



LSEP Project

Briefing for commissioners

1 October 2009

Introduction

Sitra is an umbrella organisation committed to raising standards in the housing, care and support sector. We are a membership organisation and a registered charity with over 25 years experience of offering practitioners a range of affordable policy, training, information, conference and capacity building services.

In 2009-10 Sitra has been funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) to run the Local Strategic Engagement Project to ensure that housing related support (HRS) services continue to be effectively commissioned and provided, that providers, commissioners and users are effectively engaged in strategic planning and that providers are supported in engagement in Local Strategic Partnerships.

Background

The Supporting People programme was launched in 2003 to provide housing related support services to vulnerable people in their locality. Local authorities were given grants from the CLG to commission services that met the needs of people within their area. These services are provided by organisations in the third and private sector and in some cases by the public sector, through contractual arrangements. Service users have benefited from services designed to maintain or develop their skills to live more independently. Until April 2009 the Supporting People grant was ring fenced for those Local Authorities not deemed excellent; the grant was also subject to conditions, precluding it being spent on statutory services and ensuring it only funded housing related support. In April 2009 the ring fence was removed however local authorities will continue to receive the funds as a named grant. In April 2010 this money will become part of the Area Based Grant paid to local authorities. This represents a change in the governance and commissioning arrangements for housing related support. Local Strategic Partnerships have the responsibility for achieving the Sustainable Communities Strategy through Local Area Agreements utilising the funding through the Area Based Grant. Behind this broader agenda of devolution down to local government lay more holistic outcomes, competitive tendering and the current economic climate. Local authorities, through the LSP's will have a number of targets, chosen on a local basis from the set of national indicators.

Housing related support

Sitra believes that housing related support services make a significant contribution to the quality of the lives of the most vulnerable people in the community. We want to ensure preventative services continue to be prioritised and valued in the new structures that govern and commission local services. The CLG commissioned Cap Gemini to produce a tool to enable local authorities to evidence the financial cost benefits of housing related support. National research has demonstrated considerable savings as the provision of housing related support services can prevent the use of most intensive costly public services. The Cap Gemini tool is one of a range of products that can support local authorities, evidencing the value of housing related support. Another is the Office of the Third Sector, *Social Return on Investment*. This is a framework for measuring and accounting for a wider concept of value by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits.

Opportunities for commissioners

The removal of the ring fence and the eventual absorption of the named grant into the Area Based Grant provides commissioners with a number of opportunities. The changes will allow for more flexibility in the use of the grant to meet cross cutting local priorities. There are greater possibilities for joint commissioning of services that can be shaped to achieve wider outcomes and meet the needs of vulnerable people and the communities they live in. The new arrangements if developed effectively can ensure that duplication of services is avoided, local areas achieve better value for money, service users are provided with seamless services and barriers that are associated with providing vulnerable people with the variety of services they require to live independently are avoided.

Challenges for commissioners

The new arrangements can present significant challenges particularly in the current economic climate where local authorities are potentially facing more demand for resources with a dwindling public purse. There is a concern that monies for preventative services could be diverted to support the needs of more visible statutory obligations. Whilst joint working and contributing to a number of themes in a Local Area Agreement is welcomed it does present work and bureaucracy in the governance and commissioning of housing related support. As local authorities are developing new arrangements for the governance and commissioning of housing related support, there is a danger that the current expertise that Local Authorities have in their Supporting People Teams could be lost or dissolved in a new environment of commissioning for wider agendas. There is also a concern that housing related support itself could disappear or have a significantly lower profile if providers and commissioners are not involved or linked to Local Strategic Partnerships (research below).

The Local Strategic Engagement Project

The Local Strategic Engagement Project (LSEP) will run until March 2010 to support providers, commissioners and users to ensure that housing related support (Supporting People) services have a place in the new local strategic partnership and local area agreement landscape. It has been recognised that commissioners, providers and users need to be as informed as possible about where and how housing related support services fit into local governance structures and the implications for commissioning arrangements. In addition, the project will ensure that commissioners, local strategic partnerships and local resource managers understand and appreciate of the value of those services currently funded by Supporting People.

To achieve its aim, the project has identified three main bodies of work:

Governance and Commissioning structures: The project aims to identify the issues involved in the governance and commissioning housing support services looking at Local Authority different arrangements. The LSEP will be working with the CLG on this piece of work and will be visiting different local authorities to ascertain what models are being used, the obstacles being faced and how these are being resolved.

Engagement: Providers and users need to understand how the commissioning structure works in their locality. How they can engage and influence local strategic partnerships and other local commissioning structures.

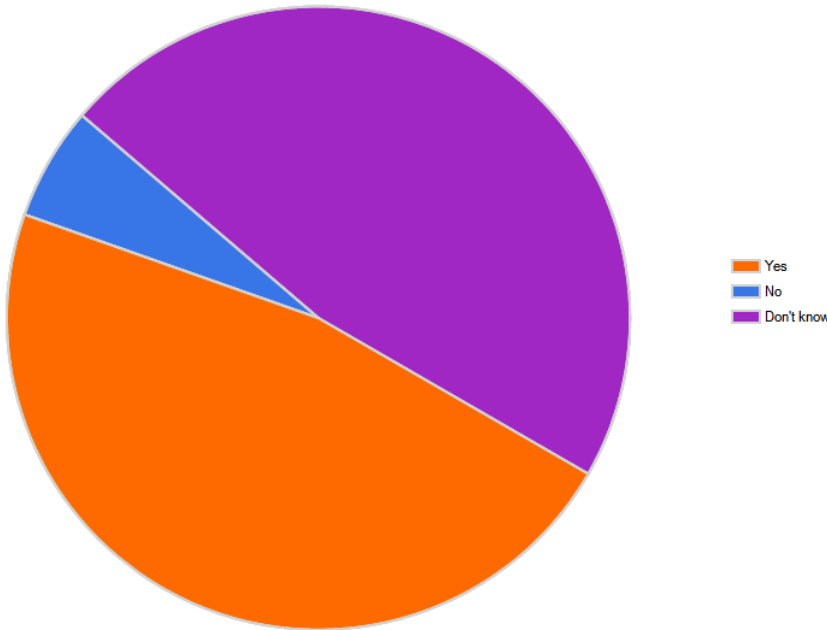
Information and good practice dissemination: One of the critical objectives of the project is to ensure that everyone is 'in the know' about housing related support. Pertinent and useful information will be distributed as soon as possible.

Preliminary research and findings

A recent Sitra web survey questioned how housing, support and care providers, commissioners and service users are involved in and represented in their Local Strategic Partnership. The survey asked respondents whether housing related support commissioners were linked to the local LSP (see pie chart below). 47.1% indicated their local commissioners were involved in their LSP; 47.1% indicated they did not know; and, 5.1% said local commissioners were not involved in the LSP. Responses show that commissioner links to the LSP are made through LSP thematic partnerships and through the commissioning bodies. Other respondents suggested that more links needed to be made. In addition, others said that some of the links already in existence were weak. This indicates that a sizeable percentage (51.4%) of HRS commissioners is either not linked or unaware of links to the local LSP. This evidence reinforces the suggestion that there exists an ignorance regarding LSPs, their structure, importance and relevance to work streams.

The survey is part of the preliminary research undertaken for the Local Strategic Engagement Project.

Are HRS commissioners linked to the LSP in your area?



Although the LSEP is in its infancy it has made some important early findings through desk-based analysis, online surveys and face-to-face interviews indicating that different localities are approaching new structures for the governance and commissioning of housing related support very differently. In some areas housing related support has not found its place in new structures, in others the change has been significant. In some areas local strategic partnerships are still grappling with delivering the themes of the local area agreements whereas in others this is more advanced. This does not necessarily mean they are ready to take on the responsibility of commissioning housing related support services, which will represent the biggest monetary contribution to the area based grant.

What the LSEP can do for you?

The LSEP aims to have an active role in supporting commissioners and providers during this transition time and into the new environment. In order to be effective, we need to appreciate the issues commissioners and providers of housing related support services are currently facing or likely to face in this new world. We need to be in the position of identifying solutions to the challenges that commissioners are facing especially the different dilemmas for rural or urban and unitary or two tier authority areas. The project will only be as good as the information and intelligence it amasses. Solutions to problems are more compelling if evidenced with good practice examples.

To find out more or contribute to the project, please email sueb@sitra.org, mikeb@sitra.org or victoriat@sitra.org