

Business Case

One additional member of staff for the Supporting People Team

Background

Supporting People is a major government programme, implemented locally, designed to improve the range and quality of supported housing and other forms of 'housing related support' such as 'floating' or visiting support.

Supporting People meant a large transfer of funds to local authorities under a specific Grant, to fund the services in place. Some of these services were newly put in place in the run up to Supporting People, with funding available prior to 1 April 2003. West Berkshire secured a very large Supporting People Grant given the size and nature of the authority (£6.1 million for 2004/5). This funds the services provided by around 30 different organisations to support vulnerable people. Indications from central government are that the funding will be substantially reduced in future years. An announcement is expected in November 2004 for each authority's funding for 2005/6 and 2006/7. Meanwhile West Berkshire has already secured significant savings in anticipation of a reduction in grant.

The Council also receives £159,000 to fulfil its role as the 'Administering Authority' for Supporting People. This is fully committed with the current staff team (3 f.t.e.), IT system and other overheads.

The Audit Commission inspected Supporting People in West Berkshire in May 2004 and published their report in July. The overall rating given was that the Council is providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement.

Recommendation

That funding be agreed from the Community Care Learning Disability purchasing budget for one additional full-time post in the Supporting People Team. This budget would appropriately fund a new post, given that the Supporting People programme has allowed for some cost reductions in it as a result of the move from residential care to supported living.

Purpose

1. To ensure continued effective implementation of the Supporting People programme in West Berkshire.
2. To respond to recommendations from the Audit Commission Inspection of Supporting People.
3. To ensure that the skills to manage and oversee the programme are vested in an increased number of people, thus minimising risk to the Council.

Financial Implications

Cost of one permanent full time Supporting People Officer, costed mid-scale at £28,130 (including direct salary on-costs), from Community Care budget. Plus set-up costs £1,500 for desk, chair, pc etc. Plus central establishment costs.

Evidence of Need

Recommendations from the Audit Commission Inspection of Supporting People require substantial further work over the coming year and beyond. Development of the five year strategy in itself is a significant piece of work, as of course will be its implementation over the coming years.

The Inspection report highlights that although the SP Team has been functioning very efficiently, it will be difficult to respond to the further action now required (paras 133-135):

The Supporting People team is committed and well organised and team members have the necessary skills and expertise to continue to deliver the programme. However, the team is small and action in the last year has, by necessity focussed on implementation and ensuring that the basics were being delivered such as payments being made on time. ... Although the team has a good track record to date, their size makes them highly vulnerable. ... In the short term, the Supporting People team need the flexibility to divert resources from the service review programme, which is currently forming a large part of their workload, to strategy development.

As well as the additional pressures detailed in the Inspection Report, recent guidance issued by central government places further requirements on the SP Team, specifically:

- In service reviews we validate the quality of services against detailed standards grouped under four 'core objectives'. These are being increased to six.
- Collation of new performance returns from providers, detailing a lot more information, which needs to be checked and validated. A sample needs to be audited.
- Annual self-assessments from providers on the quality of what they are providing. We are not expected to formally validate these, but we need to administer and check them and pick up on issues arising.
- Annual contract monitoring meetings with each provider.
- Monitoring providers' progress against action plans from completed service reviews.

Finally, the Inspection Report also recommends that we "Develop a contingency plan to address the risk to the Supporting People programme through staff sickness or the loss of a member of the team ...". Currently the expertise in Supporting People is located in three individuals who are all operating at full capacity. Loss of any one of these people would present major difficulties for achieving the minimum requirements of the Supporting People programme and pose considerable risk to the Council. An additional member of staff would spread skills and capacity, thus mitigating these risks.

Other Options Considered

No change

This would make it impossible to fully respond to the Recommendations in the report as well as additional national and local requirements for the Supporting People programme.

Central Government Funding

The Supporting People Administration Grant is fully committed with the existing staff team. Central government was approached to seek flexibility to use underspend from the main Supporting People Grant to bolster the Administration Grant, but this was not allowed. No further government funding will be available for this purpose in the foreseeable future.

Using staff from other services

This has been considered but is not thought practical because:

1. Potential staff from other services are already working at capacity.
2. Supporting People has been set up by Government as a discrete area of work, with a lot of detailed guidance and particular requirements. As things stand, it requires dedicated staff able to develop specialist knowledge.

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Quantifying the need for staff time

The various additional service pressures identified in the Business Case can be quantified as follows:

Service Reviews – two new core objectives	0.5 day extra per service. 34 services p.a. = 17 days
Validating new performance returns	0.5 hour per service per quarter (100 services) = 0.5 x 100 x 4 = 200 hrs = 27 days
At least annual contract monitoring meetings with providers (meeting, preparation and follow up) for QAF, PI's, action plans etc.	2 days x 30 providers = 60 days
Spot checks	30 p.a. x 1 day each = 30 days
Better info for service users (incl. Leaflets, consultation on format etc.)	10 days
Improved work with 'hard to reach groups'	11 days
Commissioning and Strategy development & implementation and improved performance management systems	Free up 2 days p.w. of SP Manager time x 45 weeks = 68 days
Total:	223 days
One full time member of staff works typically: 52 weeks – 5 a/l – 2 sick = 45 weeks = 225 days	225 days

Hence it can be seen that one full-time member of staff is needed to respond to the extra service pressures.

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