

EXCERPT OF MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 JANUARY
1999

AGENDA ITEM No.6.....

**SUPPORTING PEOPLE: A NEW POLICY AND FUNDING FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORT
SERVICES**

12. There was submitted a report (docketed) dated 12 January 1999 by the Directors of Housing and Social Work in respect of a recent Government report entitled "Supporting People: A New Policy and Funding Framework for Support Services" and on the issue of funding support for vulnerable people (1) outlining the background to the Government report which was putting forward for consultation a number of proposals to rationalise the future funding of support services; (2) indicating that the Government was proposing to implement a transitional Housing Benefit Scheme from 1 November 1999 when the interim arrangements expired, until April 2003; (3) intimating the findings of the inter-departmental review and that local authorities would be provided with new statutory power to compliment those already existing, in order to carry out the proposals; (4) advising that in order to allow sufficient time for the implementation of the proposals, the Government had drawn up a transitional Housing Benefit Scheme which would take effect from November 1999 to supplement normal Housing Benefit payments for rent to cover reasonable charges for support services, and (5) informing that the Directors of Housing and Social Work were currently preparing a corporate response to the consultation document by 5 February 1999.

Decided:

- (1) that the Government's proposals be noted, and
- (2) that the Director of Administration respond to the consultation document following full consideration of the proposals by the Directors of Housing and Social Work.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Housing Committee Social Work Committee		Subject: Consultation document : "Supporting People : A new policy and funding framework for support services"
From: Director of Housing Director of Social Work		
Date: 12 January 1999	Ref: support.hc/1	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the contents of a recent Government report on the issue of funding support for vulnerable people.
- 1.2 Following an inter-departmental review of funding for supported accommodation, the Government is putting forward for consultation a number of proposals to rationalise the future funding of support services.
- 1.3 Government departments involved in the review were the Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions; Health; Social Security; HM Treasury; the Home Office; the Scottish Office; the Welsh Office and the Women's Unit. North Lanarkshire Council was involved in the preliminary stages of the review.
- 1.4 In July 1997, a Divisional Court judgement on a Housing Benefit matter applied a strict interpretation of the charges which could and could not be met by Housing Benefit. Since then, interim provision have been in place to allow Housing Benefit to continue to be paid for existing supported housing provision, but restricting Benefit for new housing provision to charges relating mainly to the fabric of the accommodation.
- 1.5 The Government is proposing to implement a transitional Housing Benefit scheme from 1 November 1999, when the interim arrangements expire, until April 2003 - the proposed date for implementing the new funding arrangements.

2. Inter-departmental review

- 2.1 There are currently many schemes in place where support for vulnerable people is funded and provided by a variety of organisations, including, in some cases, through Housing Benefit.
- 2.2 The inter-departmental review found that :
- * current funding was complicated and uncoordinated
 - * the current arrangements did not allow for proper consideration of value for money, quality of service provision, or transparency in the use of resources

- * there was no strategy to co-ordinate the work or expenditure of the various government departments involved in making provision for support services
- * accommodation choices of vulnerable people were possibly distorted through the reliance on Housing Benefit

3. Proposals

- 3.1 The Government proposes to tackle these problems by introducing a new, coherent policy and funding framework for delivering support to vulnerable people in different types of accommodation and tenure. This framework is called "Supporting People".
- 3.2 "Supporting People" would enable decisions to be made at a local level to meet local priorities within a framework of centrally-determined objectives.
- 3.3 Current support, which enables a wide range of vulnerable people to maintain independent lives in the community, includes, among other things, general counselling and advice, assistance with administrative affairs, warden services and liaison with welfare agencies.
- 3.4 People relying on this type of support come from groups such as the elderly, people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, victims of domestic violence, vulnerable young people, alcohol or drug addicts, and ex-offenders.
- 3.5 The costs of providing support are currently borne by a number of different budgets, including Housing Benefit, Income Support and the Special Needs Allowance Package paid to Housing Associations by Scottish Homes.
- 3.6 The proposals would bring together the various funding streams into a single budget which would be allocated to local authorities on the basis of the needs and expenditure within the individual authorities at the time of implementation. Local authorities would then take decisions on how money could be spent most effectively at a local level on support services.
- 3.7 The Government proposes to provide a framework within which housing and social services and other statutory agencies would work with voluntary agencies, housing and other service providers to plan, commission and fund support services for vulnerable people. This would provide an integrated approach, and enable a flexible response to people's needs within a broad range of accommodation.
- 3.8 In order to carry out these proposals, local authorities would be provided with a new statutory power to complement those already existing.

4. Transitional Housing Benefit Scheme

- 4.1 In order to allow sufficient time for the implementation of these proposals, the Government has drawn up a transitional Housing Benefit scheme, which would take effect from November 1999, when the current interim arrangements expire.
- 4.2 The scheme would supplement normal Housing Benefit payments for rent by covering reasonable charges for support services. It would continue to include existing supported accommodation covered by the interim scheme, and would also include :-

- * housing provision which has opened since August 1997;
- * new housing provision which opens after the scheme begins, but before the implementation of "Supporting People"; and
- * tenants in private sector supported lodgings, provided there is a community care assessment

4.3 The scheme would not cover charges for personal care, but would define a list of eligible services, thus removing the current ambiguity over which charges are eligible or ineligible for Housing Benefit. It is anticipated that services eligible for housing benefit would cover :-

- * support in meeting contractual arrangements such as debt counselling
- * supervising behaviour to prevent damage to the accommodation
- * resolving neighbour disputes
- * assistance in claiming social security benefits
- * liaison with third parties over the individual's welfare
- * help in ensuring the safety and security of the accommodation or of appliances, where no-one in the household is capable of doing so

4.4 The scheme would allow authorities to distinguish between support services and other housing management-related costs, and would generate the information necessary to implement the Government's long-term proposals.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The Government is seeking the views of local authorities, by 5 February 1999, on a range of issues related to the transitional Housing Benefit scheme, and "Supporting People" proposals.

5.2 The Housing and Social Work Departments are currently preparing a corporate response to the consultation document.

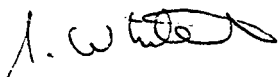
5.3 Although discussions are still at a preliminary stage, the Departments welcome the opportunity to broaden the scope of the current Housing Benefit interim arrangements through the transitional Housing Benefit scheme.

6 Recommendation

6.1 Committee is asked to note the Government's proposals, and the intention to respond to the consultation document following full consideration of the proposals.

7 Background information

7.1 Background information is available within the Housing Department.



Director of Housing

Director of Social Work