Review of Supporting People has identified floating support as a particularly cost-effective way of delivering preventative benefits. Floating support is a peripatetic housing support service delivered in a person's own home designed to help individuals maintain or develop the skills to live independently. Such services have been used, in particular, to prevent homelessness or to help re-integrate individuals back into communities following a period of homelessness or time spent in an institutional setting.

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[1] "The Financial Benefits of the Supporting People programme in Northern Ireland" (SITRA, 2015) available at www.nicva.org/resource/financial-benefits-supporting-people-programme-northern-ireland

> *"A has cerebral palsy and is a service user of (a) Floating Support Service in the Southern Trust area. Life changed for A when her mum became ill with dementia. Her Floating Support Worker linked A with a local service to enable her to better understand dementia and the changes her mother was experiencing. The next step involved working closely with A to help her source independent living options and find a good solution specific to her needs.... (Supported living) has given A the emotional support to have the confidence to live independently and learn many new skills."*
>
> **Supporting People Physical Disability client**

5.8   Floating support plays a key role in early intervention and prevention and has the potential to extend Supporting People services across a wider geographical spread, particularly in rural areas where it is often not financially viable to provide tailored accommodation-based services. The review also found good examples of floating support working successfully in tandem with accommodation-based services, particularly for young homeless people, supporting individuals in their journey to full independence.

5.9   Because floating support is intended to build skills to support independent living, services for individual clients are currently time-bound to two years. While, in most instances, this should be adequate, there is a case for greater flexibility to be applied in this rule, particularly where floating support offers a more cost-effective solution to meeting an individual's needs than alternative provision.

> **Recommendation 2:**
>
> **To actively progress opportunities to extend the floating support service as a cost effective way of meeting need.**

Core Aim – Quality of Life

5.10   Another core aim of the Supporting People programme is to achieve a better quality of life for vulnerable people, allowing them to live more independently and maintain their tenancies (per 3.2 above).

5.11   The review found a range of qualitative evidence that indicated that this core aim was being achieved. This evidence took the form of provider feedback, testimonials from service users and their families and focus groups with service users. Service users interviewed as part of the RSM McClure Watters Evaluation of Accommodation-Based Services funded by Supporting People reported benefits to their economic, social, psychological, and physical well-being. The Evaluation of Floating Support Services involved focus groups with service users and "it was the opinion of all participants that their quality of life had been immeasurably improved through the provision of floating support."[2]

> *"If I didn't have floating support now, I would be very isolated and wouldn't have anyone to help me work through things. I would be very anxious and worried, as I have been before when there were neighbour problems, and wouldn't have the confidence I have now. It is all helping me in independence."*
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> -   **Supporting People Homeless Young Person client**

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[2] "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Floating Support" (RSM McClure Watters, 2012).

Outcomes Measurement

5.12   The review found it more difficult to establish quantitative evidence of the outcomes achieved by the Supporting People programme. Several tools exist within the provider sector for measuring outcomes, some of which are highly effective, but none are used consistently across providers and there is no accessible central tool for comparing or benchmarking performance across projects or providers.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by other researchers. For example, in their work on evaluating accommodation based services, RSM McClure Watters noted that "we encountered difficulties in drawing meaningful conclusions on service effectiveness, due to limitations in the Supporting People data collected."

5.13   It is clear that outcomes measurement across the Supporting People programme would benefit from a revised approach. An improved outcomes measurement framework will require input from both service providers (who will need to review their in-house systems), and the Housing Executive (who are already working on improving their systems for capturing outcomes data). This is a significant task, which will need all parties to gain a more thorough understanding of the measures to be used and the data required for meaningful performance assessment. Some cognisance might also usefully be paid to the learning from recent efforts across the Health and Social Care sector to move to a common outcome assessment tool for social care services.

Recommendation 3:

To develop a revised approach to outcomes measurement, in consultation with service providers, that will allow for more consistent and meaningful performance monitoring.

Decommissioning Framework

5.14   The revised approach to outcomes measurement detailed above would be an essential tool in establishing a robust and unambiguous decommissioning process. While the available evidence suggests that most Supporting People services are provided to a high standard, it has been highlighted that no consistent approach exists for decommissioning any services that have not met the standard required – or indeed, services which are no longer strategically necessary. It is important that any decommissioning is evidently for the benefit of service users, and a clear set of performance standards (per recommendation 3 above) which are either met or missed will emphasise that the focus is on improving quality or aligning services with current need.

5.15   Decommissioning of services, where necessary, can be a highly sensitive issue and a transparent decommissioning framework, with agreed standards and definitions, would be a useful foundation on which to base those difficult decisions.

Recommendation 4:

To develop a decommissioning framework for services which fall below the required standard, or which are no longer strategically relevant. This should be developed in consultation with service providers, and include agreed standards and definitions.

Core Aim - Resettlement

5.16 The third and final core aim of the Supporting People programme is **to help to smooth the transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.**

5.17 The Housing Executive has played a key role in helping to deliver the Department of Health and Social Services' strategy (often referred to as 'Bamford') to resettle people with learning disabilities or mental health issues from long-stay hospitals into the community. NIHE's work has involved working in partnership with housing associations and others to fund and develop appropriate new social housing which meets the needs of resettled people and providing funding for the housing support services required to help them to live independently through the Supporting People programme.

5.18 In addition, since the inception of the Supporting People programme, the Housing Executive has worked with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to meet the accommodation and housing support needs of individuals leaving Prison Service facilities.

5.19 In terms of the Bamford resettlement programme, the review has found a number of positive impacts on the individuals resettled and their families. However, this has come at a considerable cost. Bamford-related services, funded through Supporting People, are significantly more expensive than similar services offered to other clients with learning disabilities or mental health issues through the Supporting People programme. For clients with learning disabilities, for example, the average cost per bed space to Supporting People for a service provided through the resettlement programme is more than two and a half times higher than for bed spaces in other services for clients with learning disabilities. It will be difficult to sustain this higher cost in the medium and longer-term and all partners in such schemes (Health and Social Care, providers and NIHE) need to work together to develop a more

viable service delivery model which meets need in the most cost-effective way possible.

5.20   The review has also found some evidence of significantly higher costs in some schemes which are not easily explicable by reference to the housing support needs of the clients within those schemes. This could suggest that, in some cases, Supporting People funding is being used to help meet the costs of other statutory services which are not eligible for funding through the Supporting People programme. This requires further investigation by the Housing Executive.

Standardised Regional Payment Rates

5.21   As noted above, there are significant variations in costs within client groups. While this is most marked for learning disability services, it is a feature across most client group services within the programme. For example, wide differentials in costs were also found by an independent study on accommodation-based homelessness services funded by Supporting People.[3]

5.22   While it is acknowledged that some level of variation can be explained by differing client needs, the review found it difficult to find a coherent and convincing pattern and rationale which justifies the wide range of cost variation. A more standardised approach to expected costs, and to the explanation of any variations, would be an important step towards better demonstrating value for money.

5.23   The Supporting People programme already uses a system of classifying projects as high, medium or low support, which provides a degree of benchmarking. This could be used as the basis for developing a more standardised approach to funding services. Such a system could potentially

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[3]"Strategic Review of Supported Accommodation in Northern Ireland funded by the Supporting People programme" (North Harbour, 2011)

include the flexibility to negotiate a rate outside the set bands based on a convincing and well-evidenced need. In setting rates, the Housing Executive will need to take account of the UK Government's decision to move to a national living wage by 2020, which was announced by the Chancellor in July 2015.

Recommendation 5:

Standardised regional payment rates should be developed for Supporting People services, based on the existing project banding system, and in consultation with service providers. The new rates should ensure all schemes represent value for money.

6   Review Objective 3 –
Strategic, Legislative and Administrative
Framework

6.1   The third objective of the Review is to consider whether an adequate
strategic, legislative and administrative framework is in place for the efficient
and effective delivery of the Supporting People policy and programme in the
future.

Policy and Legislation

6.2   As outlined in previous chapters, the focus of the Supporting People
programme is on supporting 'independent living' through the provision of
'housing support'. What is meant by housing support services is set out in the
Housing Support Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 and is detailed
in the paper *The Original Aims / Objectives of the Supporting People
Programme and Legislation*, produced as part of the review.[4]

6.3   During the review, the feedback from partners and providers was that the
current legislative and policy framework remains fit for purpose. Positive
reference was made to DSD produced guidance on Supporting People, the
latest in 2012, which included policy positions on the terms 'housing support'
and 'independent living'.

6.4   It has become apparent though that with the passage of time, some confusion
has re-emerged about the services eligible for funding within the Supporting
People programme and there are different views on what constitutes
'independent living'. It would be helpful to address this by consolidating,
sharpening and re-communicating the current policy and guidance, with a

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[4] This paper is available at www.dsdni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/supporting-people-
review-original-aims-objectives.pdf

clear focus on what is meant by 'housing support services' and 'independent living'.

Recommendation 6:

The current policy framework for Supporting People should be consolidated, sharpened and re communicated, focusing on improving understanding of key terms such as *housing support services* and *independent living.*

Roles and Responsibilities

6.5   Clarity is important as a number of services are jointly commissioned, with both the Probation Board and, in significantly greater numbers, with Health and Social Care. The review has found the emergence of a number of ambiguities and overlap in roles and responsibilities between Government Departments and statutory agencies over time, particularly between housing and health and social care. In Scotland, these ambiguities have been tackled by merging social care and supported housing services under the social care umbrella. A significant number of providers consulted during the review indicated considerable resistance to this approach, advocating a stronger housing lead for jointly-commissioned Supporting People schemes and welcoming the leadership provided by the Department and the Housing Executive.

6.6   The RSM McClure Watters evaluation of accommodation-based services has identified evidence of potential cross-subsidisation of some services by Supporting People which are the statutory responsibility of other bodies. This

evidence relates primarily to a number of services with a social care dimension but also flags the potential for similar issues in services jointly commissioned with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. It will be important for the Housing Executive to undertake further work to establish whether cross-subsidisation is taking place and, if so, develop plans with statutory partners to address this.

6.7   On a related point, the Review has found that over the current Programme for Government period, there has been a move away from building generic models of supported housing, which have the potential to meet a range of needs, towards more specialist, bespoke accommodation specifically designed for individual clients, often commissioned through Supporting People by Health and Social Care. A highly bespoke approach presents a number of challenges given that the expected lifespan of a capital build is a minimum of 30 years. In the absence of robust, strategically-focused needs assessment, this bespoke approach adds significant risk, current cost (as bespoke solutions are considerably more expensive to construct) and potentially, future 'sunk' costs (i.e. if bespoke buildings need to be further modified to meet changing need during their economic life), to the Supporting People programme.

6.8   Sunk costs have already been realised in at least one highly bespoke scheme for clients with dementia where the relevant Health and Social Care Trust did not stand over its own needs assessment and commissioning decision. In this instance, all the financial repercussions of this Trust decision were borne by DSD and the housing association who constructed the scheme. Capital resources were committed for bespoke design features, many of which are no longer required because of the changed client group living in the scheme, and the housing association faced a considerable financial shortfall in the scheme's running costs. It is important to avoid this in future and for all partners to meet their commitments. More appropriate arrangements for sharing costs and risks would support this.

6.9   During stakeholder engagement for this Review, a number of housing professionals made a case for moving away from these higher-risk solutions towards the development of more generic models of supported housing, which can be adapted to meet a range of needs more flexibly over the expected lifespan of the building. This more generic approach can be tailored to meet need through, for example, the staffing model adopted or by adding 'plug and play' electronic assistive technologies appropriate to individual circumstances. In general, the Review noted a desire amongst service providers to ensure a more joined-up approach to developing Supporting People schemes, involving greater sharing of costs and risks between all statutory partners.

Recommendation 7:

The relationships and funding responsibilities of the various statutory partners within the Supporting People programme should be clarified to ensure costs and risks are shared appropriately.

Ring-fencing of Funding

6.10   At one time, revenue funding for Supporting People was ring-fenced across the UK. This meant that once revenue funding was allocated to Supporting People for a particular financial year, it was dedicated to housing support services aligned with the programme's aims and objectives. The ring-fence has been removed in both England and Scotland. It remains in place in Wales and Northern Ireland.

6.11   In Scotland, the removal of the ring-fence has led to some reduction in housing-led support services. In England the result has been somewhat more dramatic, with a large reduction in services in most council areas.

6.12 Given the English experience, service providers in Northern Ireland have made a strong case for the retention of a dedicated, ring-fenced budget for housing support services. It has been argued that this would be critical in ensuring the security and sustainability of the Supporting People programme and the maintenance of important services for vulnerable people.

> **Recommendation 8:**
>
> **Maintain the current ring fenced funding arrangements for the Supporting People programme.**

Commissioning Process

6.13 Supporting People services are currently commissioned through a two-tier commissioning structure. This is led by a Commissioning Body. The existing Commissioning Body for Supporting People is chaired by the Housing Executive and its other membership includes representatives from the Health and Social Care Board, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Health and Social Care Regulator, RQIA, also sits on the Commissioning Body as an observer. This Commissioning Body is supported by five Area Supporting People Partnerships (ASPPs), covering each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas.

6.14 The review has identified three main issues with the current commissioning process:

- its lack of transparency;
- its complexity; and

- the lack of a clear line of sight between commissioning decisions and strategic priorities.

6.15 In terms of transparency, no Supporting People providers consulted during the review were able to explain how the commissioning process worked and decisions reached. This is perhaps not surprising given that the membership and minutes of commissioning body meetings are not publicly available and neither service users nor providers have any role currently in helping to inform commissioning decisions.

6.16 The two-tier process also seems somewhat complex in a small region like Northern Ireland and it is not clear that having a second formal tier adds significant value. The current structure is also weighted in favour of representation from Health and Social Care. Given that Supporting People is a housing support programme, it would be sensible to include greater representation in commissioning structures from housing professionals. There may also be a case for DSD involvement.

6.17 In comparing approaches in other jurisdictions, the review team found considerable merit in the general approach to commissioning used in Wales. In Wales, the Minister responsible for housing sets commissioning priorities over a Programme for Government period based on policy priorities and needs assessment. These commissioning priorities guide the production of a strategic Supporting People plan which then frames commissioning decisions.

Recommendation 9:

The existing commissioning structure should be revised to improve its transparency, to increase representation from Supporting People service users and providers, and to ensure an appropriate role for both housing and health and social care professionals.

Recommendation 10:

A clearer strategic line of sight should be introduced into the Programme with the Minister responsible for housing setting commissioning priorities over a programming period, based on both policy imperatives and needs assessment. This will guide the NIHE's strategic plan for Supporting People delivery and frame commissioning decisions within the Supporting People programme.

Procurement

6.18   Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK where competitive tendering is not used at all for Supporting People or housing-related support services.

6.19   The available evidence indicates a mixed picture across the UK in terms of the efficacy of competitive tendering. In England, there are indications that   it has reduced the quality of service, driven smaller providers from the market and created new layers of bureaucracy. The short-term contracts generally used have also been seen as threatening the viability of services and discouraging long-term innovation. However in Scotland, where competitive tendering is used more selectively, there have not been significant issues identified with the approach or a negative impact of tendering on service quality.

A number of perspectives around procurement were received from Supporting People partners. Some felt that a more open, competitive process would better ensure value for money and also, given the large amounts of public

money involved, a robust system of competitive procurement was imperative to ensure financial probity and confidence in the programme.

6.20   Other partners were concerned that provision for the care and support of vulnerable people should be based more on quality than cost. There was a fear that smaller, more local or more specialised providers would not have the resources or expertise to successfully bid for tender opportunities, and so would effectively be prevented from providing appropriate services. Competitive tendering had the potential, in this view, to have a negative impact on service quality, and on clients.

6.21   From most partners, there was broad support for piloting a competitive tendering process, in order to test the circumstances in which this approach might be used to best effect. It could be trialled where a service has been decommissioned (for reasons of under-performance or where it was no longer strategically required) or where a new service is identified as being necessary. Any pilot should be evaluated to assess its effectiveness in improving the commissioning process, service delivery and value for money. In operating such a pilot, there may be merit in encouraging service providers to develop their procurement capacity perhaps by working in partnership, sharing expertise and resources.

Recommendation 11:

A competitive tendering approach should be piloted, focusing particularly on new and replacement services. The pilots should be evaluated to identify their impact on value for money and service delivery.

Streamlining Regulation and Oversight

6.22   Because of its nature and client base, Supporting People is a cross-cutting programme which connects housing support with a number of other statutory services. There is no bespoke regulatory system for Supporting People services *per se* - rather there are a number of existing regulatory systems which cover aspects of service delivered within Supporting People funded schemes.

6.23   A number of Supporting People services for older people, younger people and those with disabilities also include elements of social care. For services which include a social care element, the Health and Social Care Regulator, RQIA, has regulatory responsibility. However, the standards against which RQIA regulate have been designed for domiciliary care and do not always fit well with the Supporting People model which aims to emphasise independent living. This issue has been addressed in services for young people by developing more bespoke standards in conjunction with providers and the statutory sector.

6.24   The Department for Social Development is the regulator of registered housing associations. Housing associations are the landlords for most accommodation-based Supporting People services and many are also service providers.

6.25   The Criminal Justice Inspectorate has a role in regulating approved premises jointly commissioned through Supporting People by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

6.26   In addition, as the administrating authority for the Supporting People programme, the Housing Executive undertakes a range of contract management functions to test the quality of services being provided. The main

tool for this is the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). This involves a significant element of provider self-assessment which is tested through verification visits by NIHE staff.   Many providers consulted during the review acknowledged the value of QAF but noted that it is a very resource intensive process and the value-added of all elements is not always clear.

6.27   Effective regulation and contract management play an important role in protecting vulnerable service users and ensuring good quality services. It is important that regulatory and administrative activities are conducted in a balanced way, with a proportionate regulatory burden on service providers.

6.28   The review found that the current overlap between the various regulatory bodies created a degree of confusion and, in some instances, duplication of effort. As a first step, work is needed to harmonise and streamline regulatory and administrative activity. The Housing Executive and the Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) are well-advanced on the production of a draft memorandum of understanding which will go a considerable way to address these issues.

6.29   There would be a case for going further than this and developing, over the longer-term, a more focused and tailored system of regulation for Supporting People services. Rather than creating a new body, this approach could harness the expertise available among existing regulators, in particular RQIA, and learn from the good work already completed on the regulation of services for young people. Given the breadth of the Supporting People programme, the scope, nature and locus of a revised regulatory regime would need to be carefully considered, as would the adequacy of the statutory powers of existing regulators to carry out a revised function.

Recommendation 12:

The Housing Executive and the RQIA should complete their current work on developing a Memorandum of Understanding, with a view to streamlining regulation and oversight, and avoiding duplication.

Recommendation 13:

A more focused and tailored system of regulation for Supporting People services should be considered, based on the experiences of the revised approach for regulating services to younger people.

7 Review Objective 4 – Recommendations for Efficiency and Effectiveness

7.1   A number of recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Supporting People programme have arisen throughout the course of this Review. These recommendations are noted throughout this Report and are collated here for ease of reference.

7.2   The Department for Social Development will work with key partners on the development of an implementation plan for these thirteen recommendations which will be published in spring 2016. At this stage, it is intended that the majority of the recommendations will be implemented within two years.

Recommendation 1:

To introduce a new strategic, intelligence led approach to needs assessment across all client groups, which takes proper account of demographic trends and other social factors to identify current and future patterns of need.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 2:

To actively progress opportunities to extend the floating support service as a cost effective way of meeting need.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 3:

To develop a revised approach to outcomes measurement, in consultation with service providers, that will allow for more consistent and meaningful performance monitoring.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 4:

To develop a decommissioning framework for services which fall below the required standard, or which are no longer strategically relevant. This should be developed in consultation with service providers, and include agreed standards and definitions.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 5:

Standardised regional payment rates should be developed for Supporting People services, based on the existing project banding system, and in consultation with service providers. The new rates should ensure all schemes represent value for money.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 6:

The current policy framework for Supporting People should be consolidated, sharpened and re communicated, focusing on improving understanding of the meaning of key terms such as *housing support services* and *independent living*.

Responsibility: Department for Social Development

Recommendation 7:

The relationships and funding responsibilities of the various statutory partners within the Supporting People programme should be clarified to ensure costs and risks are shared appropriately.

Responsibility: Department for Social Development and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Recommendation 8:

Maintain the current ring fenced funding arrangements for the Supporting People programme.

Responsibility: Department for Social Development

Recommendation 9:

The existing commissioning structure should be revised to improve its transparency, to increase representation from Supporting People service users and providers, and to ensure an appropriate role for both housing and health and social care professionals.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 10:

A clearer strategic line of sight should be introduced into the Programme with the Minister responsible for housing setting commissioning priorities over a programming period, based on both policy imperatives and needs assessment. This will guide the NIHE's strategic plan for Supporting People delivery and frame commissioning decisions within the Supporting People programme.

Responsibility: Department for Social Development and Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 11:

A competitive tendering approach should be piloted, focusing particularly on new and replacement services. The pilots should be evaluated to identify their impact on value for money and service delivery.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Recommendation 12:

The Housing Executive and the RQIA should complete their current work on developing a Memorandum of Understanding, with a view to streamlining regulation and oversight, and avoiding duplication.

Responsibility: Northern Ireland Housing Executive and RQIA

Recommendation 13:

A more focused and tailored system of regulation for Supporting People services should be considered, based on the experiences of the revised approach for regulating services to younger people.

Responsibility: Department for Social Development and Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

8. Equality

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department in carrying out its functions to have **due regard** to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to the obligations set out above, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have **regard** to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

As referenced earlier, the Review has been conducted in a collaborative way and there has been considerable engagement throughout with stakeholders, not least Supporting People providers. Key research projects drawn on by the review have also engaged service users.

Initial equality screening on the thirteen recommendations has been undertaken and this has indicated that sharpening the delivery of the Supporting People programme will have a positive impact on equality and there are no anticipated adverse impacts on any section 75 group. The screening will be reviewed as the Review moves into the implementation phase.

9   Appendix A -
Sources and Bibliography

The documents immediately below were produced by staff from the Department for Social Development as part of the Review of Supporting People:

DSD - Terms of Reference – Review of the Supporting People Policy and Legislative Framework

DSD – Supporting People Review – Original Aims and Objectives

DSD – Commissioning within Supporting People in Northern Ireland

DSD – Summary of Evidence paper – Supporting People Review

DSD – Lessons Learned Report from Supporting People Programmes in the UK and Republic of Ireland

In writing the Review of Supporting People report, DSD staff referred to a number of documents and other sources. The main ones are set out below.

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[DOJ – Youth Justice Agency](#)

[Homeless.org](#)

[Inside Housing](#)

[NI Audit Office](#)

[NI Assembly](#)

[NIFHA](#)

[NIHE – Housing related support services directory](#)

[NIHE – Service provider accreditation process](#)

[NIHE – Social housing development programme and unmet need](#)

[OFMDFM – Statistical information](#)

[PBNI](#)

[RQIA](#)

Appendix B

Stakeholder Engagement Log

- **Supporting People Review Project Advisory Group**

  This group met regularly from May 2014 to July 2015 and comprised of members from DSD, NI Housing Executive, NI Federation of Housing Associations, Council for the Homeless NI, Depaul Ireland, FOLD, First Housing and Support Services and Triangle Housing Association.

- **Supporting People Review Project Working Group**

  This group met regularly from April 2014 to July 2015 and comprised of members from DSD, NI Housing Executive and DHSSPS.

- **NIFHA Supporting People Conference – Wed 3 June 2015**

  Stephen Martin provided an overview of Emerging Findings at this event.

- **Supporting People Provider Events:**

  Initial Events – November 2014

  Event for Providers in Learning Disability and Mental Health Sector

  Event for Providers in Older People Sector

  Event for Providers in Homelessness Sector

  Emerging Findings Events – June 2015

  Summary of Feedback from Provider Events

  Event for Providers in Homelessness Sector

[Event for Providers in Learning Disability and Mental Health Sector](#)

[Event for Providers in Older People Sector](#)

[Event for Providers in All Client Groups](#)