

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

The Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme



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SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU



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with the Government of Wales Act 2006.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Summary

- 1 The Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme (the Programme) provides grant funding to local authorities to deliver directly, or through third-party providers, housing-related support services. These services are intended to help vulnerable people to live as independently as possible. Launched in 2003, the Programme replaced several housing-related funding streams.
- 2 The Programme supports both individuals and families of varying ages. Annually, the Welsh Government estimates that the Programme supports around 67,000 people.¹ The Welsh Government has identified 18 specific² groups of people eligible for support. Eligible groups range from people with learning or physical disabilities and developmental disorders to victims of domestic abuse, people with chronic illnesses, mental health or substance misuse issues, criminal offending histories and people with refugee status. The support provided varies according to the individual's needs. For example, some receive accommodation-based support, such as a place in a hostel. While others receive help with housing-related problems from a support worker who visits them in their own homes.³
- 3 For 2016-17, the Welsh Government invested £124.5 million into the Programme. Of this sum, around £800,000 was 'top-sliced' to fund research and development, Regional Development Co-ordinator roles and some Welsh Government posts. Collectively, just under half of the total funding supported three specific groups (learning disabilities: mental health, and young people with support needs). The single largest area of spending supported was for people with learning disabilities, receiving £30.6 million or 25% of the Programme funds (Figure 1). However, several other categories involved a larger number of units of support. For example, there were around 25,000 units of support in the alarm services (including in sheltered/extra care) category, which accounted for only 2% of the Programme spend.
- 4 Between 2013-14 and 2016-17, the total annual funding reduced by 8.5% (£11.6 million) in cash terms or 10.5% (£14.6 million) in real terms. However, overall local authority allocations have remained the same in cash terms since 2015-16.

- 1 Estimate based on figures provided by local authorities on the number of people supported by the Programme, whereas Figure 1 counts the number of 'units' of support provided by the Programme. Each unit of fixed support could potentially help more than one person or family during the course of a year. Equally, a worker providing floating support could potentially deliver support to more than the planned number of individuals.
- 2 In addition to these 18 specific groups of people, there is a generic 'floating support' category and a category to record expenditure which does not directly link to the 19 spend plan categories. Generic floating support services are typically provided to a wide range of client groups with lower levels of need and the support is not provided by a specialist service. There are more intensive floating support services provided by staff with a particular area of expertise. The Welsh Government expects individuals to be counted only once in a single category, even if they have multiple needs.
- 3 Accommodation-based support is referred to as 'fixed' and support received in an individual's home is referred to as 'floating' support.

Figure 1: distribution of Supporting People Programme expenditure in 2016-17
– local authority allocations

| Areas of greatest expenditure | Overall unit number ¹ | Total spent per category (£ millions) | Cost per unit (£s) | Overall percentage of funding |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| People with learning disabilities | 2,847 | 30.57 | 10,739 | 25 |
| Generic floating support to prevent homelessness | 4,933 | 15.94 | 3,232 | 13 |
| People with mental health issues | 2,327 | 13.78 | 5,922 | 11 |
| Young people with support needs (16-24) | 1,523 | 13.16 | 8,641 | 11 |
| People over 55 years of age with support needs (exclusive of alarm services) | 15,666 | 11.65 | 743 | 9 |
| Women experiencing domestic abuse | 1,201 | 9.04 | 7,530 | 7 |
| Other categories (total) ² | 29,146 | 29.46 | 1,011 | 24 |
| Other categories (range) | 31-25,030 | 0.13-6.43 | 91-8,609 | <0.5-5 |
| Total | 57,643 | 123.69 | 2,060 | 100 |

Notes

1 One 'unit' of support potentially supports more than one person or family.

2 A full list of support categories is available in Figure A3 in Appendix 5.

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of data supplied by the Welsh Government

- 5 Since 2009, there have been a number of changes in Ministerial responsibility for the Programme and the Welsh Government has commissioned a number of reviews of the design and delivery of the Programme ([Appendix 2](#)). The most significant of these – widely referred to as the ‘Aylward Review’ – led the Welsh Government to introduce in August 2012 a new set of arrangements to manage delivery of the Programme.⁴
- 6 One of the key developments following the Aylward Review was the introduction of a single unified grant, the Supporting People Programme Grant. Previously, local authorities administered the Supporting People Grant to fund primarily longer-term support services. These services generally focused on older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health issues. Separately, the Welsh Government administered the Supporting People Revenue Grant. This grant funded shorter-term support, such as for hostels and refuges for vulnerable people.⁵
- 7 The Welsh Government also established a new governance structure ([Figure 2](#)). The new structure included six Regional Collaborative Committees and a Supporting People National Advisory Board. Local Supporting People teams have continued to manage delivery of the Programme in each local authority. This structure reflected the Welsh Government’s aspiration to develop and manage the Programme through ‘co-production’ – the involvement of people and communities in the design of public services. Welsh Government officials responsible for the Programme point to it having led the way in developing and delivering policy in a collaborative and inclusive manner. Co-production reflects principles now embedded in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- 8 On behalf of the Auditor General, Wales Audit Office staff have examined whether the Welsh Government has put in place effective arrangements to manage the Supporting People Programme and ensure it is delivering high-quality and appropriately-targeted services. We have considered whether the Welsh Government has a clear understanding of what it wants the Programme to achieve and how it has managed the development of the Programme in response to legislative and policy changes. We have also examined the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Welsh Government since 2012 to address issues in the funding and management of the Programme. Some of these issues are longstanding. Finally, we have considered certain issues relating to local and regional delivery of the Programme. [Appendix 1](#) describes our audit methods.

4 Sir Mansel Aylward et al, **The Supporting People Programme in Wales: Final report on a Review commissioned by Jocelyn Davies AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration**, Welsh Assembly Government, November 2010

5 People fleeing domestic violence; people with learning disabilities; people with mental health problems; people suffering from alcohol or drug dependency; refugees; people with physical disabilities; people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; young people leaving care; ex-offenders; people with chronic illness and vulnerable single parents.

Figure 2: the current Supporting People Programme governance structure

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Supporting People National Advisory Board</p> | <p>Includes three independent members, the Welsh Government and representation from different parts of local government, the NHS, the social housing sector, Wales Probation Trust and providers of homelessness, housing-related support and social care services.</p> <p>The Board's overall purpose is to ensure the Programme focuses on meeting the housing-related needs of vulnerable people and to provide independent advice to Welsh Ministers on progress and barriers.</p> |
| <p>Regional Collaborative Committees</p> | <p>Five of the six committees align to the geographical boundaries of a single health board. The exception is the Mid and West Wales Committee. That Committee covers the Powys Teaching Health Board and Hywel Dda University Health Board areas.</p> <p>Each committee includes representatives from local authorities, NHS Wales, probation, Supporting People service providers and registered social landlords. They also include service users.</p> <p>The overall aim of the committees is to provide the strategic direction, at the regional level, for the Programme. They are responsible to the Welsh Ministers for regional and local collaborative delivery of the Programme to ensure the most effective and efficient services are delivered.</p> <p>A Regional Development Co-ordinator supports each committee. The Welsh Government funds these roles and the co-ordinating lead local authority in each region employs the co-ordinators.</p> <p>The committees are responsible for producing a three-year Regional Strategic Plan⁶. The plan sets out the region's strategic priorities and outlines regional needs, gaps in service provision and plans for developing services. It also contains the region's annual spend plan which brings together the spending plans of the individual local authorities.</p> |
| <p>Local authority Supporting People teams</p> | <p>Receive an annual Supporting People Programme grant allocation and directly contract with support providers.</p> <p>They are responsible for ensuring that grant conditions are met by collecting monitoring information, including national service user outcomes, and reviewing service quality and strategic relevance through evidence collection and site visits.</p> <p>Each local authority Supporting People team is required to produce a Local Commissioning Plan which identifies its local priorities, needs and gaps in provision and local plans for developing services.</p> |

6 Regional Strategic Plans replaced Regional Commissioning Plans in January 2017. The fundamental difference is the strategic plans look at the overall strategic direction of the service rather than units of support being commissioned.

- 9 **The Welsh Government has made a significant investment in the Supporting People Programme since its inception in 2003, both through direct funding for the Programme and the time and resources spent reviewing Programme delivery arrangements. However, we have concluded that, despite some strengthening of arrangements, action taken to address some longstanding concerns about the Programme’s design and delivery has not always been effective. Progress in some key areas has been slow, including in establishing a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the Programme’s impact. There are also inconsistencies in the way the Programme is being managed at a local and regional level, due in part to inadequate Welsh Government guidance.**
- 10 The Programme’s stated purpose and aims have not kept pace with changing policy. For example, the stated purpose and aims do not recognise explicitly the emphasis that the Welsh Government has placed on the Programme’s role in helping to prevent homelessness and tackle poverty. Since 2012, notable policy changes that affect the Programme have included Welsh Government legislation on social services, future generations and housing, and UK Government policy on welfare reform. But we have identified concerns about the scale of change and the way it has been communicated.
- 11 The Welsh Government is currently consulting on revised Programme guidance, including a new series of strategic objectives. The Welsh Government is also currently in the process of reviewing the implications of the UK Government’s ‘Supported Accommodation Review’ and its impact on the Supporting People Programme in Wales.
- 12 The Welsh Government has accepted most of the recommendations of the Programme reviews undertaken since 2009. Although some actions, including revisions to Programme guidance, have taken longer than anticipated. In some key areas, the action taken has not always been effective and progress has been slow. The Welsh Government’s view is that managing the Programme in line with the principles of co-production accounts for some of the pace of progress but can deliver better outcomes.
- 13 There remain concerns about the effectiveness and impact of the Regional Collaborative Committees, with mixed progress in developing regional projects and services. In addition, seven years after the Aylward Review identified the need for change, older people’s services are still predominantly not based on an assessment of need. Rather, services still tend to reflect historic provision based around tenure. There is evidence that the substantial bulk of older people’s services are still commissioned in such a way that they remain available only to tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords.

- 14 Progress in developing an approach to evaluation remains slow, and so the Welsh Government does not yet have a good enough understanding of the Programme's impact. In August 2012, the Welsh Government introduced a new framework to assess individuals' progress against a defined set of Programme outcomes. However, the Outcomes Framework has a number of limitations, which makes it difficult to form a comprehensive judgment of the success of the Programme. There is also a lack of confidence in the data that has been collected.
- 15 The Welsh Government is planning to revise the Outcomes Framework in an effort to address some of the current concerns. However, as currently drafted, the revised arrangements may not fully address the concerns about the current framework and outcomes data. Separate to work on developing the Outcomes Framework, there is some as yet limited evidence that the Programme reduces demand for health services. Further data collection in this regard is underway following an initial feasibility study.
- 16 Funding has continued to be ring fenced, in contrast to the situation in England and Scotland. Nevertheless, there are some concerns about the impact of budget reductions on the quality and sustainability of Supporting People services.
- 17 The redistribution of funds towards geographical areas of greatest need has not progressed as rapidly as anticipated. The Welsh Government introduced a new funding formula for 2012-13 and 2013-14 but chose then to suspend it when also making cuts to the Programme budget. Had the formula continued to have been implemented some local authorities would have received significantly more in 2016-17, and some significantly less, than their actual allocations. The Welsh Government has been considering implementing a revised funding formula in response to a recommendation from the Supporting People National Advisory Board. But the timeframe for doing so has not been confirmed and any new formula will now need to take account of the revised Programme objectives and be consulted upon.
- 18 The quality and consistency of regional planning – through a process of needs analysis – varies. However, in recent years the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with annual budget allocations for the financial year ahead, without providing any indicative budgets for future years. Local authority Supporting People lead officers told us that such short funding horizons hamper their ability to plan longer-term services and discourage joint working. The short timescale between the Welsh Government confirming allocations for the year ahead and the deadline for submitting spend plans has also made it difficult for Regional Collaborative Committees to contribute to the plans and provide effective scrutiny. However, the Welsh Government's own reviews have highlighted examples where local authorities have issued a substantial number of three-year contracts.

7 The Welsh Government did continue with some degree of non-formula-based redistribution in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

- 19 The Welsh Government's guidance on the procurement of Supporting People services is potentially misleading. It risks creating expectations among providers about the use of contract extensions that cannot necessarily be met by local authorities if they are also to comply with wider procurement regulations. There is evidence of variable procurement practice, with some local authorities making more use of contract extensions than others, rather than going out to tender.
- 20 The Welsh Government has capped management charges at 10%, having previously identified major variation in the nature and scale of expenditure termed as management charges. While the Welsh Government has also identified that there are widespread variations in overall service costs, further analysis is required to understand the reasons for that variation. For example, taking account of more detailed data to consider the extent to which differences in the duration of services account for this variation.
- 21 Since April 2014, the Welsh Government has undertaken a series of local authority reviews that, in some cases, have highlighted concerns about the management of the Programme. These reviews, along with some more detailed work by two Regional Collaborative Committees (North Wales and Gwent), have highlighted some issues with the eligibility of support for people with learning disabilities and differences in the level of support provided.

Recommendations

- 22 Our work has highlighted a range of ongoing challenges for the design and delivery of the Programme. The Welsh Government is still working to implement the recommendations from previous reviews in many of these areas, including through updated Programme guidance. The Welsh Government is also taking action to address other emerging issues, for example by revising its current approach to measuring Programme outcomes, although we have noted that the emerging proposals may not fully address the limitations in the current outcomes framework.

Recommendations

- 1 In recent years, the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with annual budget allocations for the financial year ahead, without providing any indicative budgets for future years. Reflecting the recommendations that we have made in some of our previous reports, and while recognising the uncertainties facing the Welsh Government's own revenues, **we recommend that:**
 - **the Welsh Government re-introduce indicative three-year Supporting People funding allocations at the earliest opportunity to assist local authorities in their planning; and**
 - **at the same time, consider the merits of moving to three-year annual rolling local authority spend plans, to assist local authorities in planning services and to allow greater scrutiny by Regional Collaborative Committees.**

- 2 The Welsh Government is proposing greater regional planning and delivery of services as part of its reforming local government policy. However, the Supporting People Regional Collaborative Committees have struggled to deliver at the scale and pace the Welsh Government would have liked. **We recommend that the Welsh Government:**
 - **identify and apply lessons learned from the experience of the Regional Collaborative Committees to inform its proposals for local government reform; and**
 - **review whether the Regional Collaborative Committee arrangements remain fit for purpose in the context of other collaborative governance arrangements, such as the new statutory public service boards and its wider plans for regional working in local government.**

Recommendations

- 3 The Supporting People National Advisory Board has recognised the need for a new formula to help redistribute Programme funds to geographical areas of greatest need. The Welsh Government is also consulting on the strategic objectives for the Programme. **We recommend that, once it has finalised the new strategic objectives for the Programme, the Welsh Government prioritise developing a new funding formula to redistribute funding in a way that most effectively delivers those objectives. In doing so, we recommend the Welsh Government give consideration to any transitional arrangements and wider policy developments that may impact on the Programme.**
- 4 The Welsh Government's current and draft revised guidance on the procurement of Supporting People services is potentially misleading as it implies that retendering need only take place where a service review has found the service to be deficient. **We recommend that:**
 - **the Welsh Government's ongoing reviews of local authorities' management of the Programme should examine whether contracts are being extended in accordance with Public Contract Regulations; and**
 - **in revising its Programme guidance, the Welsh Government redraft its advice on contract procurement to avoid the scope for any misinterpretation about when to retender for services, and to clearly articulate the rules around contract extensions.**
- 5 There have been a number of notable policy changes in recent years that affect the Programme. However, we have identified concerns about the scale of change and the way it has been communicated. In addition, other developments will have an impact on the Programme, for example, the Welsh Government's plans for local government reform and UK government reform of housing benefit. **We recommend that the Welsh Government should identify and clearly communicate the implications of such reforms for the Programme.**
- 6 While the Welsh Government has identified that there are widespread variations in overall service costs, further analysis is required to understand the reasons for that variation. **We recommend that the Welsh Government work with local authorities to examine in more detail whether there are significant variations in the costs of delivering Supporting People services of a similar type and duration.**

Recommendations

- 7 There remain concerns about data quality in the current Outcomes Framework, but with revised data collection arrangements being proposed. **We recommend that the Welsh Government work with its partners to ensure that, once introduced, any new arrangements are clearly understood by providers and embedded as part of contractual arrangements.**
- 8 Welsh Government reviews, and more detailed work at a regional level by two of the Regional Collaborative Committees, have highlighted some issues with the eligibility of support for people with learning disabilities and differences in the level of support provided. **We recommend that the Welsh Government encourage all Regional Collaborative Committees to review arrangements for support for people with learning disabilities through the Programme and work with the committees to manage any potential negative consequences for service provision.**

Part 1

The Programme's stated purpose and aims have not kept pace with changing policy, although the Welsh Government is now developing new strategic objectives



- 1.1 This part of the report considers whether the Welsh Government has clearly articulated the Programme's aims and priorities. It also considers how the Welsh Government has managed the development of the Programme in response to changing policy and legislation.

The Welsh Government considers that the Programme provides vital support to prevent homelessness and tackle poverty, although these issues are not mentioned explicitly in its stated purpose or aims

- 1.2 The Welsh Government's 2013 Programme Guidance says that the purpose for the Programme is to provide 'housing-related support to help vulnerable people to live as independently as possible'.⁸ To accompany its overall statement of purpose, the Welsh Government has set out on the Supporting People website six aims:
- a helping vulnerable people live as independently as possible;
 - b providing people with the help they need to live in their own homes, hostels, sheltered housing⁹ or other specialist housing;
 - c preventing problems in the first place or providing help as early as possible in order to reduce demand on other services such as health and social services;
 - d providing help to complement the personal or medical care that some people may need;
 - e ensuring quality services, which are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible through joint working between organisations that plan and fund services and those that provide services; and
 - f promoting equality and reducing inequalities.
- 1.3 None of the above aims explicitly reference homelessness prevention. Elsewhere though, the Welsh Government states clearly that the Programme has a key role in preventing homelessness. For example, the **Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales** (2009-19) states 'The Supporting People Programme has a vital role to play with the prevention of initial and repeat homelessness, by providing services that can help vulnerable households or individuals to address their accommodation and support needs'. In addition, the Welsh Government's annual report on Grants Management for 2016 noted 'The Programme provides vital

⁸ Welsh Government, **Supporting People Programme Grant Guidance-Wales**, June 2013

⁹ Sheltered housing in this context means accommodation for people over the age of – in some cases – 50, where there is a resident warden service, a communications system and some communal facilities.

support to people who find themselves in very difficult circumstances particularly people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. As well as preventing homelessness the Programme provides housing related support to a variety of groups including people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and women fleeing domestic abuse.¹⁰

- 1.4 Nor do the above aims explicitly reference tackling poverty. Yet, the Welsh Government intends the Programme to be instrumental in helping it to address poverty. For example, the Welsh Government's action plan for tackling poverty identifies that Supporting People has a role to play in meeting tackling poverty targets, but does not quantify the expected contribution.¹¹

The Welsh Government has recognised that wider policy developments have implications for the Programme, but we have identified concerns about the scale of change and the way it has been communicated

- 1.5 Since 2012, notable policy changes that affect the Programme have included Welsh Government legislation on social services, future generations and housing, and UK Government welfare policy reforms (Box 1). In addition, the UK Government's recent review of supported accommodation¹² and proposals that have arisen from it will have implications for the future of the Programme. From April 2019, all tenants living in supported accommodation will see their housing benefit capped at a lower rate. The impact of capping the housing benefit level, used to cover the rental and service charge element of supported accommodation schemes, is that it will create a shortfall in funding.
- 1.6 The UK government has committed to ensuring that the devolved administrations will receive a level of funding to cover this shortfall. Without the guarantee of funding for the rents and service charge element, a number of supported accommodation schemes have indicated they are likely to become unviable. The Welsh Government is currently with stakeholders in the process of reviewing the implications of the Supporting Accommodation Review and its impact on the Supporting People Programme in Wales.

10 Welsh Government, **Annual Report on Grants Management 2016**, March 2017

11 Welsh Government, **Building Resilient Communities, Taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan Annual Report 2014**, July 2014

12 Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Communities and Local Government, **Supported accommodation review – The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector**, November 2016

Box 1: Key legislation and policy reforms relevant to the Programme

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014)

Aims to improve the wellbeing of people who need care and support, and carers who need support. The Act requires local authorities and local health boards to jointly undertake a population assessment of care and support needs for adults, children and carers. This presents opportunities to combine this work with activity to produce the needs analysis for the Supporting People Programme.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)

Aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, both now and for future generations, by placing the sustainable development principle at the heart of all decision making. One key element of the sustainable development principle is a focus on prevention, which aligns closely with one of the central aims of the Supporting People Programme (paragraph 1.2c).

Housing (Wales) Act (2014)

Aims to improve the supply, quality and standards of housing in Wales. Includes a new strengthened duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness. There is a stated Welsh Government expectation that the Supporting People Programme will be used to prevent homelessness (paragraph 1.3). The Welsh Government has recently published an interim evaluation of the implementation of the part of the Act that deals with homelessness prevention.¹³ Previously, the then Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty commissioned a feasibility study to identify the best way to evaluate the impact of the Programme on homelessness.¹⁴

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act (2015)

Aims to improve the response within the public sector in Wales to all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Places a responsibility on public bodies to improve arrangements to promote awareness of, and prevent, protect and support victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

UK Government welfare policy reforms

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced a wide series of reforms to the UK benefits system. Evidence drawn together by the Public Policy Institute for Wales has suggested that welfare reforms will hit the most deprived communities and most vulnerable groups hardest, leading to increased debt and poverty.¹⁵ This situation is likely to create increased demand for Supporting People services among people needing help to manage their finances. More recently, the UK Government's Supported Accommodation Review (paragraph 1.5), and the proposals that have arisen from it, have the potential to have a significant impact on the Supporting People Programme in Wales in the future.

¹³ Welsh Government, **Post-implementation of the homelessness legislation (Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014) Interim Report**, August 2017

¹⁴ Public Policy Institute for Wales, **Evaluating the Contribution the Supporting People Programme makes to Preventing and Tackling Homelessness – Feasibility Study**, June 2015

¹⁵ Public Policy Institute for Wales, **The Impact of Welfare Reform on Housing Policy in Wales: A Rapid Evidence Review**, August 2015

- 1.7 The Welsh Government has not reviewed formally the Programme aims in response to the changing policy agenda. However, over the past few years the Welsh Government has set local authorities a broadening and increasingly complex agenda. Since issuing Programme guidance in 2013, the Welsh Government has used a number of other approaches to set out what it expects from the Programme in light of wider policy developments. Specifically, it has made changes to grant terms and conditions and issued various letters covering different issues at different times, which require local authorities to develop Supporting People services that:
- a place greater emphasis on preventing homelessness and early intervention;
 - b tackle poverty by giving people opportunities to find employment and or training and to gain skills, and through better alignment with the Welsh Government's other Tackling Poverty programmes, namely Communities First, Flying Start and Families First;
 - c help to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, and better support those young people leaving local authority care who are deemed to be at risk of homelessness;
 - d provide preventative low and medium level support 'for people experiencing domestic abuse, which needn't be strictly housing related support'; and
 - e address the consequences of UK Government welfare reform.
- 1.8 Between April 2014 and December 2015, the Welsh Government carried out a series of reviews of how well local authorities have delivered the Programme. **Paragraphs 3.29 to 3.33** and **Box 8** on page 61 provide more detail on the scope and findings. These reviews raised some issues that are difficult for local authorities to resolve. For example, about the eligibility for funding of some of the learning disability services. It is the Welsh Government's view that some local authorities are using Supporting People funding to support ineligible services to people with learning disabilities. At a time of austerity, local authorities may find it difficult to find other funding sources to continue to provide the support deemed ineligible.
- 1.9 There have also been a number of reviews commissioned by the Welsh Government about the Programme, which the Welsh Government has encouraged local authorities to take into account when developing services (**Appendix 2**). The Welsh Government's regular Supporting People bulletin gives further information to stakeholders about developments relevant to the Programme. For example, the September 2016 bulletin stated that the National Advisory Board wants the Programme to develop ways to address adverse childhood experiences, such as domestic abuse and substance abuse.

- 1.10 Although funding levels have remained stable in cash terms since 2015-16, these expectations come at a time when there remains concern about pressure on Programme budgets and with some Supporting People teams having limited staff resources. Some Supporting People lead officers told us about the challenges they experience managing the Programme, when it is for them one of a number of competing responsibilities. The Welsh Government's own reviews have raised concerns about the level of staffing in some local authorities. The reviews found that in some cases low staffing is affecting local authorities' ability to robustly monitor and evaluate services (paragraph 3.32).
- 1.11 Supporting People lead officers, and to a lesser extent Regional Development Co-ordinators and Regional Collaborative Vice-Chairs and Chairs, expressed a range of concerns to us about managing the Programme in a complex and rapidly changing policy environment. The most commonly expressed concern was that by broadening the agenda to cover issues such as signposting to employment and training opportunities and providing non housing-related support to domestic abuse victims, the Welsh Government is diluting the Programme objectives and creating confusion about Programme priorities. However, some saw the Welsh Government as seeking to narrow the overall purpose of the Programme 'through the back door'. Specifically, some perceived that the Welsh Government is seeking to revise the Programme so that it no longer delivers services to promote independent living, but is solely focussed on homelessness prevention. In our view, these contrasting perspectives are symptomatic of a lack of clarity about the overall purpose of the Programme. In response, the Welsh Government highlighted to us that the revised Programme guidance restates the importance of the Programme in helping people to live independently (Box 2).
- 1.12 Other concerns expressed included:
- a in asking local authorities to respond to a number of emerging priorities over a relatively short period, some saw the Welsh Government as failing to take adequate account of the complexity of changing services to reflect new priorities.
 - b some interviewees felt that there was a tension between local and regional needs assessment and planning of services and top-down setting of expectations by the Welsh Government.
 - c overall, officials within the Welsh Government's Supporting People team were viewed positively. However, Supporting People lead officers frequently expressed frustration with the level of guidance provided by Welsh Government officials about how to translate emerging priorities into change on the ground.

The Welsh Government is currently consulting on a series of strategic objectives for the Programme, as part of wider changes to Programme guidance

- 1.13 In May 2017, the Welsh Government issued for consultation revised Programme guidance. The Welsh Government intends that the new guidance will focus more on the 'strategic direction' of the Programme. To this end, the draft guidance includes a series of strategic objectives (Box 2). Originally scheduled for consultation in December 2015, resourcing constraints for the Welsh Government and its partners have created delays. The Welsh Government prepared the guidance by working in collaboration with partner organisations involved in delivering the Programme.
- 1.14 In developing the draft strategic objectives, the Welsh Government considered the need to articulate more explicitly the role of the Programme in delivering the **Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales**. The Welsh Government has also considered the impacts of the changing policy landscape on the Programme (Box 1).

Box 2: The Welsh Government's draft strategic objectives for the Programme

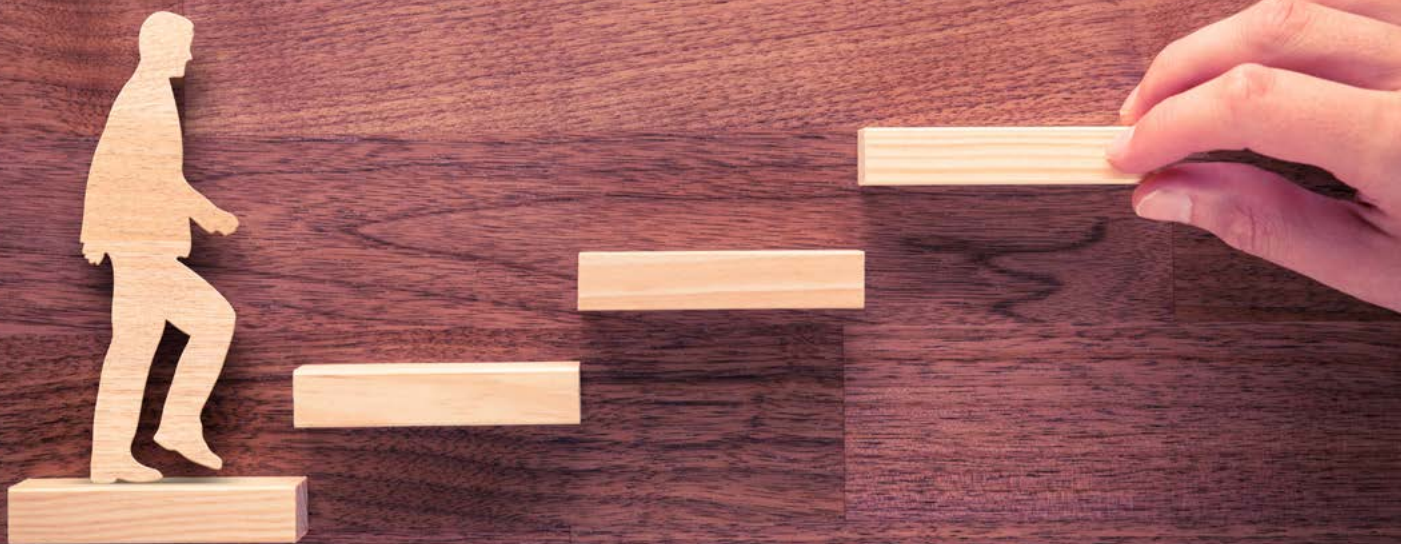
Issued for consultation in May 2017, the draft strategic objectives are that the Programme should deliver demonstrable and evidence-based impact on people's lives, by:

- Preventing homelessness wherever possible
- Supporting people to develop skills for life to flourish independently, in their own homes and part of their communities
- Supporting people to build their wellbeing and resilience to deal with shocks, stresses and uncertainty in their lives
- Reducing demands on other services
- Supporting people out of poverty
- Making best use of resources for maximum impact
- Delivering better relationships by working in partnership, across organisational, policy and sectoral boundaries
- Avoiding or mitigating the effect of adverse childhood experiences

Source: Welsh Government, **Supporting People Programme Guidance and Outcome Framework Consultation**, May 2017

Part 2

Action taken to address some longstanding concerns about the Programme's design and delivery has not always been effective and progress in some key areas has been slow



- 2.1 This part of the report examines the Welsh Government's response to the recommendations of Programme reviews commissioned since 2009. It considers whether action taken by the Welsh Government and its partners has delivered the intended benefits. The Welsh Government's view is that managing the Programme in line with the principles of co-production accounts for some of the pace of progress but can deliver better outcomes.

The Welsh Government has accepted most of the recommendations of the Programme reviews undertaken since 2009, although some actions, including revisions to Programme guidance, have taken longer than anticipated

- 2.2 Since 2009, the Welsh Government has commissioned five reviews of the Programme ([Appendix 2](#)):

- a The 'Aylward Review' (2010)
- b **Design for Governance** (2013)
- c **Independent review of the Supporting People Programme Transition Year** (2014)
- d **Supporting People Programme management charges within Supporting People service provision** (2015)
- e **Supporting People: Older People's Services** (2016)

- 2.3 The Welsh Government accepted in full 22 of the Aylward Review's 25 recommendations, rejected one recommendation outright¹⁶, and partially accepted elements of two others. In August 2012, the Welsh Government launched a new Supporting People Programme and in June 2013 it produced new Programme guidance. The new Programme included:

- a a single unified grant to replace the previous two Supporting People grants;
- b a new set of governance arrangements with six multi-sectoral Regional Collaborative Committees¹⁷ responsible for short, medium and long-term planning and a Supporting People National Advisory Board to provide the Minister with advice and information;

¹⁶ The Aylward Review proposed that the 'Supporting People Programme should be brought into the housing association regulatory framework'. The Welsh Government rejected this recommendation on the basis that the Programme is 'outside the scope of the regulatory function for registered social landlords'.

¹⁷ The Aylward Review had recommended that, as an interim measure, the Welsh Government set up 22 local authority based collaborative committees. However, the Welsh Government decided to move immediately to regional committees, and introduced six Regional Collaborative Committees. This decision put the Programme in the frontline of an emerging policy focus on regional working.

- c a funding formula to redistribute Programme funds to geographical areas of greatest need;
 - d inspections of providers by local authorities at three-yearly intervals; and
 - e an 'Outcomes Framework' to help to identify Programme impacts.
- 2.4 The Welsh Government's approach to implementing the recommendations of the Aylward Review was well-structured. It also showed the Welsh Government's willingness to work collaboratively to deliver improvements. The decisions the Welsh Government took in response to these recommendations also demonstrated its commitment to making progress in some difficult areas. For example, in respect of the funding formula and regional working.
- 2.5 The Aylward Review also called upon the Welsh Government to establish a national accreditation process for all providers, with fast track entry for providers already accredited. The Welsh Government developed a draft accreditation framework, and the 2013 Programme guidance referred to accreditation. However, the Supporting People National Advisory Board decided that the accreditation framework was not necessary. The Board's rationale was that local authorities monitor the contracts for providers, with some providers also subject to other external review arrangements. The Board proposed instead that the Welsh Government consider developing a repository of information about the governance, financial stability and organisational structure of providers seeking Supporting People funding. To date, the Welsh Government has not had the staff resource to take forward work on the repository.
- 2.6 In response to the **Design for Governance** review, from April 2016 the Welsh Government has required the main Regional Collaborative Committee member organisations to sign a Memorandum of Understanding 'to help to ensure effective and efficient strategic development, delivery, operation, administration and management of the Programme's services on a regional basis'. However, the Memorandum of Understanding took over two years to finalise. In addition, we asked our interviewees about whether the Memorandum of Understanding was likely make regional working more effective, and none felt that it would have an impact.

2.7 The Welsh Government accepted all but one of the 18 recommendations of the 2014 **Independent Review of the Supporting People Programme Transition Year**.¹⁸ Ten of the recommendations addressed issues related to the Regional Collaborative Committees (**Box 3**). The Welsh Government developed an action plan in response to the recommendations of the review. Some actions are complete and there has been some progress against all of the accepted recommendations. However, there has also been some slippage. The Welsh Government is taking forward some of the recommendations through its revised Programme guidance. For example, the need to clarify and better communicate the Programme's strategic vision and for a new set of 'strategic objectives' (**Box 2**). As noted in **paragraph 1.13**, the guidance has taken longer than anticipated to produce.

Box 3: The Welsh Government's response to the 2014 Independent Review recommendations about the Regional Collaborative Committees

Broadly, the review recommendations related to:

- the membership of the Committees, and the roles and responsibilities of members and the Regional Development Co-ordinators who work to support the Committees;
- the Welsh Government's approach to communicating its expectations of the Committees and supporting, measuring and overseeing delivery by the Committees of its expectations; and
- the way in which the Committees engage with other regional structures operating in other policy areas, such as health and social care.

In March 2015, the Welsh Government confirmed its commitment to continuing with the structure of six regional Committees and a National Advisory Board. Also, the Welsh Government committed to updating the Programme guidance to reflect the review recommendations relevant to the Regional Collaborative Committees.

18 The Welsh Government did not accept the recommendation that the Programme Guidance stipulation to appoint a service user to the Regional Collaborative Committee should be removed and left to local discretion.

- 2.8 In response to the 2015 review **Supporting People Programme Management Charges within Supporting People service Provision**, the Welsh Government introduced a 10% ‘comply or explain’ cap on management charges. The 2016-17 audit certificate requires local authorities’ internal auditors to certify that management charges for Supporting People services are 10% or less or that they have received a written explanation for charges above that level. Other actions taken in response to the 2015 review were:
- a the Welsh Government ran events with service providers and landlords to discuss the report and its approach to implementing the recommendations.
 - b the Welsh Government is currently undertaking its second round of reviews of aspects of local authority delivery of the Programme (**Box 8** on page 61). These reviews include an examination of the approach to management charges.
 - c the revised Programme guidance issued for consultation in May 2017 clarifies the level of spending that can be shown as management charges.
- 2.9 The 2016 review **Supporting People: Older People’s Services** made nine recommendations, seven of which were directed at Regional Collaborative Committees, local authorities and service providers. Nevertheless, the review identified that the Welsh Government could be more consistent in its monitoring of Regional Collaborative Committees’ progress in delivering services for older people that are based on their needs and do not reflect the type of tenure they hold.¹⁹ The review suggested that the Welsh Government require the Regional Collaborative Committees to report annually on their progress towards achieving ‘tenure neutral’ services for older people, which it now does although the data remains incomplete (**paragraph 2.20**).
- 2.10 The 2016 report also called upon the Welsh Government to review its approach to evaluating impacts so that it more effectively captures the experiences of older people supported through the Programme. The Welsh Government is currently consulting on how to revise its approach to evaluating the Programme (**paragraph 2.35**). The consultation document includes questions on how to assess the impacts of the Programme on people receiving longer-term services. The consultation notes that those receiving long-term services are particularly likely to be older people and people with a learning disability.

¹⁹ The 2010 Aylward Review had recommended that ‘the eligibility criteria for older people receiving Supporting People funds should be based on need rather than age or tenure’.

There remain concerns about the effectiveness and impact of the Regional Collaborative Committees, with mixed progress in developing regional projects and services

- 2.11 The main concerns and challenges about the effectiveness of the Regional Collaborative Committees identified by the 2014 Independent Review remain. The Gwent and North Wales Committees are widely regarded by the Welsh Government and other stakeholders as those operating the most effectively. However, even in these cases our interviews with key officers raised concerns about the added bureaucracy and the overall value for money of the committee arrangements given limited gains.
- 2.12 The Welsh Government requires Regional Collaborative Committees to report on their regional and sub-regional work, and how this work has developed since the previous reporting period. For the period October 2014 to 31 March 2015, the Welsh Government concluded that most of the feedback centred on work undertaken to align working practices. The same assessment concluded that the development of regional and sub-regional projects since the previous reporting period had been disappointing with opportunities to improve efficiencies via regional working potentially having been missed.
- 2.13 The Welsh Government did not produce its own review of the annual reports for 2015-16. Instead, the Supporting People National Advisory Board directed its governance sub-group to review these annual reports. The sub-group reached a positive conclusion about regional working for four of the six regions. For the Vale and Cardiff they pointed to only 'partial' action and for Western Bay 'limited or no action'.
- 2.14 We found that only two of the Regional Collaborative Committees – North Wales and Gwent – could demonstrate multiple examples of regional and/or sub regional projects (Box 4). In addition, some of the examples reported are not attributable to the impact of the committees. For example, two of the five regional projects cited by the Gwent Committee in its 2015-16 annual report pre-date the establishment of the Committee. Where collaborative working does happen it has tended to focus on developing common approaches to core processes and service reviews rather than genuine regional projects and services (Appendix 3).

Box 4: Regional and sub-regional projects and services operating, as of January 2017

North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee

Collaborative commissioning at a sub-regional level:

- Wrexham County Borough Council and Flintshire County Council jointly fund and manage the Domestic Abuse Floating Support project with the charitable housing association Hafan Cymru;
- Denbighshire County Council and Conwy County Borough Council jointly fund and manage the Doorstop project, which provides accommodation for people with substance misuse problems;
- a sub-regional Supported Lodgings and Nightstop Crashpad has been commissioned between Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council and Conwy County Borough Council; and
- Denbighshire County Council and Flintshire County Council are jointly funding a refugee officer and Wrexham County Borough Council are accommodating/resettling Syrian refugees jointly with Denbighshire County Council.

Other sub-regional projects are being considered.

Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee

There are currently a number of regional and sub-regional services and schemes to support a range of client groups:

- Prolific offenders project
- Gypsy and Traveller Support Service
- Young People (aged 16-24)
- Two Older Persons Floating Support schemes
- Prison Release Empowerment Workers to support individuals both pre- and post-release from prison to find and maintain suitable accommodation

Mid and West Wales Regional Collaborative Committee

The Mid and West Wales area operates one sub-regional project, the West Wales Blood Borne Virus Service, which operates across three of the four local authorities on the Committee. The West Wales Blood Borne Virus Support Service and the Hywel Dda University Health Board are working in partnership to provide support for patients living with the blood borne viruses HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C.

Cwm Taf Regional Collaborative Committee

While there are no examples of regional services, since 2015, the two local authorities comprising the Cwm Taf Committee have each operated a floating support scheme to the same specification.

Box 4: Regional and sub-regional projects and services operating, as of January 2017

The Vale and Cardiff Regional Collaborative Committee

There are no examples of regional services.

Western Bay Regional Collaborative Committee

There are no examples of regional services.

- 2.15 Our interviews with Supporting People lead officers, Regional Development Co-ordinators and chairs and vice chairs of Regional Collaborative Committees identified a number of factors that had contributed to the lack of regional delivery of services:
- a the absence of ‘pooled’ budgets between local authorities represented on the Regional Collaborative Committees.
 - b reductions in Programme funding ([paragraph 2.42](#)) mean that local authorities have focussed on decommissioning services or maintaining their own local services, rather than working together to develop shared services. Yet financial pressures should encourage local authorities to identify where, including through collaboration, they can maintain existing services at reduced cost.
 - c difficulties aligning timelines for regional procurement of services when existing local authority contracts have different contract end dates.
- 2.16 Welsh Government officials emphasised to us that the issues identified above are not insurmountable. For example, the Communities and Tackling Poverty Alignment Project, which was established in 2015, created the option to vire funding between programmes. The Welsh Government has itself acknowledged the limitations of the Regional Collaborative Committees in developing regional services. In 2015, it carried out an assessment of the Programme’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis found that collaborative working had progressed slowly in some areas, and not at all in other areas. The analysis questioned the value added by the committees. We also identified an ongoing concern that the committees ‘lack teeth’ and are not well placed to provide effective scrutiny of local authority spending decisions. These findings about regional working are relevant in the context of the Welsh Government’s wider ambitions for reforming local government.²⁰ They are also relevant in the context of the emphasis on collaboration as one of the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

²⁰ Welsh Government, **Reforming local government: renewed and resilient**, January 2017.

Seven years after the Aylward Review identified the need for change, older people's services are still predominantly not based on an assessment of need

- 2.17 The 2010 Aylward Review recommended that '...the eligibility criteria for older people receiving Supporting People funds should be based on need rather than age or tenure'. The review highlighted concerns that all older people living in sheltered housing were entitled to receive Supporting People services, such as alarm systems and warden services, regardless of whether they needed these services. One of the consequences of this was that older people with support needs, but living outside of sheltered housing, were not receiving adequate support.
- 2.18 The Welsh Government's 2013 Programme guidance placed the responsibility for ensuring that older people's services are tenure neutral with the Regional Collaborative Committees. It required the committees to:
- a establish a timeline for achieving older people's services that are based on need, not tenure;
 - b ensure that constituent local authorities reported on how they are working towards the objective and the timescales for achieving it; and
 - c report on their progress to the Supporting People National Advisory Board – and for this to be a standing agenda item for the committees and the National Advisory Board.
- 2.19 The 2016 review of older people's services pointed to some gradual change. But it concluded that local authorities were still commissioning the substantial bulk of older people's services in such a way that they remain available only to tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords. The review identified that this situation reflected a heritage of historic service models rather than evidence of particular levels of need in these tenures.
- 2.20 For 2015-16, the Welsh Government asked the Regional Collaborative Committees to report on the proportion of spending on older peoples' services that is tenure neutral. Only one of the Committees provided specific data on the proportion of spend which was tenure neutral for all of the local authority areas in its region (Western Bay). Three of the other Committees provided data for some of the local authorities in their regions. The Cwm Taf and Gwent Committees did not provide any specific data at the time, although they did provide in their annual reports a commentary on progress. However, the Cwm Taf committee has reported to us that all its services for older people are now tenure neutral.

Progress in developing an approach to evaluation remains slow, and so the Welsh Government does not yet have a good enough understanding of the Programme's impact

In August 2012, the Welsh Government introduced a new framework to assess individuals' progress against a defined set of Programme outcomes

2.21 The Welsh Government began to develop an outcomes framework in 2008, some five years after launching the Programme. In 2010, the Aylward Review concluded that there was a need for a robust outcomes framework and a more rigorous approach to evaluating services. From November 2009 to May 2010, 17 local authorities, in conjunction with some other providers, had participated in a pilot project to assess performance against 11 outcomes. The Welsh Government asked providers to report whether, on completion of the intervention or at the six-monthly review, the outcomes for each individual receiving support had been 'met', 'partially met' or 'not met'. In April 2012, the Welsh Government confirmed that the 11 outcomes used in the pilot work would become the new 'Outcomes Framework', grouped under four broad themes (Box 5).

2.22 However, in contrast to the pilot work, the Welsh Government introduced a '5-step' approach to assess individual progress against Programme outcomes. The Welsh Government decided to use the step approach in recognition that, while many of those supported through the Programme may be a long way from tangible outcomes such as securing employment, the Programme has a role to play in helping them on that journey. The step approach works as follows:

- a on entering a Supporting People funded intervention, the service user and their support worker identify which of the 11 outcomes the service user wants to work towards. Multiple outcomes can be chosen and, for each outcome, an assessment is recorded using one of the five 'steps' (Box 6).
- b at review or on leaving a Supporting People funded intervention, the progress made towards meeting the intended outcome(s) is assessed and recorded.

Box 5: The current Supporting People Outcomes Framework

Promoting Personal and Community Safety

- Feeling safe
- Contributing to the safety and wellbeing of themselves and of others

Promoting Independence and Control

- Managing accommodation
- Managing relationships
- Feeling part of the community

Promoting Economic Progress and Financial Control

- Managing money
- Engaging in education/learning
- Engaged in employment/voluntary work

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

- Physically healthy
- Mentally healthy
- Leading a healthy and active lifestyle

Box 6: The 5-step approach used to assess progress towards meeting Programme outcomes

The Welsh Government defines the five steps in the following way:

Step 1

- The outcome for the service provider at this stage is to prevent or minimise harm to the service user and others and to develop trust with the service user.
- At this stage the service user may be unwilling to discuss a particular area of their life, such as managing money, or may be difficult to engage with.
- Service users should be supported in preventing the situation from getting 'any worse' until progress can be made towards relevant outcomes.

Box 6: The 5-step approach used to assess progress towards meeting Programme outcomes

Step 2

- Service users may be willing to discuss relevant outcomes, however they are unclear about how to make progress towards achieving the outcome and need considerable support in order to take the next steps.
- The service is focused on supporting the service user to increase their stability and give access to resources that should help the service user to define what they want to achieve.
- Service users may need considerable support to accept that they can control such areas of their life as managing money.
- This may be where support is in initial stages, and due to a number of factors (e.g. risk, health, capacity, prioritisation), the support worker may be taking the lead in driving progress.

Step 3

- Service users will have started to believe they can make a difference/change to this area of their life and will accept specific time-bound goals in order to achieve the expected outcome.
- This stage should focus on encouraging service users to work towards achievable goals on their own whilst providing support should they need it; but not doing it for them.
- Service users should be supported to reflect on what has gone well and positively supported when things have not gone well.

Step 4

- Service users should be supported to deal with difficulties themselves and to become more self-reliant and knowledgeable about how to seek support from an organisation without their support worker.

Step 5

- Service users should now be able to manage most issues in this area on their own.
- For the majority of the time, service users should be accessing services without support and supported to understand when/if they need extra support in this area.
- Service users should feel confident enough to start supporting themselves in dealing with issues in this area.
- In long-term services: service users will accept they may always need support in this area but they are maintaining their optimum level of independence in achieving their goal or preventing loss of optimum independence by having long-term support.

Source: Welsh Government, **Supporting People Outcomes Framework Guidance**, April 2012

The current Outcomes Framework has a number of limitations which make it difficult to form a comprehensive judgment of the success of the Programme and there is a lack of confidence in the data that has been collected

2.23 Through the current Outcomes Framework, the Welsh Government has more clearly established what it expects the Programme to achieve. Nevertheless, in our view there remain limitations in its design. The Welsh Government has not established any indicators or criteria for assessing the success of the Programme. The Welsh Government has identified the areas it expects to see service users make progress in but has not quantified the scale of the impact it expects the Programme to deliver. Nor has there been a clear and straightforward relationship between data collected through the Outcomes Framework and the Programme aims.

2.24 Many of those involved in managing delivery of the Programme told us that the outcomes data was time consuming to collect. Moreover, many lacked trust and confidence in the accuracy of the data. In response, the Welsh Government emphasised to us its view that where local authorities lack confidence in the data, they should work more closely with support providers to address these issues. The concerns relate primarily to the subjective nature of the 5-step assessment.²¹ However, there are also concerns that:

- a some providers are making judgements without discussing progress with the service user. The Welsh Government's guidance does not make clear whether there should be dialogue when support begins or what should happen if a support worker and service user cannot agree on the extent of progress made.
- b the process may not be impartial. For example, it could be in a provider's interest to put a positive slant on progress to show their intervention is effective.

2.25 Early work by the North Wales Supporting People lead officers showed that, at least in the first few years of using the Outcomes Framework, providers did not have shared understanding of what each step meant. In evidence submitted to the Welsh Government in August 2014, the lead officers argued that concerns about the Outcomes Framework data meant that less weight was given to it during service reviews compared with other sources of data.

²¹ Any assessment of the degree of progress reflects not only progress made towards achieving specific goals, which can itself be a subjective judgement, but also reflects a more subjective judgement about the level of control and responsibility the service user is taking over the challenges they are experiencing.

- 2.26 The Welsh Government has itself identified concerns with the completeness and accuracy of the data. It found a discrepancy when comparing the number of people that the Programme expected to support in 2012-13 and 2013-14 with the number of individuals for which councils reported outcomes. Some of our interviewees raised particular concerns about the reliability of the 2012-13 and 2013-14 outcomes data following changes to the reporting requirements due to data protection concerns.
- 2.27 The Welsh Government has since challenged local authorities to provide better data. From March 2015, each local authority completes a spreadsheet identifying for each client category the minimum number of outcomes expected by the Welsh Government and the actual number of outcomes reported in the previous six months. Where the outcomes data appears to be incomplete, the Welsh Government challenges the data provided. The Welsh Government's view is that the following increase in outcomes reported demonstrates better reporting of outcomes by local authorities. Local authorities reported one or more outcomes for 30,008 individuals and 32,544 individuals during October to March 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively. For the same period in 2015-16, one or more outcomes were reported for 57,453 individuals.
- 2.28 Changes to the data collection template mean that the Welsh Government is also now able to quantify how many individuals are supported but for whom outcomes are not reported for a number of possible reasons²². For the period October to March 2015-16, the Welsh Government identified that over 20,000 potential outcomes had not been reported. This equates to 9% of all reportable outcomes.
- 2.29 Concerns about the outcome data persist, as expressed in the 2015-16 annual reports of two of the six Regional Collaborative Committees – Mid and West Wales and the Vale and Cardiff. In addition, the Welsh Government raised fresh concerns during 2016-17 about the data being submitted by local authorities in North Wales.
- 2.30 Nevertheless, there are examples of where local authorities and Regional Collaborative Committees are using the outcome data. The Cwm Taf Committee has reported that the outcomes data is presented routinely to assist in decision-making about future service provision. Monmouthshire County Council told us that it had been able to make good use of Outcomes Framework data to identify issues around service delivery. For example, the Council's analysis of the data had highlighted issues with fair access to services for both men and women. Building on that analysis, the council undertook further research and took action to address access issues for men.

²² Outcome information is only collected for people with a support plan in place and who have had a review within the reporting period. Outcomes are also not reported in all cases by providers.

- 2.31 The Welsh Government has drawn limited conclusions about the impacts of the Programme between October 2015 and March 2016 based on the outcome data reported by local authorities. In bringing together this analysis in a high-level working document sent to local authorities, the Welsh Government has aggregated outcomes:
- a **Feeling safe and managing money:** overall, an average of 61% of service users, for whom these outcomes were relevant, achieved a positive outcome across these two outcome areas, up 2% from the previous period (April 2015 to September 2015).
 - b **Managing accommodation:** overall, an average of 62% of service users, for whom these outcomes were relevant, achieved a positive outcome in this area, up 4% from the previous period.
 - c **Physically healthy, mentally healthy and leading an active and healthy lifestyle:** an average of 59% of service users, for whom these outcomes were relevant, achieved a positive outcome across the three outcome areas, up 5% from the previous period.
 - d **Contributing to the safety of themselves and the well-being of others, managing relationships and feeling part of the community:** an average of 63% of service users, for whom these outcomes were relevant, achieved a positive outcome across the three outcome areas, up 4% from the previous period.
 - e **Engaging in educational learning and engaging in employment/voluntary work:** an average of 58% of service users, for whom these outcomes are relevant, achieved a positive outcome across these areas, up 8% from the previous period.
- 2.32 The Welsh Government has emphasised to us that it only regards this analysis as indicative. Aggregating the data could mask different trends for different outcome areas and it hides some substantial variation in the percentage of service users in different categories achieving positive outcomes. Furthermore, the figures reported in the document do not distinguish between what are reported as partial or fully met outcomes. In practice, partial outcomes account for almost 50% of the reported positive outcomes. In addition, the percentage of positive outcomes reported do not cover all service users for whom the outcomes were relevant due to underreporting of outcomes ([paragraph 2.28](#)).
- 2.33 The Welsh Government expects local authorities and the regional committees to consider the data in more detail. Local authorities hold details on individuals' progress that is not available to the Welsh Government.

2.34 As another way of demonstrating the positive impacts due to the Programme, the Gwent region initially put together together a series of case studies, an approach which was replicated by North Wales (Appendix 6). The regions have used the case studies to highlight potentially substantial savings to other statutory services as a result of the Supporting People Programme.

The Welsh Government is planning to revise the outcomes framework in an effort to address some of the current concerns

2.35 The Welsh Government has acknowledged the limitations of the Outcomes Framework and is planning to revise it (Box 7). Although still to be finalised, the main changes proposed are:

- a **to reduce the number of outcomes from 11 to 7 and replace the current five-step process with three steps.** Although the exact definitions of the three steps have yet to be confirmed, the consultation document gives the examples below:
 - Step 1: ‘I would like to work towards X’ – where X is one of the seven outcomes;
 - Step 2: ‘I am working towards X’; and
 - Step 3: ‘I have achieved X’.
- b **for local authorities to submit data on a range of ‘harder’ measures.** For example, about ‘the number and/or percentage of people who have suitable accommodation which is likely to last at least six months’.
- c **for local authorities to submit equality-related information.** For example, on sexual orientation and disability, to allow the Welsh Government to evaluate the Programme against equality requirements.

2.36 However, as currently drafted, the revised arrangements may not fully address the concerns about the current framework and outcomes data. Nor would the proposed approach demonstrate definitively the impacts of the Programme on areas such as homelessness. Specifically:

- a in reducing and redefining the ‘steps’ the Welsh Government has increased the likelihood that judgements about progress are more consistent. In addition, a range of other ‘harder’ measures such as number and/or percentage of people who have entered employment will support the Outcomes Framework. However, the Outcomes Framework will still rely upon some subjective assessments of progress with the attendant risk that the data is not perceived to be reliable for the reasons identified above (paragraph 2.24).

Box 7: Revised Outcomes Framework: proposed seven outcomes and performance indicators

Outcome 1: People feel safe:

- Number and/or percentage of those supported who feel safe.

Outcome 2: People are able to manage their money:

- Number and/or percentage of clients supported whose financial situation has stabilised and/or improved.

Outcome 3: People have accommodation and are able to manage it/People who are not at imminent risk of homelessness:

- Number and/or percentage of people who have suitable accommodation which is likely to last at least six months.
- Number of people who are under a S66 duty; the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty upon local authorities to support eligible individuals to remain in suitable accommodation.
- Number of people who are S73 homeless; the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty upon local authorities to help eligible individuals to find suitable accommodation.

Outcome 4: People are engaged in education and/or learning:

- Number of people who are engaged in education and/or learning to a level 2 qualification or above²³.
- Number of people who have been supported to access a learning activity that may include basic skills training but which is below a level 2 qualification.

Outcome 5: People who are engaged in Employment/voluntary work:

- Number and/or percentage of people who have entered employment.
- Number and/or percentage of people who are volunteering.

²³ The Welsh Government has defined level 2 education as 'GCSEs (grades A*-C), O Levels (grades A-C), CSEs (grade 1), Award, Certificate, Diploma (City & Guilds, CACHE, OCR, BTEC/Edexcel/Pearson), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), NVQ Level 2, National Certificate/Diploma, Intermediate apprenticeship, Functional Skills Essential Skills, Music (grades 4-5)'.

Box 7: Revised Outcomes Framework: proposed seven outcomes and performance indicators

Outcome 6: People who are physically healthy:

- Number and/or percentage of people who receive help to manage their physical health condition.

Outcome 7: People who are mentally healthy

- Number and/or percentage of people with improved emotional/mental wellbeing.

In addition, to collecting data on the above measures, local authorities will be expected to provide data for a range of measures related to the individuals housing and employment, education and housing status when they enter and exit the support service.

Source: Welsh Government

- b the Welsh Government acknowledges the need to develop a database to reduce the time spent collecting and verifying data and to reduce errors in data recording. In its recent consultation on the revised Outcomes Framework, the Welsh Government does not commit to funding such a database, although any final decision will take account of consultation feedback.
- c measuring performance indicators does not demonstrate by itself that the Programme in question is responsible for any movement in the indicator either up or down. Attributing causality requires also in-depth longitudinal and qualitative research, and the Welsh Government is not planning any such evaluation.

Separate to work on developing the Outcomes Framework, there is some as yet limited evidence that the Programme reduces demand for health services

2.37 In February 2015, the Welsh Government approved funding for a study to explore the feasibility of linking administrative data on use of health services to individuals receiving Supporting People funded services.²⁴ The overall aim was to assess the contribution data linking techniques could make to the evaluation of the Supporting People Programme. For some Supporting People service users, the feasibility study examined health service use both in the period before and in the period after the Supporting People intervention in comparison with a 'control' group.²⁵

24 Welsh Government, **Supporting People Data Linking Feasibility Project: Research Report**, March 2016

25 The control group consisted of individuals who were referred to Supporting People but who were recorded as 'unsuccessful' and were therefore not provided with support or who were provided with support but 'failed to engage'.

- 2.38 Only two local authorities (Blaenau Gwent and Swansea) were able to provide the data in the format required within a very limited timescale. Broadly, the study found that on average all Supporting People service users in Swansea, and those service users in Blaenau Gwent receiving floating support, used GP services more than a 'control' population, and for some Supporting People service users in Swansea and Blaenau Gwent a similar pattern was seen for A&E visits. After this initial peak, in comparison to the control group, Supporting People service users showed a greater decline in their use of GP services in the months after the intervention began. The implication being that those who had received a Supporting People intervention were less likely to need to use health services over the longer term.
- 2.39 The feasibility study concluded that there is the potential to use data linking techniques to examine the impact of the Programme on health and other services. However, the report emphasised that a broader dataset is needed to support any definite judgements about the impact of the Supporting People Programme on health services.
- 2.40 The Welsh Government has taken action against some of the feasibility study report's recommendations and is providing £201,000 for a four-year all-Wales data linking study. The Welsh Government has revised grant terms and conditions to ensure local authorities collect information that will allow Supporting People data to be linked to anonymised data held about that individual's use of health services, for example, through the use of postcodes. It has also inserted a requirement for local authorities and providers to ensure relevant documents make individuals aware of how this data will be used. The Welsh Government is still considering a recommendation about developing a model to quantify the cost savings for health services due to the Programme. Because of cost constraints, the Welsh Government has decided against taking forward a qualitative study to construct a better control group and to provide explanations for the observed patterns of health service use.
- 2.41 Progress with the new four-year study has been slower than anticipated. The first-year report, published in June 2017,²⁶ notes that data has been acquired from eight councils²⁷ with a further 11 confirming that the necessary legal documentation to share data is in place. Three local authorities did not engage with the project in year one. The first year report highlights that challenges still exist in terms of data quality but that progress has been made to improve future data collection and supply.

26 Welsh Government, **Supporting People Data Linkage Study: Progress Report**, June 2017

27 Swansea, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, Newport, Torfaen and Caerphilly.

Funding has continued to be ring fenced, in contrast to the situation in England and Scotland, but there are some concerns about the impact of budget reductions on the quality and sustainability of Supporting People services

- 2.42 In the context of wider pressures on the Welsh Government's budget, between 2013-14 and 2016-17 the total annual Programme funding has reduced by 8.5% (£11.6 million) in cash terms. In real terms, there has been a 10.5% (£14.6 million) reduction. However, overall local authority allocations have remained the same in cash terms since 2015-16 ([Appendix 4](#)).
- 2.43 In Wales, funding for the Supporting People Programme continues to be 'ring-fenced', in contrast to England and Scotland. This means that, in Wales, Programme funding can only be used to fund housing-related support services to assist vulnerable people to live as independently as possible. We found near unanimous support for the Welsh Government's decision to retain the ring-fencing.
- 2.44 The National Audit Office has reported that spending on Supporting People interventions in England fell in real terms by 45% between 2010-11 and 2014-15.²⁸ English service providers have suggested that, since the ring-fence was removed, funding has been diverted to statutory services that local authorities have been struggling to deliver because of the overall reductions in central government funding.²⁹ Some English providers also suggested that reductions in spending on Supporting People services are likely to have reduced service quality, and will over the longer-term lead to higher costs. In response to reduced Programme funding in Wales, some Supporting People service providers have expressed similar concerns about the impact on service quality ([paragraph 2.54](#)).
- 2.45 Some Supporting People lead officers explained to us that they had found savings through reviewing their Supporting People Revenue Grant legacy schemes. For some local authorities their reviews identified services that were no longer strategically relevant or not providing value for money and were subsequently remodelled or decommissioned. We asked local authorities to quantify the savings arising from these reviews, but most were not able to confirm figures:
- a Flintshire County Council reported total savings of £185,000 between 2013-14 and 2017-18;
 - b Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council reported a total of £0.2 million non-recurring savings between 2013-14 and 2015-16; and

²⁸ National Audit Office, **Impact of funding reductions on local authorities**, November 2014

²⁹ The Guardian, **Supporting People cuts leave housing sector unable to help most vulnerable**, August 2011

- c Vale of Glamorgan Council reported total recurring savings of £150,000 from 2016-17 onwards.
- 2.46 By reviewing other services on an ongoing basis, some local authorities have identified opportunities for savings, including through reviews to services provided for people with learning disabilities. We have not sought to quantify the savings accrued from all these reviews, and not all local authorities have undertaken such reviews.
- 2.47 In principle, the development of regional and sub-regional working practices and/or specific services (Box 4) may also have yielded some financial savings. However, we have not seen any figures quantifying any such savings. In addition, some local authorities provided us with examples of where they have supplemented Supporting People grant with their own funding³⁰ to help offset a reduced grant allocation.
- 2.48 Our analysis suggests that one of the ways in which local authorities have dealt with budget reductions has been to change from generally more expensive fixed support to less expensive floating support.³¹ Since 2014-15, there has been a small but noticeable change in the overall proportion of Programme funds spent on fixed and floating support (Figure 3). The Welsh Government's view is that higher levels of floating support are an indicator of local authorities intervening earlier to address issues before they reach crisis point and individuals require fixed support services. This approach is in line with the preventative agenda set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and could be more cost-effective in the longer term. However, respondents to a 2016 Community Housing Cymru survey (paragraph 2.54) expressed the view that local authorities are funding fewer intensive services to achieve cost savings and that this would have a detrimental impact on service users.
- 2.49 The Welsh Government requires local authorities to submit annual spending plans that outline in 'units' how they intend to spend their allocation of Programme funds. Where the support is floating, the term unit refers to the number of people a support worker is funded to help. Where the support is fixed, the term unit refers to the number of beds provided through the Programme. The Welsh Government's analysis of spending plans for the period 2013-14 to 2016-17 found the number of units supported by the Programme has fallen at a higher rate than Programme funding. The Programme budget reduced by 9.5% in cash terms (£13 million), while the number of units supported fell by 17.6% (12,319).

30 In response to the Welsh Government reducing its grant allocation for the Supporting People Programme for Conwy and Wrexham, the local councils contributed £1.1 million and £2.5 million respectively between 2012-13 and 2015-16.

31 In 2016-17, there were 17 client categories with expenditure on both fixed and floating support. Of these, fixed support was more expensive in 14 cases.

Figure 3: proportion of the Supporting People Programme funds allocated to floating and fixed support units, 2013-14 to 2016-17

| Year | Floating support (%) | Fixed support (%) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2013-14 | 44.7 | 55.3 |
| 2014-15 | 43.8 | 56.2 |
| 2015-16 | 46.8 | 53.2 |
| 2016-17 | 49.7 | 50.3 |

Note

This analysis excludes Programme funds spent on alarm services, which the Welsh Government discounts from much of its analysis as it claims it distorts the overall picture.

Source: Welsh Government

2.50 The Welsh Government has concluded that, for the most part, the overall reduction in units was in four categories: provision of alarms in sheltered accommodation for older people; services for people over 55 years of age with support needs; people with chronic illnesses and people with physical/sensory disabilities. Our own analysis shows that,

- a alarm services accounted for 65% of the overall decline in services;
- b services for people over 55 years of age accounted for 25% of the decline in units;
- c people with physical/sensory disabilities accounted for 7% of the decline in units; and
- d people with chronic illnesses accounted for 2% of the decline in units.

2.51 Some reduction in the numbers of sheltered accommodation units with alarms funded through the Programme would be expected as local authorities seek to meet the recommendations of the Aylward Review (paragraph 2.3). Figure 4 shows that between 2013-14 and 2016-17 alarm services saw the greatest percentage reduction in spend. However, learning disabilities and generic floating support are the two areas that experienced the largest reduction in cash terms, of over £5 million in both cases.

Figure 4: client categories within the Supporting People Programme with the largest percentage reductions in expenditure between 2013-14 and 2016-17

| Client category | Change from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (%) | Change from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (£ millions) |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Alarm services (including in sheltered/extra care) * | -45 | -1.88 |
| Generic floating support to prevent homelessness | -25 | -5.36 |
| People with chronic illnesses | -25 | -0.04 |
| Young people who are care leavers | -20 | -0.16 |
| Single people with support needs (25-54) | -19 | -1.01 |
| People with physical and/or sensory disabilities | -18 | -0.33 |
| People with learning disabilities* | -16 | -5.85 |
| People with criminal offending history* | -16 | -0.44 |
| People with substance misuse issues (drugs and volatile substances) | -15 | -0.67 |
| Young people with support needs (16-24)* | -11 | -1.65 |
| Women experiencing domestic abuse* | -10 | -0.94 |

Note

* All the client categories in this table showed an overall decline in spend between 2013-14 and 2016-17. However, this trend was not consistent across all years and there was some fluctuation. Only the five categories highlighted showed a consistent reduction year on year. Appendix 5 provides the year-on-year figures.

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government data

- 2.52 Four client categories received more funding in 2016-17 in cash terms than in 2013-14; people with substance misuse issues (alcohol); men experiencing domestic abuse, people with refugee status and people with developmental disorders. However, the overall proportion of Programme funding for the latter three of these groups together remained relatively small, at less than 1% (Appendix 4).
- 2.53 The Welsh Government considers that the reduction in spending on 'people with learning disabilities' was very likely to be because local authority reviews had found that some support was ineligible. Typically, these reviews found that some support provided through the Supporting People Programme was not housing-related support, but was 'care' support, which is not eligible for support under the Programme. The Welsh Government does not have any intelligence on whether other funding sources are filling the gap left by removing Supporting People funding. We have not followed up this issue with all local authorities.³² However, we know of one authority (Blaenau Gwent), which remodelled its learning disabilities services to remove elements of care from the Supporting People Programme and fund them instead from its adult social care budget.
- 2.54 The lack of robust outcomes data (paragraphs 2.23 to 2.36) means that we are unable to assess the impact of the changes made in response to budget reductions. However, a 2016 survey of Community Housing Cymru and Cymorth Cymru members identified a range of concerns about the quality and sustainability of Supporting People services due to the funding reductions. The survey had a response rate of approximately 33%, and it is not known whether the concerns expressed by survey respondents are held more widely.
- 2.55 Some of the Supporting People lead officers, providers and Regional Collaborative Committee vice-chairs that we interviewed raised specific concerns about the quality or sustainability of services. However, such concerns were not widely expressed.

³² The Auditor General is currently undertaking an examination of how local authorities strategically commission their learning disability services. The work is focussing on how commissioning contributes to improved outcomes and wellbeing for citizens. The Auditor General will report on this work towards the end of 2017.

The redistribution of funding towards areas of greatest geographical needs has not progressed as rapidly as anticipated

The Welsh Government suspended the funding formula during 2013-14, although it did continue with some element of redistribution

- 2.56 The Welsh Government developed and implemented a new funding formula for 2012-13 and 2013-14. In line with an Aylward Review recommendation, the purpose of the funding formula was to redistribute funding for the Programme to the geographical areas of greatest need.³³
- 2.57 In 2014-15 and 2015-16, the Programme as a whole experienced budget cuts of 1.3% and 7.4% respectively in cash terms. Following consultation with stakeholders and modelling of the impacts of budget cuts on individual local authorities, the Welsh Government decided to suspend the formula. It was concerned that continuing to apply the formula would result in some local authorities experiencing cuts so large as to destabilise services. For example, between 2012-13 and 2013-14, Cardiff Council's allocation had already reduced by £0.8 million through redistribution. Other local authorities in North Wales together lost approximately £0.3 million.
- 2.58 However, the Welsh Government did continue with some element of redistribution:
- a for 2014-15, the local authorities expecting a reduction under the redistribution formula received a cut in their funding allocation. Those expecting an increase in their allocation under the redistribution formula did not receive one, but nor did they experience a cut in their allocation.
 - b for 2015-16, all local authorities received a reduction in funding, but those who were due to lose under the redistribution formula had a bigger reduction than those expecting to gain.
- 2.59 For 2016-17 and 2017-18, the Programme budget remained stable and all 22 local authorities received the same allocation in cash terms as in 2015-16.

³³ The original method was flawed as funding allocations were entirely determined by the resources local authorities had available to allow them to apply for funding, and how active they were in promoting applications from people in need.

2.60 There has been some movement towards redistribution of funding through the application of the formula. However, had the formula continued to have been implemented some local authorities would have received significantly more in 2016-17, and some significantly less, than their actual allocations (Figure 5). At the extremes:

- a Denbighshire received a total of £1.94 million more than it would have done had the Welsh Government continued to implement the formula, which amounted to £20.53 per head of population; and
- b Merthyr Tydfil received a total of £1.69 million less than it would have done had the Welsh Government continued to implement the formula, which amounted to £28.43 per head of population.

2.61 During our fieldwork, the local authorities that expected to receive increases in funding through the redistribution formula expressed frustration at the suspension of the formula. In contrast, local authorities facing the biggest reduction in their funding because of the funding formula expressed concerns about how they would manage if the Welsh Government were to reintroduce it. Also, some councils have expressed residual concerns about the basis of the formula.

Figure 5: amount of funding each local authority received in 2016-17 compared with what they would have received had redistribution continued

| Local Authority | 2016-17 per head of population (£s) | Projected amount to be received in 2016-17 per head of population if redistribution had been fully implemented (£s) | Difference between actual and projected expenditure per head of population (£s) | Difference in cash terms (£millions) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Merthyr Tydfil | 35.79 | 64.22 | -28.43 | -1.69 |
| Blaenau Gwent | 36.7 | 53.09 | -16.39 | -1.14 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 34.01 | 46.94 | -12.93 | -1.82 |
| Pembrokeshire | 22.03 | 33.67 | -11.64 | -1.44 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taf | 38.15 | 43.93 | -5.79 | -1.37 |
| Carmarthenshire | 35.09 | 40.81 | -5.72 | -1.06 |
| Newport | 43.09 | 48.72 | -5.63 | -0.83 |

Figure 5: amount of funding each local authority received in 2016-17 compared with what they would have received had redistribution continued

| Local Authority | 2016-17 per head of population (£s) | Projected amount to be received in 2016-17 per head of population if redistribution had been fully implemented (£s) | Difference between actual and projected expenditure per head of population (£s) | Difference in cash terms (£millions) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Bridgend | 40.93 | 46.1 | -5.17 | -0.73 |
| Caerphilly | 34.6 | 37.94 | -3.35 | -0.6 |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 27.17 | 28.41 | -1.24 | -0.16 |
| Torfaen | 37.43 | 37.64 | -0.2 | -0.02 |
| Monmouthshire | 22.05 | 21.71 | 0.34 | 0.03 |
| Swansea | 57.01 | 55.51 | 1.49 | 0.36 |
| Cardiff | 45.55 | 43.88 | 1.67 | 0.6 |
| Wrexham | 36.45 | 34.46 | 1.99 | 0.27 |
| Isle of Anglesey | 37.78 | 35.71 | 2.07 | 0.14 |
| Gwynedd | 41.05 | 33.04 | 8.01 | 0.98 |
| Ceredigion | 39.42 | 28.79 | 10.63 | 0.79 |
| Powys | 38.74 | 26.02 | 12.72 | 1.69 |
| Flintshire | 37.71 | 24.24 | 13.47 | 2.07 |
| Conwy | 55.52 | 38.23 | 17.29 | 2.01 |
| Denbighshire | 57.97 | 37.45 | 20.53 | 1.94 |

Note:

For comparative purposes, we have presented some of the above data on a per head of population basis. However, the formula that the Welsh Government developed to support redistribution is not simply population based and sought to take into account levels of local housing related support needs.

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government data

The Welsh Government has been considering implementing a revised funding formula, but the timeframe for doing so has not been confirmed

- 2.62 The Welsh Government is currently considering the feasibility of introducing a revised funding formula to continue the redistribution of Programme funds to geographical areas of greatest need. In so doing, it is responding to a recommendation from the Supporting People National Advisory Board. The Welsh Government is conscious that reintroducing such a formula, potentially at a time of further Programme budget reductions, is likely to have an impact on some services locally. However, the Welsh Government also acknowledges that Programme funding should be allocated based on need rather than historic provision. The previous formula contains a number of variables for which there are no up-to-date figures.
- 2.63 The Supporting People National Advisory Board had been encouraging the Welsh Government to implement the new formula for 2018-19. This is likely to be an overly ambitious timeframe, as the Welsh Government has not yet undertaken any work to identify potential data components to be included in a revised formula. Reaching agreement on the formula introduced in 2012-13 proved challenging and took 12 months of work before it was implemented.
- 2.64 To implement the formula for 2018-19, the Welsh Government would need to have devised it in time for local authorities to receive their indicative allocations in late 2017 and submit their spend plans in January 2018. In addition, without a clear understanding of what funding levels for the Programme will be over even the medium term, it will be difficult for the Welsh Government to model the impact of any formula on individual local authority allocations. The introduction of any new formula also needs to take account of the confirmed strategic objectives following the recent consultation and the impact of wider policy developments ([paragraph 1.5](#)).

Part 3

There are inconsistencies in the way the Programme is being managed at a local and regional level, due in part to inadequate Welsh Government guidance



- 3.1 This part of the report examines aspects of the local and regional management of the Programme. Specifically, it considers issues relating to regional planning, the procurement of services, analysis of the costs of services and the quality of Programme management at a local level.

Regional Commissioning Plans are informed by needs assessments, but the Welsh Government has identified that the quality of these assessments varies

- 3.2 The 2013 Programme guidance outlined the requirement for each local authority to carry out needs and supply mapping, and to undertake a gap analysis, for all groups eligible to receive support. The purpose of needs mapping is to ensure that robust evidence underpins local authority commissioning plans and decision making.
- 3.3 The guidance states that needs and supply mapping and a gap analysis should be undertaken on a regular basis. The Welsh Government does not expect this activity to be undertaken every year for all eligible groups. However, it does specify that where an emerging priority or gap in service provision is identified, the local authority is responsible for gathering further information on needs and the availability of appropriate services. The guidance also states that needs mapping and gap analysis must be informed by engagement with stakeholders and service users. In addition, regional mapping of needs should be carried out to help identify priorities within the Regional Collaborative Committees' commissioning plans.
- 3.4 The Welsh Government has not reviewed in detail the quality of local authority or regional needs mapping and analysis. However, it has identified variations in the quality of the work undertaken. The Welsh Government has highlighted that in Gwent there are good examples of a range of national, regional and local data being used to provide a picture of the supply and demand for services. However, the Welsh Government has also highlighted a number of concerns in other regions:
- a in some cases, it is not clear how Supporting People teams and the Regional Collaborative Committees use information from needs mapping.
 - b in one area, the Welsh Government has highlighted the need for a consistent approach to needs mapping across the region in each of its three reviews between 2014-15 and 2016-17.

- c in a number of cases, there is too much focus on collecting information on demand only and not enough action to identify unmet needs.
 - d at least one Regional Collaborative Committee does not have a consistent approach to needs mapping across all its constituent authorities. Consequently, the constituent local authorities are using different datasets, which are difficult to combine to produce a regional analysis.
- 3.5 Public Service Boards³⁴ are now required to carry out assessments of local wellbeing under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In addition, health boards and local authorities are also required to carry out population assessments of care and support needs under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. There may be scope to use the local needs mapping analysis from these two processes to reduce duplication of effort and gather information about unmet needs. The Welsh Government has encouraged Regional Collaborative Committees to make links with Public Service Boards. Since 2016, the committees have been required to provide feedback in their annual reports on the links they have made with these boards. The extent of progress reported varies.

The Welsh Government has provided only annual funding allocations in recent years which has hampered local planning

- 3.6 The 2013 Programme guidance stated that, in March of each year, the Welsh Government would provide local authorities with a firm allocation for the new financial year, and an indicative financial allocation for the following two financial years. However, since the end of 2012-13, the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with figures for a three-year period on only one occasion. Specifically:
- a in December 2012, the Welsh Government issued indicative figures for 2014-15 and 2015-16;
 - b in October 2013, the Welsh Government gave indicative figures for 2014-15 and 2015-16; and
 - c in November 2014, January 2016 and December 2016, the Welsh Government gave indicative figures for the following financial year only.

³⁴ Public Service Boards are statutory partnerships of public service agencies who are responsible for working together to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing in their area. Each local authority is required to establish such a board.

- 3.7 In addition, in three of the four years since 2012, the Welsh Government was late issuing its final grant offer letters to local authorities. In particular, local authorities did not receive their grant letters for 2014-15 until mid-May. However, we understand that only for 2014-15 was there a difference between the indicative and final grant allocated. Before issuing the 2014-15 final grant offer letters, the Welsh Government decided to fund Regional Development Co-ordinator posts from the Supporting People Programme budget. Prior to 2014-15, the Regional Development Co-ordinator posts were funded from the Social Housing Management Grant.³⁵ After issuing the indicative allocations for 2014-15, the Welsh Government decided to fund the posts from the Supporting People Programme. Because of this change, for 2014-15 the Welsh Government reduced the allocation of each local authority by just under £15,000. The Supporting People Programme has continued to fund the posts since 2014-15.
- 3.8 Local authorities must submit their spend plans for the financial year ahead to the Welsh Government in the third week of January. Local authority Supporting People lead officers expressed concerns about their ability to plan effectively given the tight timescales between receiving their indicative allocations for the financial year ahead and submitting their spend plans.
- 3.9 Between receiving their indicative allocations and submitting spending plans to the Welsh Government, the Welsh Government's guidance requires local authorities to ensure that their spending plans are 'signed-off' by local authority members. There is a role for the relevant Regional Collaborative Committee to contribute to the plans and provide effective scrutiny. However, the timescales for submitting spending plans have made this difficult in practice, which can result in the Committees' involvement being little more than a rubbing-stamping exercise.
- 3.10 Local authority Supporting People lead officers were also frustrated by the annual approach to setting budgets for 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18. They told us that this annual allocation, together with the prospect of further funding reductions, creates stagnation in the Programme, hinders their ability to establish long-term services, has created a culture of small one-off pilot schemes and causes instability in service provision and high staff turnover. A number of local authority lead officers told us that they would like to be able to fund their service providers for three years at a time. This is particularly the case where there has been a review of services and these providers have been found to be providing value for money. However, the Welsh Government's own reviews have highlighted examples where local authorities have issued a substantial number of three-year contracts.

³⁵ The Social Housing Management Grant has been renamed the Housing Policy Development Programme. It helps to pilot innovative management policies and schemes, develop housing management good practice and help with implementation of new housing management policies.

3.11 The challenges of managing with an annual allocation of funding are not unique to the Supporting People Programme. We have highlighted similar issues in a number of other reports over the past year. The Welsh Government recognises the limitations of providing local authorities with one-year Supporting People budgets. However, officials told us that given the current financial climate there are no plans to alter this approach.

The Welsh Government's guidance on the procurement of Supporting People services is potentially misleading and there is some evidence of variable procurement practice

Welsh Government guidance on procurement rules has created expectations among providers that cannot necessarily be met by local authorities

- 3.12 During our fieldwork some Supporting People service providers told us that, in their view, some local authorities were re-tendering for Supporting People services where this was not required, with the main aim of driving down the costs of the services. The current Programme guidance states that 'New services should be subject to normal procurement practice and regulation, but provided that a robust and regular review regime is practised, it would not be anticipated that Supporting People services would be re-tendered on a routine basis and any re-tendering exercises would normally only take place following a service review. This will have established whether a service was not strategically relevant, of low quality or did not reflect acceptable cost guidance and was not able to make the changes to address identified shortcomings.'
- 3.13 Local authority Supporting People officers told us that they would appreciate clearer guidance about retendering. However, the revised Programme guidance that the Welsh Government has issued for consultation continues to imply that retendering need only take place where a service review has found the service to be deficient in some way.
- 3.14 In our view, this guidance on re-tendering existing Supporting People services is potentially misleading. The overall contract value and the type of service dictate the specific process to be followed to comply with procurement regulations. But there is still an expectation that public bodies procure all services in accordance with the principles of the public procurement regulations, which should naturally lead to periodic market-testing. In addition, the Welsh Government's grant terms and conditions state that goods and/or services to deliver Supporting People purposes must be purchased in a competitive and sustainable way so as to demonstrate value for money.

- 3.15 Public Contracts Regulation (2015)³⁶ states that an extension where there is no contractual provision for one is a material modification of the original contract and as such would require the services to be retendered. Extending contracts without provision to do so is in principle akin to directly awarding a contract through a single tender action³⁷. Where local authorities undertake a single tender action all reasons for such action should be evidenced and defensible. Procurement regulations allow for single tender actions in certain conditions, including:
- a the need for extreme urgency;
 - b where only one tender has been received;
 - c protection of exclusive rights; and
 - d technical reasons mean there is only one possible supplier.
- 3.16 We found that the guidance has created tensions between providers and local authorities. It has fostered the view among some providers that, as long as services are providing value for money, local authorities should not retender the services. A joint survey of Supporting People service providers undertaken by Community Housing Cymru and Cymorth Cymru ([paragraph 2.54](#)) also found that the guidance had contributed to providers' expectations about the extent to which public bodies should retender for services.
- 3.17 In our recently published report on **Local Authority Funding of Third Sector Services**,³⁸ we found similar evidence of a small number of local authorities continuing to procure services from the same third-sector organisations without regularly testing the market to ensure they are securing the best return on their resources. Such an approach risks:
- a reducing the pool of potential suppliers;
 - b inadvertently working against the Welsh Government's objective of local authorities developing local third-sector organisations;
 - c creating frustration amongst providers where they consider such closed approaches inequitable; and
 - d limiting opportunities for local authorities to drive further improvements and efficiencies.

Although, we also acknowledged that working within established partnerships can reduce or limit these risks for local authorities.

36 The Public Contract Regulations (2015) transpose into English, Welsh and Northern Irish law the European Union Directive on public procurement (Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement).

37 Where a contract is awarded to a single provider or limited group of providers – without competition.

38 Auditor General for Wales, **Local Authority Funding of Third Sector Services**, January 2017

There is evidence of variable procurement practice, with some local authorities making more use of contract extensions than others rather than going out to back out to tender

- 3.18 In response to the concerns raised by providers about procurement practices, we gathered some additional information from local authorities. We asked each local authority for the total number of contracts extended and for the total number of contracts awarded through a full procurement exercise during 2015-16.³⁹
- 3.19 Local authorities reported letting 33 contracts through full procurement exercises in 2015-16, although 10 did not report any such exercises. In contrast, the responses we received suggested that around five times as many contracts had been extended. However, in some cases the procurement activity undertaken involved the rationalisation of a larger number of contracts into a smaller number of contracts following significant service reviews. Some local authorities were sensitive to the disruption caused and resource impact for providers in having to retender for their services, but they also highlighted that in their view European Union regulations made it a requirement for them to 'test the market'. In addition, some local authorities have made direct awards on different terms and conditions to existing providers following service reviews and with a view to delivering savings, or they have extended contracts to allow service reviews to be undertaken.
- 3.20 By way of an example, Cardiff Council explained to us that while, it has previously recommissioned some services through direct awards, its main approach was to tender for services. Its aims being to: comply with Welsh Government grant terms and conditions and legal and procurement advice; ensure best value for money through procurement; address under-utilisation of some services; optimise opportunities for economies of scale; address duplication across some services and rationalise the number of contracts.⁴⁰ The Council is in the middle of a three-year commissioning process and, in 2016-17, recommissioned its generic floating support through a full procurement process. The number of contracts reduced from 14 to two and the Council reports that it has achieved over £900,000 in savings, while being confident that service quality has been enhanced.
- 3.21 Local authorities provided us with further details about 74 extended contracts.⁴¹ Contract extensions ranged from four months to 48 months. The average contract extension was just under 19 months.

³⁹ We did not ask local authorities for information about contract extensions or procurements for other years. Therefore, we do not know whether the patterns we identified would have been reflected in other periods.

⁴⁰ As at May 2017, Cardiff Council provided Supporting People services under 35 contracts delivered by 27 third-sector organisations and registered social landlords. The Council provides some services directly, including: homeless hostels, community alarms, mobile warden services and services to clients with learning disabilities.

⁴¹ We asked councils for additional information about the five largest contracts. Not all local authorities extended up to five contracts while some extended to more than five contracts.

- 3.22 Of the 74 contract extensions, local authorities reported that 26 (35%) were extended even though there was not an extension provision in the original contract, akin therefore to a direct award (paragraph 3.15). We have not examined the detail of these contractual arrangements to determine whether they were, in practice, compliant with local procurement policies and wider procurement regulations. Local authorities informed us that their contract procedure rules allowed them to do this using contract exemption notices. Local authorities gave two main reasons for extending contracts without provision to do so:
- a local authorities were confident that the services provided were delivering value for money, and as such did not believe that a procurement exercise would bring any benefits. They told us that they had gained such assurance through service reviews and ongoing dialogue with the provider, which in some cases had already led to reduced costs. For example, during 2015-16 Flintshire County Council extended its contracts for fixed site services for young people and families with support needs. Officers told us they had completed tender exemption reports, had recently undertaken a full review of the projects and found that they were performing well, and that project costs had been reduced to within the benchmark costs set by the Council. Consequently, it was the Council's view that a full procurement exercise would risk disrupting the projects that were providing value for money.
 - b local authorities told us that they were extending the contracts until they were able to review, remodel and procure future services.

The Welsh Government has capped management charges at 10% due to its concerns about variable practice

- 3.23 The 2013 Programme guidance gave local authorities some information on how to estimate the costs of individual Supporting People services. The guidance included information about the average costs of some services at that time. It indicated that the Welsh Government would provide some additional benchmark data about management costs, such as office costs.
- 3.24 In 2015, the Welsh Government commissioned a review of Supporting People 'management charges' (paragraph 2.8 and Appendix 2). That review followed an initial survey in 2013 that indicated major variation in the nature and scale of expenditure termed as 'management charges' in Supporting People funded services across Wales. Part of the review's remit was to establish the definitions of management charges used by providers and local authorities. The review also assessed the proportion of Programme funds spent on management charges. In response to the review, the Welsh Government altered the grant terms and conditions so that management charges should not exceed 10% of the scheme costs, unless a reasonable explanation can be provided – known as the 'comply or explain' cap on management charges.

3.25 In the revised Programme guidance issued for consultation in May 2017, commentary on the costs of services is limited to high-level information about what should comprise a management charge. The draft guidance reiterates the 10% comply or explain cap on management charges. We found that local authorities use a range of different methods to calculate the cost of Supporting People services. For example, a small number of local authorities continue to use the tariff system⁴² that was a feature of the Programme pre-2012.

The Welsh Government has identified widespread variations in overall service costs, but further analysis is required to understand what these variations mean

3.26 The Welsh Government has analysed local authority spend plans to try to assess the extent of variation in the costs of Supporting People services. For each client category, it has identified the most costly per unit service provided, the least costly per unit service and the average per unit cost. It has also calculated the 'multiplier' – the number of times the cheapest service will go into the most expensive. This analysis has highlighted that there are substantial variations in the cost of services across Wales. Based on the 2015-16 spend plans, the two categories which saw the largest variation in the unit costs of services were as follows:

- a one local authority spent £357 per unit to provide services to address drug misuse whereas another spent £18,530 per unit, which is 52 times more; and
- b one local authority spent £392 per unit to provide services for those with a criminal offending history whereas another spent £11,700 per unit, which is 30 times more.

3.27 However, the Welsh Government's analysis does not factor in the type or duration of the support provided. It compares the costs of services that last for less than six months with the costs of services that last for more than 24 months. In addition, its analysis compares the costs of fixed services with the costs of floating services, when the latter tend to be less expensive. Looking at the extremes – the most and least costly services within a client category – may only indicate that some services are outliers.

3.28 We sought to undertake a more detailed analysis of the data. However, this was not possible, as the data collated by the Welsh Government does not contain sufficient information about the length of the services. The data is in three categories: services less than six months; services between six and 24 months and services of more than 24 months.

⁴² Previous projects were costed by using a fixed price which had been agreed as a fair cost for a particular type of project or level of accommodation being provided.

Welsh Government reviews have found variability in the overall quality of Programme management by local authorities and some issues with the eligibility of support provided for people with learning disabilities

Since April 2014, the Welsh Government has undertaken a series of local authority reviews that have, in some cases, highlighted concerns about the way the Programme was being run

- 3.29 Beginning in April 2014, the Welsh Government undertook a first round of review of all 22 local authorities to gain assurance that local authorities are using their allocation of Supporting People Programme Grant appropriately. The Welsh Government completed the first round reviews by December 2015 and has since partially completed a second round of reviews (Box 8).
- 3.30 The Welsh Government summarised the key messages from the first set of reviews. It identified variable performance across the piece with no good or poor areas of performance common to all local authorities. For core activities, such as contract specification and contract monitoring, performance varied considerably.
- 3.31 When examining contract monitoring arrangements, the Welsh Government expects to see:
- a a schedule of regular monitoring visits by local authorities to Supporting People services providers, broadly speaking, to ensure that the services are delivering in line with the contract requirements. The scheduling of visits will reflect a risk-based approach, using intelligence gathered by the local authority, such as from service reviews, outcome data and for the number of clients using the service.⁴³
 - b minutes of the meetings of the regular monitoring visits and a summary of issues discussed, actions raised and an update and record of actions completed since the last visit.

43 The Welsh Government expects contract monitoring visits to include an examination of: compliance with the contract; compliance with associated policies and guidelines, for example, the Programme guidance; quality of service; collection and use of outcomes and performance data; resource levels; staff training; the service user experience and complaints management. The June 2013 Programme guidance did not specify the frequency with which local authorities should carry out monitoring visits. However, the draft revised guidance specifies that monitoring should be carried out at least annually.

Box 8: Welsh Government reviews of delivery of the Programme by local authorities

The reviews have sought to validate both 'input' on spending on Supporting People and 'output' information about the number of people supported. In particular, the reviews have examined:

- local authority arrangements for procuring Supporting People services (including benchmarking of contract costs);
- local authority arrangements for monitoring contracts for Supporting People services; and
- how local authorities assessed the housing-related needs of their communities and made decisions about services based on those needs.

Each local authority was given one of three ratings:

- 11 were given 'full assurance', which meant that the review team felt that the Programme was being run and monitored effectively;
- seven were given 'partial assurance', which meant that the review team had some concerns on the running of the Programme; and
- four were given 'unsatisfactory assurance', which meant that the review team had significant concerns about the running of the Programme.

The Welsh Government issued action plans to all local authorities, although for the authorities rated with 'full assurance', the plans covered relatively minor administrative issues.

The Welsh Government is undertaking a second round of reviews to provide continued assurance and to consider whether local authorities are addressing the issues identified by the first round of reviews. As of February 2017, the Welsh Government had completed 13 second-round reviews, which included all the local authorities rated unsatisfactory or given partial assurance in their first review.

Of the 13 second-round reviews, five authorities were deemed to have improved, six received the same rating as they had done previously and two were deemed to have deteriorated. The overall results were that two received a rating of full assurance; nine received partial assurance; and two were unsatisfactory. The Welsh Government plans to complete the second-round reviews by the end of 2017-18. The Welsh Government plans to conduct further testing to follow up on specific concerns arising from the second-round reviews.

Source: Welsh Government

- 3.32 From the first round of reviews, the Welsh Government found that nine of the 22 local authorities had insufficient evidence on file to show that they were monitoring contracts appropriately. In three of these nine reports, the Welsh Government specifically identified limited staff resources as a factor in the weaknesses in contract monitoring. However, Welsh Government officials have indicated to us that, in most cases, any weaknesses in contract monitoring may be linked to the limited resources in those Supporting People teams. The risks of poor contract monitoring by local authorities include failing to identify services which are not delivering the intended benefits or where providers are not managing the Programme well. For example, if providers are not collecting the required outcomes data.
- 3.33 From its second round of reviews, the Welsh Government identified that four of the nine local authorities that had weaknesses in contract monitoring were improving their arrangements. Some of the other local authorities concerned have indicated to us that they have put improvements in place since the second-round reviews.

The reviews undertaken by the Welsh Government, along with some more detailed work in two regions, have highlighted some issues with the eligibility of support for people with learning disabilities and differences in the level of support provided

- 3.34 In its recent reviews, the Welsh Government identified that some of the support funded through the Programme for people with learning disabilities was ineligible, as it was not housing-related support. From the Welsh Government's perspective, this resulted in the risk that Programme funding, designed to address housing-related support needs, is used instead to subsidise health and social care activity.
- 3.35 Two regions (North Wales and Gwent) have undertaken their own more detailed reviews of learning disabilities services ([Appendix 3, Box A1](#)). The North Wales review identified a number of instances where services funded by the Programme were ineligible. In response, the North Wales Collaborative Committee requires its constituent local authorities to report on their progress towards ensuring that all services for people with learning disabilities funded through the Programme provide only housing-related support. The Committee also established a sub-group to look at a range of issues related to this client group, such as the scope for using telecare to replace or supplement a support worker.

- 3.36 The Gwent review identified a range of concerns with learning disability provision funded through the Programme. The issues identified included some instances where there was the risk that Programme funding was providing care rather than housing-related support. The review made eight recommendations, including that by March 2018 all support to this client group should be based on an assessment of an individual's housing-related support needs. The Regional Collaborative Committee was tasked with overseeing progress towards this objective.
- 3.37 The work undertaken in Gwent and North Wales shows that there are some wide variations in the hourly support for people with learning disabilities that local authorities will fund through the Programme. As part of a phased Programme of completing individual housing related support assessments, in 2015-16, Newport City Council, decided to limit Supporting People funded support to eight hours per week for people with learning disabilities or enduring mental health problems. Denbighshire County Council has indicated to us that it works to an assumption of an average of 10 hours per week of support for learning disability clients, but with the amount of support informed by a needs assessment. A person with learning disabilities living in Conwy or Flintshire can receive up to 21 hours of support from the Supporting People Programme.⁴⁴ However, it does not necessarily follow that a person with learning disabilities in one area receives more or less support than they would elsewhere. The total package of support might be the same, but the funding to provide that support might come from different sources.
- 3.38 We are unable to form a definite judgment about whether such variation in provision exists across other client groups. However, the available data does suggest a degree of variation in the provision for other groups. For example, we identified that 16 of 22 local authorities provided Supporting People services for the client group 'families with support needs' in 2016-17. Fourteen local authorities provided support to people with physical or sensory disabilities through the Programme. While only three local authorities provided Programme support to people with developmental disorders such as autism. It may be the case that the needs of individuals are met through other funding sources. However, these differences emphasise the importance of effective scrutiny of needs mapping to ensure any lack of provision through the Programme can be explained.

⁴⁴ Flintshire County Council indicated that these arrangements are currently under review to ensure that all spend is eligible.

Appendices



Appendix 1 – Audit methods

Document review and data analysis

We reviewed a wide range of documentation including:

- The Supporting People Programme guidance published in 2013
- Commissioned reviews of various parts of the Programme
- Local authority reviews carried out by Welsh Government officials
- Regional Collaborative Committee annual reviews
- Regional Collaborative Committee commissioning plans
- Regional Collaborative Committee spend plans
- Spend plans and outcomes analysis conducted by Welsh Government officials
- Ministerial briefings
- Minutes from meetings of Supporting People National Advisory Board and the various sub groups

Interviews

We conducted telephone interviews with officers with overall lead responsibility for the Supporting People Programme in each of the 22 local authorities in Wales. We also interviewed Regional Collaborative Committee chairs and vice chairs and each of the Regional Development Co-ordinators.

We have discussed the administration of the Programme with Welsh Government officials. Additionally, we undertook a range of other interviews with other people with involvement in the Programme including the Welsh Local Government Association, Housing Leadership Cymru and organisations who provide Supporting People services. We also held discussions with key stakeholder groups, the Supporting People National Advisory Board and the National Supported Housing and Provider Network.

Survey of local authority procurement activity

We surveyed the 22 local authorities to develop our understanding of the way in which they procure and fund Supporting People services. We collected information about contracts extended and full procurement exercises carried out during 2015-16. We also collected information about Supporting People Revenue Grant schemes that local authorities inherited.

Appendix 2 – Previous reviews and research on the Supporting People Programme

In August 2012, the Welsh Government introduced a new set of Programme arrangements to implement the recommendations of the 2010 Aylward Review that had been commissioned by Jocelyn Davies, the then Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration. This Appendix describes the Aylward Review and subsequent reviews and research into the Programme.

Since the start of the third Assembly in May 2011, a number of Ministers have been responsible for the Programme:

- Huw Lewis (as Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage): May 2011 – May 2013
- Carl Sargeant (as Minister for Local Government and Communities): May 2013 – September 2014
- Lesley Griffiths (as Minister for Communities): September 2014 – June 2016
- Carl Sargeant (as Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children): June 2016 – present.

Review of the Supporting People Programme in Wales – the ‘Aylward Review’ (2010)

In 2010, the Welsh Government commissioned Sir Mansel Aylward to undertake a review of the Programme. The purpose of the review was to provide the then Deputy Minister of Housing, Jocelyn Davies, with advice on the delivery arrangements and to make recommendations on how these could be strengthened.

The ‘Aylward Review’ made 25 recommendations regarding the allocation, governance and delivery of Programme funding. Unlike in England and Scotland, the Review advocated the continued ring fencing of the grant outside of the Revenue Support Grant for local authorities. Other key recommendations included unifying what were then two separate funding streams into a single grant, proposals for a new funding formula and a revised governance structure. That revised structure included the establishment of a Supporting People National Advisory Board to provide independent advice and information.

The Review placed a strong emphasis on the need for a collaborative approach across local authorities, housing and support providers, health services, probation and other relevant organisations with an ‘abiding emphasis on co-design and co-production’. The review advocated the establishment of multi-sectoral collaborative committees within each local authority boundary whose remit should include the planning, commissioning, procuring and

monitoring of services. Acknowledging the potential of regional working, in particular the approach in Gwent and North Wales, the Review suggested that these local collaborative committees could act as an interim measure in progressing towards cross-boundary arrangements.

Three work-streams, reporting to a National Advisory Board, undertook the implementation of the review recommendations. The work-streams were convened under the themes of finance, governance and quality.

Design for Governance (2013)

In 2013, the Welsh Government commissioned UK Research and Consultancy Services Ltd to produce a range of long-term Regional Collaborative Committee governance options. The review sought to address the challenges that had been identified around a collaborative un-constituted body making spending decisions in relation to a grant administered by local authorities. The review developed three options:

- Option one – a stronger local government focus, coupled with a statutory duty to address ‘Supporting People’ needs
- Option two – place the Regional Collaborative Committees on a statutory footing and/or become legal entities
- Option three – develop a combination of Regional Collaborative Committees established by a Memorandum of Understanding but linked to legally binding grant conditions on local authorities which confer real authority and leverage on the Regional Collaborative Committees

Option three was favoured as it enabled Supporting People funding to remain with local government but with legal conditions that would require local authorities to spend it in accordance with the strategic plan developed by the Regional Collaborative Committee. A Memorandum of Understanding would establish the Regional Collaborative Committee’s roles and responsibilities, in particular the underlying principle of the Regional Collaborative Committee being a collaborative, multi-sectoral body.

Independent Review of the Supporting People Programme Transition Year (2014)

In association with Shelter Cymru, Miller Research Ltd were commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake an independent review of the Supporting People Programme following its transition to new structures in 2012. The aim of the research was to review the various structures underpinning the Supporting People Programme since the implementation of the re-launched Programme in August 2012 and to make recommendations regarding their future.

The main findings of the review were:

- understanding of the role of the Supporting People National Advisory Board and the engagement of some of its members was variable;
- perceptions that the Supporting People National Advisory Board had become excessively involved in the operational detail of the Programme rather than providing leadership;
- the role and remit of the Programme's Steering Board was unclear with suggestions that it was duplicating many of the discussions held at the Supporting People National Advisory Board;
- although seen as important, there was a lack of clarity regarding the membership, outputs, timescales and accountability or the workstreams;
- there was a lack of clarity over Regional Collaborative Committees' function and expectations of their performance;
- Regional Collaborative Committees were perceived to lack power or authority and there was a lack of understanding of the Programme to scrutinise and challenge;
- Regional Collaborative Committees had created increased bureaucracy and workload for members;
- regional commissioning had been varied and influenced by historical arrangements for the Programme in each region, with more activity in areas with a tradition of regional working;
- most Regional Collaborative Committees had been involved in developing consistent processes and back office functions rather than developing regional services;
- although seen as integral, the Regional Development Co-ordinator role was varied and required further clarity; and
- ensuring service user engagement was a challenge.

The review made a number of recommendations on how the Programme could be improved based on these findings in the following areas:

- Structures
- Strategic vision
- Steering Board and Workstreams futures
- Opportunities for increasing Regional Collaborative Committee influence
- Cross-policy agenda linkages
- Membership and Chairing of the Regional Collaborative Committees
- Regional Development Co-ordinator role and function
- Service user engagement

Supporting People Programme Management Charges within Supporting People Provision (2015)

The Welsh Government commissioned UK Research and Consultancy Services Ltd to analyse the use of the Supporting People Programme Grant. This review followed an initial survey in 2013, which indicated major variation in the nature and scale of expenditure termed as 'management charges' in Supporting People funded services across Wales. The aim was to understand how charges were being levied, what they consisted of, whether this was in line with other grant funded schemes, and the extent to which they were consistent with Welsh Government grants management policy.

The main findings of the report were:

- the average amount levied for management charges in Supporting People projects in Wales was approximately 10 to 15% of total project funding;
- project charges ranged from 1.4% to 37% at the extreme ends of the spectrum;
- an estimated £12 million to £18 million of expenditure is spent on management charges annually;
- there is a wide variety of practice in relation to management charges and a general lack of clarity with no consistent agreement on what kind of expenditure a 'management charge' should cover;
- very few authorities have defined policies for addressing management charges and many appear to tackle the issue in an ad hoc fashion;

- there is some evidence that approaches to management charges are changing as a result of the recent Programme funding cuts; and
- there are very few surpluses generated from the grant funding, either through high management charges or otherwise.

The report recommended that:

- a series of design principles for the management charges regime in the Programme be developed;
- a definition of what should be included in management charges be devised, taking into account previous work on this subject;
- the Welsh Government set a maximum cap limit on management charges of no more than 10% of the net grant to a provider;
- the cap should operate on the principle of 'comply or explain' so that it combines transparency and clarity with a degree of flexibility; and
- the monitoring and control of management charges should utilise existing arrangements as far as possible.

Supporting People: Older Peoples Services (2016)

The Aylward Review highlighted a concern that across Wales people over the age of 55 (in some cases 50) living in sheltered housing, were automatically receiving or entitled to receive Supporting People services regardless of their level of need. This was resulting in people with high needs who did not live in sheltered housing not receiving the appropriate support. The review recommended that services for older people funded by the Supporting People Programme should be available to anyone, irrespective of where they lived.

In order to progress this recommendation, the Welsh Government commissioned a research study conducted by a PhD student, which aimed to:

- explore how services were provided for older people through the Supporting People Programme Grant in each of the 22 local authority areas;
- assess whether housing-related support services had moved from being based on tenure to being based on need; and
- examine what else the Welsh Government could do to promote the effective move from tenure to needs-based services.

The study concluded that considerable amounts of dedicated Supporting People Programme Grant funded services for older people were still tenure based and progress was slow and inconsistent. It also highlighted there was confusion about what the recommendation meant and the actions required in order to meet it. The study identified a misplaced belief in some areas that the recommendation had already been implemented, along with resource challenges in being able to provide services for all eligible older people in some rural and remote areas.

The study recommended that Regional Collaborative Committees and Local Authorities work with stakeholders to develop timetables for implementation of tenure-neutral services. It also recommended the monitoring of progress on a more consistent basis and that Regional Collaborative Committee Annual Reports should contain a specific section updating the Welsh Government on progress. Among some of its other recommendations, the study also suggested that it would be advisable for local authorities and providers to establish a working group to explore models, which could work well in rural and semi-rural areas.

Supporting People Data Linking Feasibility Project (2016)

This feasibility study was jointly funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government.

The overall aim of the project was to explore the contribution data linking could make to the evaluation of the Supporting People Programme. The study concluded that although various challenges exist a full quantitative evaluation was possible using data linking.

The study recommended that the Welsh Government should provide funding for a full quantitative data linking evaluation study of the Supporting People Programme across all local authorities in Wales using linked routine administrative data. The study also recommended that the Welsh Government should consider commissioning a parallel qualitative study to help provide further explanations for any observed patterns in the quantitative data along with the establishment of a 'cost offset' model to enable net benefits of the Programme to be estimated. In order to provide the necessary standardised dataset to allow data linking to take place, the study recommended including additional data requirements in the Supporting People Outcomes data spreadsheet that was in the process of being redesigned. The study also recommended making it an obligation to share this data through the terms and conditions for the Supporting People grant.

Appendix 3 – Examples of regional approaches to core Programme management processes

During our fieldwork we gathered evidence about collaborative working within the regions. We found relatively little evidence of genuine regional projects (Box 4 on page 29). However, we did identify a greater number of examples where common approaches to core processes and service reviews have been developed (Box A1 below).

Box A1: Examples of regional working to develop common approaches to core processes and joint reviews

North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee

- Conwy County Borough Council collates and manages outcomes data and returns to the Welsh Government for all six of the local authorities in North Wales.
- The North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee has produced a booklet describing the impacts of the Programme on individual lives.
- Denbighshire County Council and Flintshire County Council have carried out joint reviews of services.
- A sub-regional partnership agreement between Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council to deliver the Syrian Resettlement Programme in these locations.
- The North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee agreed a series of actions to be taken across the constituent local authorities, including service reviews, to ensure that by 31 March 2016 all new entries to older people's services are tenure neutral, and that by 31 March 2017 all services for older people funded by the Programme are tenure neutral.
- The Committee also established a sub group to look at learning disabilities services funded through the Programme. The Group's objectives were:
 - to look at the current funding of learning disability services and assess whether the services funded are eligible services;
 - analyse how current learning disability services link to the homelessness prevention and tackling poverty agenda; and
 - learn best practice from each authority.
- The RCC sub group's July 2016 report made three recommendations, one of which was to carry out further work on learning disability services funded through the Programme in North Wales. The Regional Collaborative Committee accepted the recommendations.

Box A1: Examples of regional working to develop common approaches to core processes and joint reviews

Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee

- The Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee has produced a booklet describing the impacts of the Programme on individual lives.
- The Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee established a Task and Finish group to provide it 'with an overview of the provision of supporting housing and housing related support services across the region for people with Learning Disabilities'. In early 2016-17, the Regional Collaborative Committee accepted all the group's recommendations, as did the social services departments of the relevant local authorities.
- The 2014-15 work programme for the Gwent Regional Collaborative Committee prioritised scrutiny of older people's services provided across the region, and set the deadline that by the end of 2016 all services for older people should be tenure neutral in line with the 2010 Aylward Review recommendation. However, only two of the five local authorities have met this deadline, but it is anticipated that they all will have done so by April 2018.

Mid and West Wales Regional Collaborative Committee

- The Mid and West Wales Regional Collaborative Committee has developed a standardised online data collection tool, and the constituent local authorities share knowledge and assist each other with the process of collating information and formatting.

Cwm Taf Regional Collaborative Committee

- The two constituent local authorities of the Cwm Taf Regional Collaborative Committee have used the same approach to conduct strategic relevance reviews of services. Also, Cwm Taf Regional Collaborative Committee has developed regional outcomes guidance and operates a regional Service User Involvement Planning Group.
- Cwm Taf Regional Collaborative Committee established an Older Person's Group on a task and finish basis to manage and monitor:
 - the process of reconfiguring older person's services across Cwm Taf so that they are based on need rather than tenure; and
 - the development of a consistent approach to commissioning older people's services.

Box A1: Examples of regional working to develop common approaches to core processes and joint reviews

The Vale and Cardiff Regional Collaborative Committee

- City of Cardiff Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council have an in-principle agreement to carry out joint reviews of services, but for a range of reasons have yet to complete any such joint reviews of services. In addition, these two local authorities have jointly developed an approach to service user engagement, known as the Vale and Cardiff Regions Participation and Involvement Framework.
- The Vale and Cardiff Regional Collaborative Committee has established a commissioning sub group to identify and tackle barriers to the regional commissioning of services. There is ongoing discussion about jointly commissioning domestic abuse services.

Western Bay Regional Collaborative Committee

- The Committee is developing a regional approach to needs analysis, priority setting and horizon scanning, which the Committee envisages will act as the foundation for future delivery of regional services.
- The constituent authorities of the Western Bay Regional Collaborative Committee use a single system of data collection to monitor contracts.

Appendix 4 – Local authority Supporting People allocations 2013-14 to 2016-17

Figure A1 below shows the amount of funding that the Welsh Government allocated to each local authority for the Programme between 2013-14 and 2016-17, in total cash terms. We have been unable to collect accurate figures for 2012-13 from the Welsh Government. This was the year in which the Supporting People Grant and Supporting People Revenue Grant merged into the new Supporting People Programme Grant.

The total local authority allocations do not amount exactly to the overall Programme budget as it is top sliced to fund additional work in support of the Programme. For instance, in 2016-17 around £800,000 was top sliced from the overall Programme budget of £124.5 million.

Figure 5 in the main body of the report compares local authorities' actual 2016-17 allocation to what they would otherwise have received, had the Welsh Government continued to implement the funding formula that it applied in 2012-13 and 2013-14 – but then suspended. The funding formula was intended to support the redistribution of Programme funding to geographical areas of greatest need.

Figure A1: Local authority funding allocations from the Supporting People Programme, 2013-14 to 2016-17

| Local authority | 2013-14 (£ millions) | 2014-15 (£ millions) | 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (£ millions each year) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Isle of Anglesey | 3.05 | 2.88 | 2.64 |
| Gwynedd | 5.92 | 5.61 | 5.04 |
| Conwy | 7.57 | 7.18 | 6.45 |
| Denbighshire | 6.44 | 6.11 | 5.48 |
| Flintshire | 6.82 | 6.46 | 5.80 |
| Wrexham | 5.84 | 5.53 | 4.98 |
| Powys | 6.03 | 5.72 | 5.13 |
| Ceredigion | 3.46 | 3.27 | 2.94 |
| Pembrokeshire | 2.78 | 2.87 | 2.71 |

| Local authority | 2013-14 (£ millions) | 2014-15 (£ millions) | 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (£ millions each year) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Carmarthenshire | 6.77 | 6.86 | 6.49 |
| Swansea | 14.62 | 14.61 | 13.81 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 4.93 | 5.07 | 4.79 |
| Bridgend | 6.10 | 6.15 | 5.81 |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 3.65 | 3.68 | 3.46 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taf | 9.44 | 9.59 | 9.05 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 2.09 | 2.24 | 2.12 |
| Caerphilly | 6.54 | 6.59 | 6.23 |
| Blaenau Gwent | 2.61 | 2.69 | 2.55 |
| Torfaen | 3.65 | 3.63 | 3.43 |
| Monmouthshire | 2.17 | 2.15 | 2.03 |
| Newport | 6.67 | 6.73 | 6.36 |
| Cardiff | 19.07 | 18.11 | 16.26 |
| Total | 136.33 | 133.80 | 123.69 |

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government data

Appendix 5 – Changes in planned spend across client categories 2013-14 to 2016-17

Although the new Supporting People Programme was launched in 2012-13, the Welsh Government has only been able to provide detailed spend plans for 2013-14 onwards. **Figure A2** below shows the changes in spend across client categories between 2013-14 and 2016-17. **Figure 4** in the main body of the report shows the client categories with the largest reduction in cash terms between 2013-14 and 2016-17.

There are some minor differences between the total expenditure figures reported from the spend plans for 2013-14 and 2014-15 when compared with the actual local authority allocations (**Appendix 4**).

Figure A2: Supporting People Programme spend per client category between 2013-14 and 2016-17

| Client category | 2013-14 (£ millions) | 2014-15 (£ millions) | 2015-16 (£ millions) | 2016-17 (£ millions) |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Alarm services (including in sheltered/ extra care) | 4.17 | 3.66 | 2.44 | 2.28 |
| Generic floating support to prevent homelessness | 21.30 | 14.11 | 14.00 | 15.94 |
| People with chronic illnesses | 0.18 | 0.19 | 0.17 | 0.13 |
| Young people who are care leavers | 0.84 | 0.94 | 0.75 | 0.68 |
| Single people with support needs (25 to 54) | 5.31 | 5.07 | 5.65 | 4.29 |
| People with physical and/or sensory disabilities | 1.84 | 1.71 | 1.45 | 1.51 |
| People with learning disabilities | 36.43 | 35.59 | 31.74 | 30.57 |
| People with criminal offending history | 2.89 | 2.82 | 2.63 | 2.44 |

| Client category | 2013-14 (£ millions) | 2014-15 (£ millions) | 2015-16 (£ millions) | 2016-17 (£ millions) |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| People with substance misuse issues (drugs and volatile substances) | 4.64 | 4.77 | 4.43 | 3.96 |
| Young people with support needs (16 to 24) | 14.81 | 14.62 | 13.46 | 13.16 |
| Women experiencing domestic abuse | 9.99 | 9.83 | 9.08 | 9.04 |
| Families with support needs | 4.64 | 4.48 | 4.12 | 4.23 |
| People with mental health issues | 14.55 | 14.45 | 13.72 | 13.78 |
| Single parent families with support needs | 1.11 | 1.06 | 0.92 | 1.07 |
| People over 55 years of age with support needs (exclusive of alarm services) | 11.90 | 11.96 | 11.23 | 11.65 |
| People with substance misuse issues (alcohol) | 1.33 | 1.42 | 1.40 | 1.51 |
| Men experiencing domestic abuse | 0.21 | 0.21 | 0.25 | 0.29 |
| People with refugee status | 0.31 | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.44 |
| People with developmental disorders | 0.14 | 0.25 | 0.18 | 0.20 |
| Expenditure which does not directly link to the spend plan categories ¹ | n/a | 6.61 | 5.68 | 6.43 |
| Total | 136.68 | 134.13 | 123.69 | 123.69 |

Note

¹ This category was only introduced in 2014-15.

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government data

Appendix 6 – Case study examples of the impact of the Supporting People Programme in Gwent and North Wales

Both Gwent and North Wales Regional Collaborative Committees provided us with examples of case studies where a range of positive outcomes had been reported for people receiving support through the Programme. Both Committees have published reports aiming to highlight not only the social and human impact of the Programme, but also the economic impact and cost effectiveness of the Programme. This has been done by comparing the costs of individual supporting people interventions with more generic costs to public services of a wide range of incidents such as dealing with a crime incident, ambulance callouts, a homelessness application or a housing eviction for instance. We have included in **Box A2** below a selection of the case studies provided to us.

Box A2: Case studies providing examples of the impact of the Programme on individuals

Older people case study

Region: North Wales

Situation: After Gladys's partner passed away she became very isolated and lonely. Gladys moved into a sheltered housing scheme as she wanted to feel part of the community and improve her health and wellbeing.

Outcomes: Gladys's life has changed significantly since being encouraged by the independent living co-ordinator to be involved in activities and clubs. This has included her taking part in a digital inclusion and photography course resulting in her winning an award and being interviewed on BBC Radio Wales about her positive experience.

Supporting People costs: £11.10 per week

Domestic abuse case study

Region: Gwent

Situation: Fiona had been a victim of domestic abuse and required support with life skills including cooking and shopping on a budget, applying for and managing a tenancy, maintaining a home, claiming benefits and parenting issues.

Outcomes: Fiona has been living independently for almost a year and no longer has any Social Service involvement, She is on the housing waiting list and has almost completed her GCSEs in Maths and English. Fiona intends to carry on with her education and is applying for other courses and voluntary work.

Supporting People costs: £18,444 for six months support

Box A2: Case studies providing examples of the impact of the Programme on individuals

Substance misuse case study

Region: North Wales

Situation: Tracey has a history of long-term drug abuse and is working towards recovery from heroin addiction and gaining full-time custody of her children.

Outcomes: Tracey has demonstrated that she is working towards independent living by attending weekly support sessions, paying personal rent and abiding by the scheme's rules. Her physical health has improved and Tracey remains in contact with all her children and sees them on weekends.

Supporting People costs: £218 per week

Care leaver case study

Region: Gwent

Situation: Megan is a care leaver who had become homeless and at risk of sexual exploitation. Megan was lacking independent living skills and had a history of self-harm, anxiety and depression, low self-esteem and a lack of motivation.

Outcomes: Megan moved into a supporting housing project and received support to develop her budgeting and independent living skills. Her self-care, self-esteem, confidence and motivation have all improved and Megan is currently waiting to be referred to the move-on panel, which will enable her to secure her own tenancy.

Supporting People costs: £44,404 in total

Generic floating support case study

Region: North Wales

Situation: Linda had a history of personal problems in childhood leading to time spent in care homes and abusive relationships. Linda had developed a serious problem with hoarding and was at risk of eviction due to the condition of her property.

Outcomes: After receiving floating support, repossession proceedings were successfully avoided and Linda is now managing her accommodation very well.

Supporting People costs: £1,040

Mental health case study

Region: Gwent

Situation: Clive has paranoid schizophrenia and needed support to manage his tenancy, correspondence and daily living. He also required support to address his alcohol and drug abuse and to improve his overall physical and mental health.

Outcomes: After receiving support Clive has been able to maintain his tenancy and engage with staff and services. He is working towards reducing his substance misuse and is focused on maintaining his physical and mental health.

Supporting People costs: £120 per week ongoing

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