

Supporting People - an overview

This factsheet gives information on Supporting People, what it is, who it helps, how it is changing and how you can campaign in your local area.

This information is relevant to England.

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What is Supporting People?

Introduced in April 2003, Supporting People is a decentralised government programme that funds, monitors and improves frontline housing-related support services for disadvantaged and vulnerable people, including thousands of people with a learning disability.

Why was it introduced?

Supporting People was introduced to provide people with a stable environment, helping them live more independently and avoid crises which necessitate more intensive intervention. Services provided under the programme help minimize additional costs to health, care, probation and homelessness services. The result is better outcomes for the individual and reduced costs for the state.

Who can get Supporting People services?

Supporting People helps around one million people at any one time in England, including approximately:

- **815,000** older people with support needs
- **39,000** single homeless people
- **36,000** people with mental health problems
- **32,000** people with a learning disability
- **10,000** women at risk of domestic violence.¹

What services are available?

All the services funded by Supporting People are aimed at helping people live independently in their homes whilst simultaneously preventing loneliness and social isolation. This includes:

- Assisting people with the security of and personal safety in their homes;
- Supporting people to deal with others, such as landlords, other tenants and a range of professionals;
- Life skills training, including help with social and domestic skills;
- Help with moving to more independent accommodation, and;
- Offering people support with personal budgeting.

Who delivers the services?

Supporting People is administered through 152 top-tier authorities who distribute the funding accordingly. Services are largely delivered by the voluntary and community sector and housing associations. This is aided by a working partnership between local government, service users and support agencies such as social care, health and probation services.

How is Supporting People funded?

Supporting People brought together seven housing-related funding streams to provide services that were reliable, cost effective and complimentary to existing care services. Originally a specific ring-fenced grant, Supporting People has always been a decentralised programme allowing each authority complete discretion over where to direct their funds. This was intended to make the planning and development of services needs led.

¹ **Household Units for Administering Authority by Primary Client Group - 31st March 2010**
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1755491.xls>

Changes in funding

The Spending Review in 2010 announced that at the national level Supporting People funding levels would be reduced from £1,636 million annually in 2010/11 to £1,590 million annually in 2014/15. This represents a reduction of 12% over 4 years, in real terms. However, the situation looks different at the local level as a formula/needs approach has been used to determine the allocation.

Ways to look at the allocation of Supporting People money

- 1) Data presented on the Communities and Local Government website, which provides a breakdown of different funding streams for local authorities for 2011/12 (the 'undampened' data), shows that some local authorities will get more Supporting People money than in previous years, while others will experience big cuts, when this data is compared to the 2010/ 2011 data. According to our calculations from this data the biggest loser is Camden with a loss of 60% of its Supporting People budget, followed by West Berkshire and York, both with 48%. In contrast, places like Stoke-on-Trent will receive 80% more Supporting People money than in 2010-2011. The changes come as a result of the methodology used to calculate funding levels.
- 2) While the data presented on the Communities and Local Government website informed us of the changes to Supporting People funding outlined above, a letter by the department recently highlighted that the figure to take into account when calculating the cuts to Supporting People funding are the grant 'floors' attached to the Formula Grant, into which Supporting People funding is now included. These range from 11.3% to 14.3% depending on the banding of the council at the most. This is based on the suggestion that Supporting People cannot be looked at as a separate grant, since it is now part of the calculation of the formula grant. If local authorities follow the calculations outlined by CLG, Supporting People money should at the most be reduced by 14.3%.
- 3) To complicate things even further, DCLG calculated that local authorities spending power overall is on average reduced only by 4.4% over the next year. Therefore, one could argue that Supporting People funding has only reduced by that amount and should only be reduced by that much.

The different possible approaches to understanding Supporting People funding have caused disagreement between the Government and local councils. While Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister, seems to suggest that no council should have to cut Supporting People funding locally by more than 11.3% based on approach 2 above, local councils seem to see the situation differently.

Threat of cuts

A decision taken in 2010 means that Supporting People is now an un-ringfenced grant that is absorbed into the formula grant, allowing individual councils to make future spending decisions. Using the discretion this allows local authorities, some have responded to the announcements around Supporting People funding and the general cuts agenda by proposing huge cuts to Supporting People funding for local projects.

Inside Housing recently reported that just two out of 13 authorities which have revealed their budgets are slashing their supported housing funds by less than the 11.3%. A recent survey by Inside Housing revealed that Hull Council is looking to slash 53% and Southwark 40% from their respective Supporting People budgets.

Worryingly, cuts are not only being proposed in the areas that have seen large cuts in their allocation of Supporting People funding as proposed. According to the data provided in approach 1 above, and verified by Inside Housing's recent poll, Cornwall are also planning to cut their Supporting People budget by around 30 to 40%, despite seeing an actual increase of 13% in allocation. Cumbria follows close behind indicating cuts of 27%, despite an increase of 46% in Supporting People money.

Impact of cuts

There are fears that cuts to Supporting People could result in both short and long term social problems as well as increasing the costs for other services.

Independent research by Capgemini in 2009 estimated that the national investment of £1.6 billion in housing-related support generated net savings of £3.4 billion to public spending by avoiding more costly services. For example, it was estimated that Supporting People helps avoid £315.2 million health costs, £413.6 million costs of crime and criminal justice and £95 million of costs of homelessness.²

Without the support of services funded by Supporting People there is a risk that people with learning disability will become increasingly isolated and marginalized which would undermine the quality of life of both for the individual and their family and/or carers. In addition, it would see increased costs for benefits, residential and other services.

² Communities and Local Government, Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People Programme, 2009

What can you do?

You can challenge any cut to the care and support that you or the person you support receive. Below are some simple ideas of things you could do to campaign against cuts to Supporting People in your area.

1. Gather information

It is important that you find out as much as you can about what your local authority is planning to do around Supporting People. If they are making cuts, find out the formal reasons for why they have made that decision- try and get this in writing in possible. It is also useful to find out how/where the cuts are being made and whether consultation took place.

2. Contact your local authority

You can contact your local social services department to gain more information about proposed cuts. Based on the information you gather you could then lobby the local authority directly to try and get them to change their plans. If you think that the local authority has acted unlawfully in making this cut you can make a formal complaint.

3. Get your local MP involved

You may want to get your local MP involved as they may be able to put pressure on the council to change their decision. At first, you should contact your MP and tell them about your campaign. However, it may also be useful to meet with your MP to discuss the matter in more detail.

4. Work together

You are not alone. There will be many individuals who are going to lose the care and support that they need and want. You should find out if there is anyone else campaigning around Supporting People already or consider setting up a campaigning group. By coming together, your voice will be louder and you will become a serious opponent who cannot be ignored.

5. Work with the local media

You could contact your local newspaper or radio station telling them about your concerns and your campaign. They might be able to run a piece on your campaign which will help raise awareness.

6. Organise a petition

Petitions allow you to gather the names of people who support your campaign. They are an easy way of getting people involved and showing your local authority how many people support the campaign.

We are aware of many individuals and carers who have disputed cuts in their area and have won! Don't let your views go unheard.

To find out more about campaigning against cuts read our booklet called [Don't cut us out!](#)

Also, don't forget to contact the campaigns team to let them know what you have found out, by emailing rossanna.trudgian@mencap.org.uk or clare.lucas@mencap.org.uk

Key terms

1. **Decentralised**- not under the direct control of the central government.
2. **Top-tier authorities**- county councils, London boroughs and unitary authorities.
3. **Specific Grant**- where allocation and distribution are set centrally and linked to a specific policy initiatives.
4. **Ringfenced**- when funds can only be used for a previously specified purpose. Un-ringfenced money is not subject to these restrictions.
5. **Spending Review**- the announcement of the governments spending plans for the next three years.
6. **Formula Grant**- a block grant which councils can spend as they wish.
7. **Undampened data**- data looking at the sum of grant money before the Government takes into account the needs and impact of cuts on a local area
8. **Grant "floors"**- maximum reduction in grants

For more information or to help us campaign on this issue contact the Campaigns team.

You can get in touch by emailing campaigns@mencap.org.uk or calling **020 7696 6952**.

We look forward to hearing from you.