4 July 2003

Communication News

What’s New On The SPK-Web
You can now view the Probation Accommodation Grant control figures on the SPK-Web in the ‘Finance and Contracting’ section.

New in the ‘General Documents’ section this week; National Training Framework document one, a list of the National Training Framework modules, details of accessing training and the Supporting People competencies framework.

Check out the ‘Jobs’ section for 2 Contracts and Review Officer posts in Sheffield and a Service Development and Performance Manager post in Southampton.

This week’s new discussion topics include; first service reviews for tenancy support, accommodation based and floating support, value for money, steady state contracts and block gross non chargeable contracts. There are discussions continuing from past weeks on a range of subjects and if you can’t find one on the topic you want to discuss you can start a discussion of your own.

Programme News

Services For Domestic Violence Survivors Without Recourse To Public Funds.
Immigration and benefit rules state that asylum seekers do not have access to public funds or the services they pay for. Therefore, asylum seekers who are domestic violence survivors cannot access social security benefits like housing benefit until their immigration application is approved. However, the Government wishes to ensure that asylum seeker domestic violence survivors attempting to leave violent relationships can access support, particularly as leaving is one of the most dangerous times for survivors. Authorities should be aware that there is no legal impediment to paying Supporting People grant to refuges and floating support services to meet the housing related support costs of women without recourse to public funds. However, women with no recourse to public funds still remain unable to access welfare benefits to fund rent and living costs.

The Home Office will continue to work with women’s groups, who specialise in domestic violence, to ensure that women and those who advise them understand the relevant Immigration Rules and the types of evidence, which they need to put forward. This will aid IND in dealing with applications swiftly and where applications are successful, mean that women can have swifter access to public funds.

Beacon Councils
For details of this year's Supporting People theme in the Beacon Council scheme see the annex.

**Actions For July**
Apply to become a Beacon Council
Reviewing Services

There are many excellent supported housing services being delivered throughout England and ODPM wishes to build on this legacy through the new Supporting People programme and develop higher quality additional services. Up to now the planning of services has often been based more on specific local initiatives than on full assessment of need locally. Equally there has been little examination of the range of services being provided locally, or their quality and appropriateness for meeting local needs.

Supporting People teams will now start to bring a structured and comprehensive overview of the need for support in local areas. Throughout the period of implementation Supporting People Teams have been collecting data on existing supply within their local area and are now in a position to match this supply against their need.

Reviewing and monitoring the supply of supported accommodation within the local area also allows the administering authority the opportunity to become very familiar with the services being provided. Supported housing is a complex sector providing for a wide range of needs. The review process will allow Administering Authorities to tailor services more effectively and ultimately the service reviews will allow a much wider range of services to be provided. This does not mean that providers should be fearful of reviews and SP teams should working in partnership with in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect. Reviews and discussions will of course point to areas where services need to either changed or improved which is the purpose of the programme.

The Supporting People programme is a new and important way in which local authorities and their partner agencies in health and probation can deliver some of the local strategic priorities of the communities plan as well as other strategies such as the Homeless and Housing Strategies. The Shadow Strategy has already been produced and Supporting People Teams will now be looking at developing their 5 year Supporting People Strategy. The development of the Strategy will begin with consulting with a wide range of users and consultative bodies which needs to done in a way which is inclusive of all members of the community, including black and minority ethnic groups.
Criteria for Supporting People Theme

- **Strategy** A strategy which highlights the scale of the gaps in supported accommodation within the local area. There should be a clear achievable long-term vision with strong links to other local strategies, including those on Homelessness, Housing, Health, and ultimately the Communities Plan.

- **Partnership** A sound and effective Commissioning Body encompassing all of the main partners. In two tier authorities representatives from each district council. The Commissioning Body should enable the Strategy to be successfully implemented. The Supporting People programme grant will be applied locally through a joint process undertaken by all partners.

- **User/ Provider Satisfaction** Evidence of user involvement throughout the consultation period of the strategy and also as part of the quality and monitoring processes. A sound approach to transparent and robust reviews involving providers and service users, focusing on quality of service, value for money, strategic relevance and key elements of the ODPM reviews framework. Evidence of innovative mechanisms, which have been put in place to involve the smaller specialist/BME providers and the hard to reach groups. Evidence of views must be reflected in the strategy.

- **Actions**
  - A full and comprehensive supply data of all supported housing
  - A structured review process
  - Develop specific services that ‘plug the gap’ of where there are few or no services
  - Agreed interim contracts in place with all providers in the local area who are providing a support service
  - To have a robust and transparent monitoring inspection and review of the quality and effectiveness of services
  - Framework for effective decision making and administrative process to take place
  - Commence consultation on the 5 year strategy involving all stakeholders

- **Outcomes**
  - Help older people to remain to live independently at home for longer
  - Enable young homeless/ people leading chaotic lives to remain in one place for longer and to establish and maintain their tenancy
  - Enabling a range of other vulnerable groups to remain in a more independent living avoiding institutional care or at the extreme, prison or a life on the streets
  - Ensure that services are meeting local needs and deliver Best Value in the sector
  - Better targeted and quality services

- **Consultation** Consultation with all stakeholders should be evidenced as the authority developed their Supporting People shadow strategy. This should be evidenced through inclusive forums and other established working groups. Similar discussions will now be taking place as the Administering Authority begins to develop their 5-year strategy. There must be a clear opportunity for all stakeholders to comment and put forward views. Authorities should also use where possible the Best Value consultations mechanisms. The
key is to make best use of existing consultation exercise whilst trying to ensure that those who are liable do not fall through the net are not missed out.