

## **Supporting People Consultation**

Amicus is a trade union which represents 1.2 million members from all sectors of the economy, with a strong membership working in social housing. Among this membership we have recognition in many of the key Housing Associations delivering services dependent on Supporting People money. Whilst Amicus members welcomed the introduction of Supporting People, and believed that this greatly enhanced the systems for funding the supported services, and continue to believe that this structure of funding is the way forward, our members have also had concerns over many areas.

Over the last 12 months, Amicus members have been made redundant, as a result of the cuts in Supporting People funding, and the decisions, often illogical in the views of our members, of the way that these funds are prioritised impacts on their ability to do their work. Our members have also expressed concern over the amount of administration that Supporting People has brought with it, detracting from front line delivery of services as well as the processes for auditing services, which vary from one authority to another.

For Amicus, the issues of job security, due to the instability in funding; and stress, due to the rise in administration and inability to plan long term have been major issues. However our members have not set out only to highlight the problems that they have identified with this funding stream, but have also had forums and discussions on how they believe that the funding can be improved. In 2004, we met with the Minister, Lord Rooker, who was moved by our presentation, and came to understand the issues that were of greatest concern to us. Again in 2005, Amicus met with the Minister Phil Woolas MP, who picked up on these issues, and in May 2006, Yvette Cooper MP will be addressing our Conference for Representatives working in Housing Associations.

I have therefore attached the Amicus document on issues and solutions to this response, to assist the ODPM in deciding the way forward.

### **Funding**

Central to Amicus' concerns about Supporting People is the issue of funding. Supporting People funding is short term, and therefore detracts from managers' ability to plan strategically for service provision or to plan and develop their workforce accordingly. In the recent Amicus report "Short Term Funding, Short Term Thinking" (also attached), our representatives identified this to be a major issue with regards to their members job security, causing people to look for more secure employment, whilst others remained in their post with the daily uncertainty of their future. The issues of personal stress, financial security and morale flow from this. The Amicus report recommended 5 to 10 year funding was better, not only for employees, but also service users. A good example of this is Stonham Housing where Amicus is recognised. Last year 280 employees were put at risk of redundancy as a result of the insecurity of funding, and the reduction of the total resources

available. We are also aware of other Housing Associations who have totally withdrawn from providing Supporting People services, due to the risks of funding withdrawal in the future.

Secondly there is an issue about the way that funding is distributed. Our members describe how in many Housing Associations that cross local authority boundaries that some more “needy” schemes received less funding from one Local Authority than other housing schemes whose need is not as great whose funding comes from a neighbouring Local Authority. Clearly the standards applied to Supporting People funding seems to vary between local authorities, and this does not make sense to our members delivering the service.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the size of the Supporting People budget is being cut and this has a direct impact, again on our members. Initial funding levels enabled services to be delivered, however with reduced funding, it has meant that services have been cut, employees working beyond their call of duty to deliver the services, often working excessive overtime, and the employees own welfare being put at risk. Above this, our members’ dedication to their service users has meant that they will often work these additional hours in their own time. With an aging population and vulnerable service users being ever dependent on the services, a reduction in the funds available is not only detrimental to our members delivering services, but is storing up problems for the future. Amicus believes that proper funding needs to be assessed again for this programme, and the resources made available.

### **Administration of the programme**

Amicus has identified a number of areas where the administration of the Supporting People funding can be improved. Currently the system for administrating Supporting People is geared to each Local Authority. As a result of this, for all the Housing Associations that cross Local Authority boundaries, there is a range of different processes to be followed by each Housing Association. These will include criteria and timescale for application to local authorities for funds, dealing with each of the different auditing processes and liaising with a wide range of people. In the meeting that Amicus had with Lord Rooker, it was agreed that the administration processes were disproportionately geared to the Local Authorities as opposed to Housing Associations and service providers from the non profit sector. Clearly single criteria would help bring uniformity to those that are administering the Supporting People funding in Housing Associations, and this would free up time spent on dealing with different systems, the additional cost of working to the range of criteria, and most importantly for our members, stress in working the long hours to manage the system.

Likewise, the daily paperwork used by front line deliverers of the service requires streamlining, so that this takes far less time, whether it is the development of Supporting People plans, or the accounting for the Supporting People service delivered to the service user any particular day.

Finally the auditing process needs to be reviewed. Each Local Authority, again uses a different system of auditing, requiring different information, gathered in different ways and at different times, resulting, in some cases, the same service delivered by a Housing Association to two different authorities, as being excellent to one and failed to another. A national system would simplify things for all concerned, and reduce resources spent on Supporting People.

The other major issue that impacts on our members is the modus operandi of the Supporting Housing Teams. These teams make decisions which have a direct effect on our members' terms and viability of employment, and yet Amicus as the recognised union in many Housing Associations has no input into these teams. Clearly Amicus is a stakeholder and provision should be made where a recognised trade union can consult with these teams. New systems and processes and the withdrawal of funding has some of the greatest impact on our members' job security and conditions. This is a point that we made strongly to Phil Woolas MP when we met at the end of 2005, and requested a mechanism of engagement with these teams, an idea that he expressed interest in. We therefore believe that there should be greater accountability of the Supporting Housing Teams, and in particular the way that it works with the non profit sector as well as Local Authority provision of social housing, to ensure that consistency and transparency is applied between its conflicting demands. Greater liaison between Amicus and the Supporting Housing Teams should result in a far better outcome for our members, the ones delivering the service and administrating the funding within Housing Association. We know that trade unions add value in this way and would therefore request that this is considered further.

### **Communication**

Finally there needs to be better co-ordination between the funders, the Housing Associations, and the agencies providing services. Amicus recognises that this has not been as effective as it could have been and therefore would want to see better dialogue between the bodies. Where Housing Associations recognise a trade union, that trade union should be part of this wider dialogue as a stakeholder and a partner. This co-ordination has to not only be in communication but also between the systems used in the whole supporting process from bidding for funding through to service delivery and service auditing.

Likewise there needs to be better communication about the allocation of funding between funders, whether the ODPM or Local Authorities.

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