

**Report to Council by Councillor S-A. Stavrou as the Council's Representative
on the Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body
20th April 2010**

Introduction

At last year's Annual Council Meeting, the Housing Portfolio Holder was appointed as the Council's representative on the Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body, and I was appointed as the substitute representative. However, since Commissioning Body Meetings are held during the day in Chelmsford, and due to the work commitments of the Housing Portfolio Holder, I have undertaken the role as the Council's representative over the past year.

As we come to the end of the Municipal Year, I thought Members of the Council would welcome a report on my representation and activities.

Background to Supporting People

Supporting People is a national programme funded through the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). The programme went live in March 2003 and brought together various funding streams related to the provision of support, linked to accommodation for vulnerable adults. Grant allocations at that time were based on the existing and planned levels of provision across the country, rather than an analysis of need.

Funding has been paid by the CLG to county-level local authorities (the "Administering Authorities") who manage the SP Grant on behalf of a formal partnership, called the Supporting People Commissioning Body.

In the past, the SP Grant from the CLG was ring-fenced for use only for Supporting People activities. However, from April 2010, the grant will be included as part of the County Council's Area-Based Grant. This means that the County Council can decide how much of their Area-Based Grant should be allocated to Supporting People. This is an area of concern, shared by most of the members of the Commissioning Body, since less money may be allocated to Supporting People by the County Council, than the additional money the County Council receives through its Area-Based Grant.

Commissioning Services

The current SP grant from the CLG for Essex is just under £30m per annum. This is used to commission over 700 services from 120 providers. Most providers are councils or housing associations, but some are charities.

These commissioned-services deliver 'housing related support' to vulnerable adults. Services can either be specifically linked to accommodation, or can be provided through floating support. This is where support is provided to a person in the community, who is not living in specialist accommodation. When/if the support is no longer required, the support worker "floats away" to provide support to another person in another property.

The vulnerable groups supported by SP include young people leaving care; women escaping domestic violence; older people in sheltered accommodation or Extra Care; people at risk of offending; teenage parents and vulnerable homeless people as well as adults with mental health problems or a learning disability. Services are aimed at building or maintaining independent living skills and often prevent or delay people requiring more costly interventions.

As well as being involved with commissioning services (through the Commissioning Body – see below), the Council is also a provider of supported housing. The main provision by the Council is its sheltered housing, but also includes Norway House and CARE, the Council's Home Improvement Agency (HIA).

The Supporting People Commissioning Body

The Commissioning Body is a partnership comprising councillors from each of the 12 District Councils and Essex County Council and officers or board members from Probation and Health. It meets around 4 times each year at County Hall, Chelmsford. The Commissioning Body's purpose is to agree and oversee the strategic and budgetary direction of Supporting People in Essex.

District Councillors are accompanied by senior officers. I am usually accompanied by the Director of Housing, who is also a member of the Essex Supporting People Core Strategy Group. The Core Strategy Group comprises officers from each of the district councils, Essex County Council and others, and meets in advance of Commissioning Body meetings to consider and comment on draft reports to the Commissioning Body. The Core Strategy Group's comments and recommendations are included within the reports to the Commissioning Body.

The Supporting People Team

The Supporting People Team is provided by Essex County Council, and manages the day-to-day running of the programme. This includes strategic and service reviews, the latter being against a national Quality Assurance Framework. The SP Team also carry out contract management including the collection and analysis of a range of performance indicators. Over a period of time, the "legacy services" that were inherited at the beginning of the SP Programme have been formally reviewed and reshaped to provide greater consistency. Services continue to be reshaped as strategic priorities evolve.

As well as reporting on two National Indicators (NI 141 – *Planned moves by Vulnerable Adults* and NI 142 – *Vulnerable Adults Maintaining Independence*) the SP Team also records "Outcomes" against a National Framework, which enables them to identify successful delivery of outcomes at the service level.

Individual Meetings with the Chairman of the Commissioning Body and the Head of Supporting People

Each year, the Chairman of the Commissioning Body (Cllr Derek Robinson) and the Head of Supporting People (Simon Harniess) take the trouble to come out and visit each of the Commissioning Body members, and their supporting officer, to discuss SP issues affecting their organisation.

The Director of Housing and I met them at the Civic Offices, Epping on the 26th February 2010. The discussion was wide-ranging, and we took the opportunity to raise our concerns about some of the proposed changes that may affect our Council (see below).

Key Issues in 2009-10

Governance

Governance arrangements for SP in Essex were reviewed and the decision was made to continue with the current arrangements of the member-led Commissioning Body, supported by an officer-led Core Strategy Group.

Budget 2010/11

Since the Supporting People regime was introduced in 2003, the level of grant from the CLG has reduced consistently in real terms, which has provided challenges for the Commissioning Body over the years. As a result, over recent years, the Commissioning Body has had freeze payments to SP Providers, including our Council, giving no inflationary increases.

This year's budget-setting process was particularly difficult, and led to the need for a special meeting to consider the budget position. One of the problems was that the County Council attempted to impose additional savings in the SP Budget, in addition to the CLG's reduction in its SP Grant. However, the officer Core Strategy Group and the Commissioning Body (particularly our Chairman - a county councillor) worked hard together to successfully minimise the budget reductions. Nevertheless, once again, it was not possible to increase the payments to SP Providers (including our Council) for the forthcoming year, which will cause real difficulty for some providers.

The challenging times for the public sector generally have resulted in the Commissioning Body establishing an officer-led Finance Sub-Group, to look at better alignment of costs across particular types of service in order to ensure we are able to meet future challenges. Our Director of Housing is a member of this Sub-Group.

Strategic Review of Older Peoples Services

During the year, further progress was made with the Strategic Review of Older Peoples Services, which SP fund. This is primarily in relation to sheltered schemes, but also includes Extra Care and there is a subsidiary review looking at Telecare (see below). Therefore, this has been of great interest to me, both from a commissioning point of view, and from the point of view of the Council having its own sheltered housing schemes and Careline Service (which provides Telecare).

Following extensive consultation, the review has now moved to the implementation stage. It is expected that the majority of providers, including our Council, will now begin to move away from the traditional sheltered model to a 'hub and spoke' model. This model preserves the core service, but begins to deliver the service into the wider community, where there are often more vulnerable older people. This increased flexibility enables support to be better targeted according to need, rather than tenure.

There were a number of options available with regard to how the "hub and spoke" model would operate, some of which – including the Supporting People Team's "preferred option" at one point - would have had a serious detrimental financial effect on our Council. Supported by officers, our Council led the arguments against such options, which has resulted in our preferred option being adopted.

Response to the "Southwark Judgement"

During the year, a court case involving the London Borough of Southwark (now referred to as "the Southwark Judgement") clarified the respective responsibilities of Children's Social Care and Housing in relation to 16-17 year olds that present as homeless. In brief, the court decided that Children's Social Care should be responsible, not councils. As a result, on behalf of the Commissioning Body, the SP Team have worked closely with partners to ensure the best use of SP-funded accommodation to meet the changing needs.

Additional Handyperson Funding

Supporting People already commission Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) – like our Council's Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (CARE) Service - many of which provide a "Handyperson Service". The Commissioning Body were pleased to obtain an additional £150,000 from the CLG in 2009/10, and a further £220,000 for 2010/11, which was earmarked for additional handyperson funding. This was intended to iron out any inequalities in current service distribution. Adding the new funding to the existing funding produced a "notional funding pot" which the Commissioning Body then distributed to existing services across the county on the basis of needs indicators. As a result, our Council will receive an additional £26,725 over this two-year period for our Handyperson Service.

Key Challenges and Activities for 2010-11

Re-commissioning of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs)

During next year, the contracts in place for the provision of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs - like our CARE Service) between, Supporting People, Adult Social Care, the district councils and providers will expire. A review is being undertaken to re-commission these services from April 2011. Since the current funding is distributed on a "legacy basis", with no reference to need, the Commissioning Body will be seeking to align funding to the HIAs according to needs indicators.

It is likely that a smaller number of HIAs will have larger contracts for providing HIA services to a larger number of districts. One of the outcomes of this re-commissioning exercise could be that our Council loses the ability to operate our own HIA, and that a housing association wins the contract to operate the HIA service in Epping Forest. We are currently the only council in Essex that operates its own HIA. If I am appointed as the Council's Supporting People representative next year, this is an aspect I will be monitoring closely and, as usual, will act in the best interests of our Council

Review of Telecare Services

The Commissioning Body will be progressing the Telecare Review, with the aim of establishing a more logical and equitable distribution of SP funding. As members will be aware, our Council provides its own Careline Service, partially funded by SP.

As with the re-commissioning of HIAs, one of the outcomes of the Telecare Review could be that our Council loses the ability to operate our own Careline Service (or lose SP funding) and that another housing provider (council or housing association) could win a contract to operate the Careline Service in Epping Forest. Again, I will be monitoring this issue closely on behalf of the Council, especially our Council plans to use our Careline Control Centre for a number of other purposes (e.g. receipt of housing repair requests out of hours, and CCTV monitoring).

Service Review Programme

All SP services were reviewed in the first three years of the SP Programme. Following a series of Strategic Reviews, SP have now implemented a programme of risk-based service reviews. These have already started, with the three county-wide holistic floating support services being reviewed first. Reviews are carried out against the national Quality Assurance Framework and include considerations of performance and value for money. Around 112 services are scheduled for review, including some of this Council's SP-funded services.

New Developments

Along with officers, I have been advocating the establishment of a "Development Fund" (funded from SP savings), to fund new supported housing schemes in Essex for some time. Indeed, in the Commissioning Body's draft budget, a Development Fund of £0.5m was included.

However, it is unfortunate that the reduction of SP funding in Essex by £1m next year means that new supported housing developments have had to be shelved. Following a process to bring forward bids, the Commissioning Body had agreed three priority schemes, including one which would have targeted people with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles through intensive floating support.