

SUPPORTED PEOPLE AND SHELTERED HOUSING IN SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

What is Supporting People?

Supporting People is a national programme designed to fund housing support services for vulnerable tenants including services for the elderly. The programme commenced in 2003. The Government decided at the time to remove housing support as an eligible item within rents and therefore subsidised via housing benefit. The Supporting People programme allowed the costs of housing support to be identified separately.

Housing support refers to activities which assist people in sustaining their tenancy such as assistance with claiming housing benefit, assistance with accessing care services or social services support or medical support where this is needed. Housing support specifically excludes providing care services as these are funded through different agencies such as the County Council.

In Cambridgeshire the County Council administers the Supporting People funding. Providers of services funded by Supporting People include local authorities, housing associations and charities.

What are the main financial issues for Supporting People?

The funding that central government provides to be distributed by Supporting People is being reduced. Cambridgeshire Supporting People have calculated that savings will need to be made to bring expenditure in line with falling income by 2012/13. If no savings are made the programme will be overspent by over £300,000 in 2011/12 and by around £1.3 million in 2012/13. These savings will be achieved via a series of procurement exercises over the next three years. This financial pressure means that any savings identified by service providers in the meantime need to be shared with Supporting People.

In addition to requiring savings on the overall budget, Supporting People have also decided to refocus their current spending to better reflect the range of need within the County as identified in an independent needs assessment in 2009. This shift has two main dimensions:

1. A move away from supporting residential based services to supporting targeted floating support services
2. The need to re allocate spending from 'traditional' sheltered housing (for which there is an oversupply in the County) to help fund the expansion of extra care provision (for which there is an undersupply). South Cambridgeshire has been identified as being particularly in need of extra provision of extra care housing.

What does this mean for South Cambridgeshire?

As a service provider of sheltered housing all of this has a bearing on what happens at South Cambridgeshire District Council. The need to make savings on the Housing Revenue Account means that the Council can no longer provide the same level of cross subsidy from the rent income and reduces the Council's ability to sustain supported housing services in the light of the funding changes coming through Supporting People in the future. Delivering supported housing services in an environment of reducing overall budgets requires all providers to consider how to reconfigure their services to ensure that they are targeting those most in need of support.

The need for Supporting People to identify savings in the short term means that any savings made by the Council need to be shared with Supporting People now. The identification of savings to come from South Cambridgeshire will, however, form part of the reinvestment required in the district to address the shortfall in extra care provision.

Supporting People will retender sheltered housing provision within the next three years. As with all procurement exercises there will be an expectation that overall spend can be reduced and it is very likely that a significant part of the tender will focus in providing a floating support model of service. We are working collaboratively with the County Council and Supporting People to develop a new model of commissioning which will help inform the future tender process. The Council can ensure that it is best placed to respond to this tender by remodelling services now so as to develop experience and expertise in delivering a floating support style of service.