

## In support of Supporting People

Ricky Rowledge, Director of Council for the Homeless (CHNI), puts her case for Supporting People...

The Supporting People (SP) programme was introduced in 2003. It has had a profound and positive influence on the sustainability and quality of supported housing services in Northern Ireland. Initially it proved a challenge, but SP has created a climate of self-examination and continuous improvement.

The programme encourages providers to scrutinise methods of service delivery, processes and procedures at every organisational level, across all functions and, significantly, the strategic relevance and need for their particular service. This has resulted in stronger, more viable and self-aware organisations, better able to meet the demands of a rapidly changing environment. The Quality Assessment Framework has been particularly beneficial. It ensures uniformity of practice and makes certain the needs and aspirations of service users are integral to shaping the type of service they receive. Until recently the programme's budget in Northern Ireland has been adequate and secure. However in 2008 the budget was frozen. This has placed an acknowledged stress on existing recipients, whose access to other funding streams has also been depleted in the current economic climate. It also means the commissioning of any new services must be funded by savings from other SP services.

Any further erosion of this budget would have considerable negative impact upon the ability of providers to meet their obligations and the outcomes for which they are funded. It will result in an undermining of the invaluable support to some of our most vulnerable citizens. CHNI believe the services provided through SP could not be replicated in any other Government programme nor be as cost effective to the public purse. Consequently we recommend the proposed cost benefit analysis of the SP programme be prioritised. We argue the focus should be on the benefits and/or savings to other programmes of social care and housing management.



CHNI's Director, Ricky Rowledge

It is vital Northern Ireland does not follow the route taken in England where ring fencing of the budget was removed. When efficiency measures are demanded across Government and when it appears public service expenditure is under threat the removal of ring fencing may appear very attractive but the resulting unmet need and effect on the lives of very dependent people would be substantial. The Department for Social Development has understood and championed the protection of the budget. Any pressure to move from this position should be strenuously resisted.

Finally, it is incumbent on the NI Housing Executive and the provider sector to work jointly to shape the future landscape of housing support services. An understanding of funding constraints must be balanced with an acknowledgement of the expertise and experience providers can bring to strategic planning. This type of constructive partnership should be promoted and vehicles strengthened or created to achieve this end. Supporting People has come a long way in six years and has the potential to further develop but only if we can actively pursue a common agenda and a single vision for the future.