

New plan for £125 million programme to help vulnerable, elderly and homeless people in Wales creates uncertainty and lacks direction, says National Assembly committee

The Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme could be at risk of letting down vulnerable and elderly people due to the confusing way it will work and uncertainty it creates for organisations charged with delivering it – according to a National Assembly committee.

Worth around £125 million pounds a year the programme is designed to help prevent homelessness, help vulnerable people live as independently as possible and provide help as early as possible in order to reduce demand on other services such as health and social services.

According to the Welsh Government it helps 57,000 people per year, 37,000 of those are elderly.

But despite being in place for 14 years, the Committee was unable to find out how successful the Supporting People Programme had been and what the Welsh Government had learned from it to make improvements.

The programme could shortly be merged with a number of other schemes to create a single 'Early Intervention, Prevention and Support Grant'. But the Committee could find little evidence to support why this was necessary or why it was better than the existing funding regime.

The announcement from the Welsh Government also created uncertainty for organisations and stakeholders responsible for delivering services to the vulnerable and elderly. With little information about the new grant scheme or the way it could be funded, they were left feeling like they'd been kept in the dark.

"It is clear that after some 14 years in existence there remained a number of significant shortcomings with the governance and management of the Supporting People Programme," said Nick Ramsay AM, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

"The pace of progress in addressing issues raised by previous reviews, for example, with regard to the funding formula and the monitoring of the impact of the Programme, had been slow.

"While we recognise that there may be scope to better integrate grant programmes to achieve better outcomes, we have serious reservations about the way the proposals for the new integrated grant were developed and announced in the fine detail of the Welsh Government's budget proposals.

"The Welsh Government needs to do more to demonstrate the evidence base for its proposals and to test the arrangements through robust evaluation of the flexible funding pilot projects that are now underway before deciding on the scope of any new grant and the timetable for its implementation."

The Committee makes 13 recommendations in its report, including:

- The Welsh Government publish revised guidance for the Programme quickly to provide the required clarity on the overall Programme aims and objectives;
- The Welsh Government engages closely with key stakeholder organisations in evaluating the impact of the flexible funding pilots and to determine the scope and timing of any further grant integration affecting the Supporting People Programme beyond 2018-19; and,
- The Welsh Government pause and reflect on its approach to evaluating the feasibility of an integrated grant proposal. We recommend that the Welsh Government consider extending the timescale of the flexible funding pilot projects to ensure that a thorough and detailed examination of their impact can take place.

Background

The Supporting People programme is to provide housing-related support to help vulnerable people to live as independently as possible.

The aims of the Supporting People Programme are:

- to help prevent and tackle homelessness
- helping vulnerable people live as independently as possible
- providing people with the help they need to live in their own homes, hostels, sheltered housing or other specialist housing
- 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
- providing help to complement the personal or medical care that some people may need
- 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
- promoting equality and reducing inequalities.

The Welsh Government invests over £124.4m in the programme annually. It supports more than 57,000 people each year.