



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Supporting People Programme Grant Funding
Monmouthshire County Council

A Report by the
Housing and Regeneration Department

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| <i>Date:</i> | 30 November 2015 |
| <i>Officers:</i> | Simon Prothero, Rob Smith and Sheilah Gaughan |

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SECTION 1 – REPORT SUMMARY

1. Background

- 1.1 In April 2014, officials from the Housing and Regeneration Department of Welsh Government commenced a programme of high level reviews of the use Local Authorities were making of the Supporting People Programme Grant they were awarded. It is anticipated all Local Authorities will be reviewed by March 2016.
- 1.2 The main purpose of the review programme is to provide assurance to senior Welsh Government officials and to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty that Local Authorities are using their allocation of Supporting People Programme Grant appropriately. In particular, Welsh Government officials reviewed:
- Procurement of providers;
 - Contract monitoring and management arrangements by the Local Authority;
 - Financial information to validate amounts spent;
 - The strategic decision making process based on the need for the service; and
 - Delivery information to validate numbers of people supported.
- 1.3 The review undertaken in Monmouthshire County Council was based on the information supplied by the Local Authority in their quarter 4 outturn report for 2014/15, i.e. the data for the period January 2015 to March 2015, as this was the most recent and complete data submitted.
- 1.4 The review was undertaken at the request of the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. Given the continuing financial pressures faced by the Welsh Government, there is a need to ensure the programme's budget is being used to best effect and it is managed appropriately
- 1.5 The results of the reviews will inform wider and more detailed examination of all Local Authorities and their Supporting People programmes. The reviews, which may cover all services and support or specific themes, will also inform the Minister's decisions as the Welsh Government prepares the budget future financial years.
- 1.6 These reviews are high level and designed to provide an overview of assurance over the use of Supporting People Programme Grant. The reviews do not examine in detail all transactions and processes used by the Local Authority.

2. Overall Conclusion

2.1 Overall, and on the basis of the testing undertaken, we are able to partially conclude the Supporting People funding provided to Monmouthshire County Council has been spent on the purposes for which it was awarded. However, there are concerns over the staffing levels within the Local Authority for this grant funding programme and the ability to effectively manage the Programme as a result of this. The report reflects how provision of service is managed and the recommendations made reflect those which were raised during the visit.

2.2 Welsh Government officials requested information for the following contracts:

| Client Spend Category | Provider | Provision | Units | Contract Amount |
|---|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Women Experiencing Domestic Abuse | WAIMON | Accommodation | 5 | £118,604 |
| People with Learning Disabilities | Reach | Supported Living / Floating Support | 31 | £221,119 |
| Young People with Support Needs (16-24) | Llamau | Floating Support | 8 | £20,266 |
| Families with Support Needs | Solas | Floating Support | 2 | £25,000 |
| Generic floating support | Gwalia | Floating Support | 22 | £178,454 |
| Alarm Services (sheltered/extra care) | Melin Homes | Extra Care | 21 | £21,318 |
| Alarm Services (sheltered/extra care) | Abbeyfield | Alarms | 10 | £5,109 |

2.3 In advance of the meeting Monmouthshire provided the Review Team with a selection of electronic files relating to service configuration and the review. On the day we were provided with further information to enable the review to be carried out fully.

2.4 The Review Team found the information viewed was of an acceptable standard, however, intelligence and monitoring relating to services was not saved centrally. This could impact should there be an issue with staff due to sickness. Overall the Review Team were able to conclude the Supporting People services are being adequately managed given the team resources available.

2.5 The Review Team saw copies of contracts and Service Level Agreements and the hard copy with the 'wet' signatures. Of concern was the fact each contract used a generic service specification; this could impede projects from meeting the

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specific needs of the service users which it is intended to target, for example, a service for young people receiving floating support will vary from a generic floating support scheme.

- 2.6 The Review Team discussed management charges with Monmouthshire. The team were advised Monmouthshire does not have a set amount for management charges. The team advised from 2016 they intend to start using a cost calculator to establish costs for services which will include management charges.
- 2.7 The Review Team identified the Supporting People Team were struggling to complete contract reviews and record regular monitoring meetings with providers. The staffing of the team consisted of less than two people which appears to be impacting on their ability to manage the breadth of activities required to maintain effective monitoring and commissioning of services.
- 2.8 The Review Team was provided with evidence of the Supporting People Planning Group minutes, however, at the time of the review there were minutes available from only two meetings in 2015. The Monmouthshire Team advised meetings are scheduled to take place quarterly. Minutes showed the representation from a single provider; the Gateway Manager who works for Monmouthshire Council.
- 2.9 The Review Team requested information on review dates for services. The Supporting People Team advised there was no schedule, a small number of reviews had been started but due to staff shortages these had not been completed. Providers complete Quarterly Monitoring Questionnaires (QMQs), these were viewed on the day.
- 2.10 The Review Team were pleased to note Monmouthshire has a Gateway for people entering services. The Gateway service operates in the same room as the Homelessness Advice Team and provides a link with Supporting People. It was also stated the Gateway provides valuable management information to the Team.
- 2.11 The Reach Supported Living project provides support for people with Learning Disabilities. There are 31 units of support at a cost of £221,119. As this is a mix of accommodation based and floating support a comparison to the Wales average cost for services was not possible. The Monmouthshire Team have made savings for this client group, when the contract was first signed in 2007, 26 units of support cost £301,529. The team advised the contract value would reduce further in 2015/16. Monmouthshire recognise more work is needed and the contract extension letter for 2015/16 advised of the possibility of remodelling the floating support service. As part of the review, evidence was seen which suggested there may have been elements of statutory care being delivered. There was no evidence supplied of a review of this project by the Monmouthshire Team.
- 2.12 Gwalia Crisis Support is a floating support service which was remodelled in 2015 with Support Worker costs capped at £36,000 per year. Gwalia have completed Monmouthshire's cost calculator for 2015/16, at the time of the review the information had been collected but not analysed. A check of the information

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raised questions over some of the management costs claimed, these queries were highlighted to the Supporting People Team. Despite attempts to make savings the service appears to cost 136% more than the Welsh average for 2014 and the cost appear to have further increased in 2015. It was unclear as to whether the costs reflect higher needs of people using services.

- 2.13 WAIMON provides housing relates support to women experiencing domestic abuse. It is a former Welsh Government funded project which transferred to Monmouthshire in 2012. In 2015 the project transferred to Cyfynol, which was formed as a result of a merger between WAIMON and Torfaen Women's Aid. There was no evidence of a service review on file. The Provider Self Assessment Form shows the strategic links for the projects and which local, regional and national plans/ guidance it delivers against. The Supporting People Team confirmed they would be looking at the project for 2015/16 and the cap of £36,000 per support worker per annum would be applied which would result in future savings on the contract.
- 2.14 During discussions with the Monmouthshire Team, the Review Team were advised services are approved by the Supporting People Planning Group and Cabinet, which appears to be a robust governance arrangement. However, in order for this to be robust Supporting People Planning Group meetings should happen quarterly and external providers should form part of the membership.
- 2.15 The Supporting People Team shared a copy of the Monmouthshire Internal Audit Report from 2015/16 on the Local Authority Allocation from 2014/15. The Review Team would like to thank Monmouthshire for this and their open and honest approach to this review.
- 2.16 Specific outcome reports were not seen for the projects reviewed. Following discussions with the team there were queries on the robustness of data from providers as outcomes data did not link to information provided in the Needs Mapping Forms and Quarterly Monitoring Questionnaires. The Review Team were advised providers now have to provide information within a 5% variance in order for it to be considered robust. The importance of outcomes information was endorsed by the Review Team.
- 2.17 During the review evidence was seen of service user involvement by Monmouthshire Council, however, it was unclear how this information would feed into service review or development and the timeliness of the collection and use.
- 2.18 It was noted during the review Monmouthshire had previously paid providers quarterly with 6 weeks being in arrears. They have recently reviewed their payments and all providers are now paid quarterly in arrears, this is in line with good grants management practice. However, there were concerns for the lack of due diligence checks on providers and lack of desk instructions for the grants administration. For example, there is no separation of duties for the accounts payments. These concerns were addressed with the team.
- 2.19 Overall, we found the Supporting People team were keen to ensure the services they funded met the requirements of the Grant and work was underway to ensure

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any potential saving, which were needed should the budget be reduced, were identified. The Review Team were keen to advise proposed efficiency savings should be implemented even if there is no reduction in Welsh Government grant funding for 2016/17.

3. Acknowledgements

- 3.1 We would like to express our thanks to officials in the Supporting People Team of Monmouthshire County Council for their help and co-operation during our review.

November 2015

**Housing and Regeneration
Department**

SECTION 2 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

Findings and Management Response

| Ref. | Finding / Observation | Risk / Impact | Recommendation | Monmouthshire Council Response |
|------|---|---|---|--|
| 1.1 | Contracts reviewed use the same generic service specifications. | Services are not tailored to the specific needs of different service user groups. | The Supporting People Team should tailor service specification to meet the needs of people who are receiving a service. | <p>When new contracts are issued in the future they will have, as a contract schedule, a service specification attached. As with other contracts in the care and support sector there is current discussion around how contracts can become more outcome focused and less output or task orientated. The development of service specifications for the future will need to take these developments into account.</p> <p>In mitigation of the observation, it should be noted that a considerable proportion of the service delivery in all contracts is similar (some say as much as 90%). Contracts referring providers to the SP guidelines already ensures that the services are expected to comply with the eligible tasks and outcome delivery. The needs of the people being supported are assessed and an appropriate support plan agreed on an individual basis – effectively creating an individual contract between the service user and the support. This is the critical consideration and the basis on which service delivery should be assessed.</p> |

| Ref. | Finding / Observation | Risk / Impact | Recommendation | Monmouthshire Council Response |
|------|--|--|--|--|
| 1.2 | Staffing resource within the team is low, this is impacting on their ability to robustly monitor and improve services. | Inability to appropriately manage the programme. | The Local Authority may wish to consider the resourcing of the Supporting People Team, given the level of resources they manage. This may include sharing functions with other local authorities with which they share partnership arrangements. | <p>The audit has been extremely useful in focusing our attention on the processes involved. Already we have highlighted that in our reviews we do too much work for the provider – in developing an action plan for them. This practice does little to nurture the provider’s ownership and is an inefficient use of our resource. In terms of contracting, we now see the need to place a more formal expectation on providers to have an appropriate quality assurance system in place. We will be requiring an annual self-assessment with an associated quality report. These documents will make the monitoring function more efficient. SP providers will be included in a pilot self-assessment exercise during January 2016.</p> <p>SP is managed through our Social Care and Health Directorate. A number of process and resource utilisation efficiencies are being considered at this time. SP’s requirements will be considered within this process and the recommendations from this report will inform the work.</p> |

| Ref. | Finding / Observation | Risk / Impact | Recommendation | Monmouthshire Council Response |
|------|---|--|--|---|
| 1.3 | Insufficient due diligence checks carried out on providers. | Interruption to service and the impact on service users if a provider were to cease trading. | The local authority should review providers annual audited accounts. | <p>We will include the SP providers in the arrangements already in place for continual financial sustainability monitoring for our SC&H contracts.</p> <p>This will be a 3-step process. Firstly, our Internal audit will conduct financial sustainability checks, based on information and analyses provided by Credit Safe (this includes an appraisal of all recently lodged accounts). Secondly, based on the results from these assessments, a risk assessment will be conducted and those providers that have either questionable sustainability or for whom the failure of the organisation would have a significant impact on people being supported, automatic 'flags' would be set up by Credit Safe to advise us when any adverse financial information becomes available.</p> <p>Lastly, we will need to have an emergency plan developed so that if/when a provider has to terminate a contract at short notice, we have the outline of a plan available with which to manage the situation.</p> |

| Ref. | Finding / Observation | Risk / Impact | Recommendation | Monmouthshire Council Response |
|-------------|---|--|--|---|
| 1.4 | Insufficient file records for contract monitoring. Project reviews not undertaken in line with Welsh Government guidance. | The Council and service users could be exposed to risk and difficulties should issues arise over quality of service. Services may not be meeting strategic need. | The Council to review monitoring arrangements and ensure meetings and actions resulting are recorded. The reviews which have been started are prioritised for completion and a schedule for reviewing all services is established. | A prioritised schedule has been agreed for the short-term and arrangements put in place for capturing all meeting and discussion notes. |
| 1.5 | External providers are not represented on the Planning Group. | Provider experience and knowledge is missed during the strategic planning of services. | Providers are represented in planning group meetings. | <p>This will be discussed at the next Planning Group Meeting. It will be proposed that the Gwent Regional Provider Group nominates 2 provider representatives (MCC providers), This ensures that our Planning Group links with the regional forum.</p> <p>The terms of reference will need to be amended as will the actual agendas for the meetings – there is probably a need for a session where the provider representatives are present and a session when they are not.</p> |
| 1.6 | Lack of clarity of how service user's information fits into commissioning decisions. | Services commissioned do not reflect the needs of people who use services. | There needs to be a clear process for the information gathered from Service Users to feed into commissioning decisions. | Given the rurality of the County, effective service user involvement will always be a challenge. However, a new support worker forum has been implemented and one objective for this is for the support workers themselves to become more involved in consultations with service users, and thus feedback via the forum. |
| 1.7 | No claim forms or invoices for payments and no separation of duties for accounts. | Local authority could be open to fraud. | Documented methodology for making payments and clear lines of accountability. | This matter is being discussed with our Internal Auditors and whatever process they recommend will be implemented. |

| Ref. | Finding / Observation | Risk / Impact | Recommendation | Monmouthshire Council Response |
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| 1.8 | No desk instructions for financial management. | Funding could be used inappropriately. | Documented desk instructions for administering the grant. | A proposal is to be put to the Directorate and Commissioning senior management that a resource within the commissioning team be used to develop desk instructions. The proposal is for someone who is not familiar with the SP processes to do this work, ensuring that in developing the desk instructions also provides a challenge to inefficiencies. |
| 1.9 | Concerns some support provided is delivering personal community care services and not housing related support, particularly around learning disabilities. | An inappropriate use of funding. | Review services to ensure Supporting People funds housing related support only. | <p>It has already been highlighted that there is the risk of this inappropriate use of funding – particularly in respect of the Drybridge Gardens and Reach contracts.</p> <p>Arrangements are already in hand to provide whatever support is needed at Drybridge Gardens via our floating support service – as opposed to the current accommodation-based service.</p> <p>Reach has highlighted that they believe a floating support service would more effectively meet their service users' needs. At the same time, concerns around the delivery of their SC&H contract have also highlighted issues with resource substitution. A joint SC&H and SP review is to be completed before issuing of more appropriate contracts for 1 April 2016.</p> |