An Evaluation of the Arrangements for the Provision of Floating Support Services in Lancashire

Report for Lancashire County Council Supporting People

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Introduction

The current arrangements for the provision of Supporting People floating support services across Lancashire have now been in operation since 2007. This model of service commissioning was developed in response to a number of concerns about the previous approach, based on commissioning district level services, including: the degree of variability in service standards; inequitable client and geographical coverage; and value for money. As the re-configured service has now been in operation for nearly four years it was felt to be an appropriate time to evaluate the current arrangements in terms of whether or not they had overcome the concerns associated with the previous pre 2007 arrangements.

This report documents the findings from the review undertaken by the University of Salford, commencing with an outline of the rationale for the development of the current floating support service delivery arrangements. This is followed by an explanation of the methodological approach adopted for the review including details of the various stakeholder groups who participated in the evaluation. An important point to note is that only a sample of stakeholders contributed to the research and it is possible that the views of those who did not participate may be different to those that did. The third section documents the findings from the review, considering a number of specific issues in turn which relate primarily to the aims of the evaluation. The final section presents a series of recommendations on the basis of the review.

Section 1:   Background

In July 2007 the Lancashire Supporting People Partnership re-configured the provision of floating support from one where services were commissioned on a local authority level basis to one where they were commissioned on the basis of three geographical areas across the County, namely East Lancashire (covering Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley local authorities), North Lancashire (covering Lancaster, Fylde and Wyre) and South Lancashire (Preston, Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancashire). The rationale underpinning this change in approach to commissioning floating support services included concerns about the following:

- Cost breakdown for the services revealed a wide range of unit prices and hourly rates charged by the agencies for the floating support provided and hence, there was a wide degree of variability in value for money;

- There was evidence of variable levels of quality and performance among the floating support providers;

- Supporting People funding was being used to support ineligible activities;

- The services were in some cases not being provided to contracted capacity;

- There was significant variability in the degree of publicity and information about local services and, in some cases, the local profile of services was very low: local stakeholders were often unaware of the services available locally and it was questionable whether vulnerable people themselves would encounter information about the service available in the ordinary course of their lives;

- Referral and assessment procedures associated with accessing floating support services were inconsistent across the County;

- Performance tended to focus on inputs/outputs rather than focusing on outcomes for the clients;

- The availability of services to service users with specific needs was often anomalous with major gaps in some areas and duplication of services in others;

- The take-up of services by vulnerable people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities seemed disproportionately low;

- An inconsistent and inequitable geographical coverage of services and access across the County; and

- The provision of floating support was often only available to those living in social housing.

As a consequence, the re-configuration of services in 2007 was based on the requirement to:

- Realign the supply of floating support services to meet the strategic priorities of partner agencies and partnerships;

- Ensure that the services commissioned were based on identified needs for vulnerable groups;

- Improve the ease of access by vulnerable people to the services available and ensuring that such services operate in a tenure neutral manner;

- Increase the number of vulnerable people benefiting from Supporting People funding, especially those with complex needs or experience of social exclusion;

- Ensure that the services are provided to vulnerable people among the BME community in a way that recognises the sensitivities specific to their needs and promotes their social inclusion;

- Procure cost effective, transparently priced and sustainable services; and

- Increase the quality of services commissioned and the outcomes for service users.

The core objective of floating support was seen as *'the provision of a service which provides high quality and cost-effective floating support to vulnerable people in Lancashire in order to maintain and increase their level of independence.'* In addition, the post 2007 floating support service commissioning arrangements were designed to: develop clearer access to services; provide a more equitable distribution of services on a geographical and client group basis; and improve contracting arrangements. The identified recipients of floating support included people at risk of social exclusion: homeless households; people at risk of domestic violence; young people; gypsies and travellers; people with mental health problems; refugees; offenders; and people with substance misuse issues.

Following the procurement process, the East Lancashire contract was awarded to Calico Enterprises Ltd, an informal partnership of Calico Enterprise, Foundation Housing and First Initiatives and the North and South contracts were awarded to Disc Compass Ltd. In the former case the services are provided 'direct' by the contractor while in the case of Disc, sub-contractual arrangements exist with 12 agencies to deliver the services. The annual value of the floating support contracts post 2007 was in the region of £3.3 million with Supporting People being the sole provider of such services. The contracts awarded were generic in nature covering all client groups as opposed to being specialist provision catering for specific client groups. The current contractual arrangements are due to terminate in July 2011.

Section 2:   Methodology

The Supporting People Partnership commissioned the Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford to undertake a review of the current model of floating support provision across the County, focusing on the extent to which the re-configured services have achieved the objectives identified above. More specifically, the review was required to address the following key issues:

- The effectiveness of current access arrangements;

- The extent to which the current service satisfied the need for outreach, resettlement and floating support services;

- The extent to which the separation of supported housing and floating support services meet the needs of service users;

- The extent to which the current provision arrangements meet the needs of the different client groups; and

- The extent to which the current arrangements meet the needs of the different local areas.

The research approach adopted for the study encompassed five stages. The initial stage involved familiarisation with the documentation relating to the contracts and the performance monitoring information produced. The second stage involved conducting personal semi-structured interviews with representatives of Disc and Calico. In each case, discussions were held with staff who had a strategic overview of the service, those responsible for operational issues and those involved in the collation of the performance review information. The interviews lasted between one and three hours. In addition, contact was made with representatives from each of the 12 sub-contractors of Disc who were invited then to participate in the review exercise: personal interviews were completed with 10 of the agencies, in some cases involving more than one staff member.

The local authority strategic housing leads were consulted as part of the third stage and this took the form of focus group discussions in each of the three contract areas to which the respective local authority staff were invited. The penultimate stage involved consulting with wider stakeholders, such as Lancashire Probation Services and Lancashire Drug and Alcohol Action Team: five such agencies participated in semi-structured personal or telephone interviews.

Finally, a selection of current Disc service users were interviewed (25 in total). In the majority of cases, this took the form of a personal interview as opposed to a mini-group discussion. The group were representative of the diversity of service users and included a mix of genders, age groups, different ethnic groups and a range of Supporting People client groups. Around one quarter of the group were living in supported housing, with the remainder either living in their own accommodation and receiving support or as in a small minority of cases, were ex-service users. The selection of service users was determined in consultation with the service provider with the emphasis being upon a random selection of individuals being identified: in some cases the research staff identified potential participants from pre-defined lists provided by the service provider. In the majority of cases the interviews were conducted at the premises of the service provider while for others a central venue was identified. All those who took part were given a £10 voucher at the conclusion of

the interview. In the case of Calico, at the time of the review, the organisation had commissioned SITRA to undertake a review of their floating support service from a service user perspective and rather than duplicate effort, agreement was given to approach SITRA about including specific questions identified by the research team. SITRA held discussions with 33 current and previous service users and the relevant feedback was forwarded to the research team. In total then, the views of 58 current and previous service users have been documented.

Despite best efforts on the part of the research team in consultation with the various service providers it proved difficult to engage with potential service users about the research.

Section 3:   The Review Findings

Introduction

Before looking in detail at the research findings from the review exercise, it is important to bear in mind a number of points. First, there was widespread recognition among a range of stakeholders that it would be very difficult to directly compare current performance monitoring information as well as data relating to the level of need among the Supporting People client groups with that from the pre 2007 contract arrangements. This is due to concerns about the reliability of the monitoring approaches and associated database from the pre 2007 era. Where possible and where such data does exist it has been incorporated and interrogated although a degree of caution needs to exercised in terms of translating the results. In addition, during the discussions with the various stakeholders, anecdotal evidence and views were elicited about the provision of floating support pre 2007. Some of this information has been drawn upon where felt to be pertinent but it lacks the statistical integrity required to enable direct comparison with the information available post 2007.

Second, the services provided by Disc and their sub-contractors and Calico have developed over the last three years and a degree of evolution was evident in discussions with staff for example in relation to the changing nature of the performance monitoring information collated. Hence, the service provided at the start of the contract is likely to be different to that operating currently. Both organisations, in discussions with the research team, outlined their strategic aims for developing the service further for the benefit of the service user.

Third, it became evident during some of the consultations with service providers and stakeholders that there was a lack of clarity around some of the terminology used in relation to floating support with a degree of ambiguity identified. This was particularly noticeable in relation to the following terms, resettlement, outreach and pre-tenancy activities. Such different interpretations of these activities coloured some respondents' answers to some of the questions posed by the research.

The remainder of this section considers the findings from the review under the following headings:

- Models of service delivery;
- The referral process;
- Performance monitoring information;
- Separation of supported housing and floating support;
- Assessment of need/categorisation;
- Equality of service coverage;
- Quality of service;
- Role of local authorities;
- Local versus sub-regional provision; and
- Additional issues.

1. Models of service delivery

There is a sharp contrast in the service delivery models of Disc and Calico. In the case of Disc, the service is delivered in conjunction with a sub-contractual agreement with 12 service providers whereas Calico delivers the services 'in-house.' There are a number of important differences between these two approaches which need to be rehearsed as they have implications for the operationalisation of the service. These differences include: management arrangements, the degree of specialism; and service standards. Each of these will be examined in turn.

Management arrangements

Disc have service level agreements in place with each of their sub-contractors, although the general consensus among the service providers is that it is a partnership approach between themselves and Disc. This is seen has having a number of direct benefits to the individual service providers and hence service users including first, a high degree of leadership and clarity of service direction by Disc including regular partnership meetings and briefings. As one of the sub-contractors commented:

> *'It feels like a partnership with Disc and different to other SP contracts. There are regular meetings with partners which have enabled open discussion about the delivery of the service. Discussions have focused on the models of delivering a consistent service. Disc has come into this with a partnership philosophy.'*

Similarly, there was a high degree of praise for the way Disc involved the partners in discussions via the partnership meetings. A second partner commented:

> *'The collective group is at the table looking at developing trends and how to respond to this.'*

While the majority of the service providers were complimentary about the partnership approach, a minority voiced some disquiet:

> *'We are not equal partners with Disc but it is more than a contractual relationship.'*

> '*Our relationship with Disc is as a sub-contractor, it is not a true partnership. It is not really a two-way partnership. Some agencies voiced ideas about how to improve provision and particularly around the paper work/monitoring information but this was not followed through.'*

> *'It's a partnership when they want it to be.'*

A second perceived benefit of the 'partnership' approach was that the service providers generally had a better appreciation of the role of other complimentary services within the partnership:

> *'Due to Disc we now have a better knowledge and working relationship with other agencies.'*

In this respect, the partnership approach was seen by many of the sub-contractors as offering a degree of strategic direction for the group, consistency in approach to service delivery and access to a wide range of support agencies both within and beyond the partnership.

Degree of specialism

Although commissioned as a generic floating support service, there was general recognition that the partnership model of service delivery developed by Disc had meant there was a relatively high degree of specialism among some of the service providers which was highly valued in terms of responding to those clients with particular support needs, for example domestic violence and substance misuse. In contrast, there was some concern among service commissioners in particular about the level and range of specialisms among the Calico staff. While some of their current staff had previously worked for specialist agencies and therefore had detailed knowledge/experience around particular 'needs' others had more generic skills. Calico themselves acknowledged that the level of specialism among their staff was something that they were looking to improve in the future with around one third of their staff offering specialist support and the remaining two third providing generic floating support:

> *'We would like to see this proportion (former) increase over time.'*

One of the commissioning bodies who took part in the wider stakeholder interviews reported that their own staff exercised a degree of reluctant to refer clients to Calico because of concerns regarding the ability of Calico staff to respond to specific needs of their client group and especially where the individual client had complex or multiple issues that needed to be addressed.

The one exception to the above was in relation to the needs of gypsies and travellers. Some of the local authorities from the Disc contract areas tended to be critical of the lack of focus around the needs of gypsies and travellers which was seen to be related to the absence of staff with suitable skills. The recent Lancashire-wide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment confirmed the presence of members of this community within the districts. However, at the same time, other local authorities were positive about the approach taken by Disc in relation their Gypsy and Traveller community, especially over the previous 12 months, referring to a greater presence of Disc staff 'on site' and working with the community to break down barriers. Calico was felt to excel in its approach to Gypsies and Travellers, with a high degree of engagement with this section of the community, seen as a direct result of having a dedicated staff member with the recognised appropriate level of knowledge and expertise providing floating support to these clients:

> *'We have a good relationship with gypsies and travellers. We have a dedicated floating support worker whose specialism is acknowledged.'*

Service standards

One of the major concerns regarding the pre 2007 floating support service provision (as noted earlier) was the lack of consistency in the standard of service across the different providers. An important consequence of the partnership model of delivery adopted by Disc has been the improvement of standards across the partnership.

Most of the sub-contractors and relevant local authority staff acknowledged the leadership approach adopted by Disc in this respect and this has arguably been one of the most important features of the partnership approach and represents a significant improvement on the pre 2007 situation.

2. The referral process

One of the central features of the Disc model of service delivery is the centralised referral access point 'Compass Gateway.' This was generally seen as a particular benefit of this model in that it enabled an informed prioritisation of needs in association with a waiting list. In this way, those with the highest need are 'placed' with one of the sub-contractors before someone with a lower priority need. Initially, a detailed assessment of the individual referred was undertaken by the Compass Gateway staff, however, this led to a delay in referrals being processed and this was substituted by reliance on the assessment information provided by the referral agencies.

Certainly, the Disc service users were very complimentary about the speed with which they had been referred:

> *'It took me about 2 weeks to get referred which is pretty fast.'*

> *'It seemed to happen very quickly and then I was introduced to my support worker.'*

Similarly, the majority of the stakeholders were positive about how the Compass Gateway worked, although some of the local authority representatives consulted suggested that they had had such little information about the process that it was difficult to offer an opinion. This should be seen within the context that Disc commented that the allocations procedure was routinely discussed in depth at stakeholder meetings and one to one meetings with Commissioners and had been since contract inception.

At the same time, however, some of the sub-contractors had concerns. First, it was felt that there was an over-reliance on the initial brief assessment undertaken by the referral agency as a basis for directing the client to the most appropriate support provider, although there was also an acknowledgement that some referral agencies were not completing the assessment documentation fully. A couple of them suggested that when a more detailed assessment of the client was undertaken by their own staff they felt that the referral was inappropriate. In particular, the latter assessment often uncovered other needs which had not been recognised and which were only likely to become evident during a detailed discussion with the client, for example, uncovering underlying mental health issues or recognition/acknowledgement of substance misuse. The following comment illustrates this point:

> *'I would question sometimes whether those referred to us by Disc should receive floating support and some of those who Disc refer to us don't want this type of support. There is a much lower level of engagement from this type of client and this can count against us when it comes to looking at the number of clients we have supported through to conclusion.'*

This issue of inappropriate referrals was also mentioned by a small minority of the service users for example:

> *'I don't think they (Disc) should have referred me to that agency, I didn't really need the type of support they were offering.'*

An associated concern regarding the referral process was that there was a question mark about the extent that Disc, which has its own floating support staff, were 'cherry picking' clients at the expense of other service providers.

Hence, in a minority of cases concern was expressed about the appropriateness of some of the referral decisions although it should be borne in mind that the contractual arrangement for all sub-contractors is for the provision of a generic rather than specialist service.

A second issue which was mentioned was a concern by some of the stakeholders about the treatment of 'repeat clients', i.e. those where the support has been withdrawn in agreement with the client, but who a short time later experienced a life crisis which resulted in them requiring the re-introduction of support. In such circumstances, the client has to be referred back to Compass Gateway and they may have to wait a period of time before they are referred (depending upon their relative level of need for the service) and it does not always follow that they will be referred on to the original floating support provider.

The main concern about this process was the impact on the client in terms of the interruption in their relationship with the original service provider and increasing their sense of isolation and vulnerability. This was echoed by one of the sub-contractors who explained that one of their clients had previously received floating support and had recently re-contacted them to ask for additional floating support but was very reluctant to be referred back to Disc on the basis that the client would not necessarily be then referred on to the original floating support provider with whom they had an established relationship. One or two of the agencies did state that they would try wherever possible to continue to provide support on an informal basis during the referral period but that this was not ideal and often relied on the staffs' good will.

Similarly, one of the agencies reported that in such circumstances, they would inform Disc that floating support had been reintroduced to an ex-client and this was seen as an acceptable procedure by the agency, although it was unclear how universal this practice was or whether this was acceptable to Disc.

There was a general preference for keeping clients 'on the books' for a period of time when their floating support had been withdrawn, especially when the period of time that the support had been provided was less than the 2 year maximum duration. On this latter point regarding the time limit, some concern was expressed by some of the service providers that this 'cut-off' date was somewhat arbitrary and did not reflect the longer-term support needs of some of the clients. This suggests a lack of clarity about this issue as Disc contended that the length of time that a client is supported depends entirely on their needs. It was advocated by some agencies that a more flexible approach needed to be adopted to ensure that the service was truly responsive to the needs of the individual client.

At the same time, it was also recognised that having an 'open-ended' approach to the length of time a service could be provided and keeping ex-clients 'on the books' could have an impact on the perceived performance (i.e. the number of successful interventions completed) of the organisation and the partnership generally. There was a degree of criticism that such important operational issues were heavily influenced by performance monitoring.

In the case of Calico as one organisation, the referrals, both from agencies and self-referrals were handled within the organisation (both initial and subsequent detailed assessment). Again, service users tended to be complimentary about the length of time they had had to wait before receiving support, referring to *'a couple of days', '3 days', 'within 24 hours of talking to someone', 'a week after moving in',* and '*a couple of weeks/three weeks later.'*

Hence, two slightly different approaches to client referral are in operation within the County with the approach developed by Disc initially designed to standardise and speed up the referral process but drawing a degree of concern about the categorisation of referrals according to 'need', the perception that some clients were being inappropriately referred to particular service providers and the treatment of ex-clients with a recurrent need for floating support. At the same time, the evidence suggests that both approaches resulted in a speedy referral for the service user which, given the vulnerable nature of the client group, is a particularly important consideration.

3. Performance monitoring information

As part of the contract monitoring procedures a wealth of performance information is provided by both Disc and Calico on a quarterly basis in a range of formats. Many of the Disc sub-contractors were concerned about the amount of staff time it took to collate this information and suggested that at times it was 'overly bureaucratic.' In particular, it was seen as being intrusive in reducing the amount of time staff could spend working directly with the clients. As one of the interviewees explained:

> *'The amount of information requested by Disc has increased over time as has the amount of paperwork required. We were told at the beginning that this would be paperless but this has not happened.'*

Serious concerns were raised from a number of quarters about the need for such information in terms of firstly, the format and use made of the data and secondly, the over-emphasis upon throughput/input measures. In terms of the format/use issue, the local authorities were particularly critical about the accessibility of such information and questioned its usefulness in terms of informing the strategic development of services at the district level:

> *'Don't know why they need to provide so much monitoring information. Some of the information is useful but most is not. What we need is longitudinal data rather than just quarterly statistics. We need to be able to make comparisons. There needs to be a greater understanding about what the information can be used for and how it can inform future developments.'*

> *'The type of monitoring information produced at the moment doesn't really help me to get to grips with what's happening at the local level and how well we are or are not doing.'*

It was suggested that the monitoring information was provided for the SP commissioning team rather than to provide evidence for use by the districts, although there was a degree of uncertainty about the extent to which the information was actually used by the SP team. As one of the sub-contractors noted:

> *'I don't know why all this information is needed or what it is used for.'*

At the same time, one of the local authority leads from one of the Disc contract areas did feel that the monitoring information provided by Disc had been useful and Disc had, where requested, provided further explanation of the data.

Calico had recognised that from a local authority perspective the monitoring information produced was of variable value. In response they had established regular meetings with the local authority strategic housing leads to review the information relating to their own district and respond to any issues/concerns raised. This approach was greatly appreciated by the local authority representatives concerned who felt that they had a much more detailed appreciation of how the service was performing within their own districts.

The second issue raised about the performance monitoring information related to the reported pre-occupation with input/throughput measures. This point was made by a number of participants and illustrated by the following quotation:

> *'There is an obsession with inputs rather than outcomes. What we really need is more information on the impact or outcome of the resources spent.'*

While the emphasis upon input statistics was largely seen as resulting from a contractual obligation on the part of the contractors to provide such data to the SP team, it was felt by some of the participants that this over-reliance on input measures diverted attention away from issues associated with the quality of the service. Certainly, there was a sense conveyed by some of the participants that the sheer amount of monitoring information currently produced served only to 'complicate the picture' and acted as a barrier to engagement between the local authorities and the contractors.

One of the more pessimistic commentators went as far as to say that the complexity of the statistical information produced was used as a defensive tool against would be critics and that service quality was at risk of being seen as of secondary importance compared with data capture.

The quality of the services has also been assessed and reported on separately through SP contract reviews. These are made available to local authorities and other commissioners by the SP Team.

Some outcome measure statistics do exist for the post 2007 service but these have not been widely interrogated nor disseminated with the impression remaining that the focus of the current performance monitoring is around input rather than output measures.

Information was provided by the Supporting People team for the period April 2009 until March 2010. The following two tables look specifically at the achieved outcomes for each of the Supporting People client groups according to contract holder (i.e. Calico and Disc). These figures have been derived by averaging the outcome measures/indicators for each client group to provide a general average for the client group as a whole. It should be noted that these 'averages' should be viewed as offering an indication of the degree to which output achievements have been met rather than conclusive.

In table 1, which considers the outcome achievements by client group for Calico, it can be seen that the for each client group the average proportion where the outcome has been achieved ranged from 54.2% (offenders) to 76.2% (older people with support needs). The table also provides a comparison with the average outcomes achieved for each client group for the North West. The level of achieved outcomes was higher than the North West average across ten of the client groups, ranging from only a very small percentage difference (i.e. 0.7% in the case of people at risk of domestic violence) to a more substantial difference of 15.7% among the rough sleeper group.

Table 1: Outcome achievements by client group for Calico

Client Group	Average % supported to achieve outcome	NW average % supported to achieve outcome	% difference
Alcohol Problems	67.9	66.9	+1.1
Drug Problems	68.5	67.1	+1.4
Frail Elderly	60.0	52.5	+7.5
Generic/Complex Needs	75.1	68.3	+6.8
Homeless Families	70.6	71.2	-0.6
Learning Disabilities	68.8	75.4	-6.6
Mental Health Problems	64.9	69.1	-4.2
Offenders	54.2	66.5	-12.4
Older People with Support Needs	76.2	70.5	+5.7
People at risk of Domestic Violence	74.5	73.7	+0.7
Physical or Sensory Disabilities	59.7	64.9	-5.2
Rough Sleeper	72.2	56.5	+15.7
Single Homeless	67.1	66.0	+1.2
Teenage Parents	60.4	62.9	-2.5
Travellers	65.3	51.7	+13.5
Young People at Risk	59.4	73.1	-13.7
Young People Leaving Care	72.7	68.8	+3.9

In the case of the outcome achievements by client group for Disc (table 2 shows the information for both North and South contracts), the average achieved outcome for each client group ranged from 45.1% (single homeless with support needs – Disc North) to 97.2% (learning disabilities – Disc South). Comparing the Disc data with that for the North West, it can be seen that a higher percentage of achieved outcomes was evident for eight of the client groups ranging from a 2.6% difference (single homeless with support needs – Disc South) to 21.8% (learning disabilities – Disc South).

Table 2: Outcome achievements by client group for Disc (North & South)

Service Name	Client Group	Average % supported to achieve outcome	NW average % supported to achieve outcome	% difference
DISC North	Generic	72.7	68.3	+4.4
Inward House	Drug Problems	54.8	67.1	-12.3
Together	Mental Health Problems	64.5	69.1	-4.6
Lancaster & District Homeless Action	Single Homeless with Support Needs	45.1	66.0	-20.8
Lancaster & District Women's Aid	Women at risk of Domestic Violence	81.4	73.7	+7.7
Richmond Fellowship	Mental Health Problems	74.8	69.1	+5.7
Lancashire Young Homeless Project	Young People at Risk	85.8	73.1	+12.6
DISC South	Generic	62.9	68.3	-5.4
Inward House	Drug Problems	55.6	67.1	-11.5
Together	Mental Health Problems	62.0	69.1	-7.1
Chorley & South Ribble MIND	Mental Health Problems	63.5	69.1	-5.6
North West Community Services	Learning Disabilities	97.2	75.4	+21.8
Lancashire Young Homeless Project	Young People at Risk	77.4	73.1	+4.2
South Ribble Key	Single Homeless with Support Needs	68.5	66.0	+2.6
Preston Women's Refuge	Women at risk of Domestic Violence	62.1	73.7	-11.6
West Lancs Women's Refuge	Women at risk of Domestic Violence	77.7	73.7	+4.0
Progress Care – Clare House	Women at risk of Domestic Violence	61.8	73.7	-11.9

As noted earlier, one of the reasons identified for the re-configuration of the floating support service was the desire to move away from a purely input/quantitative performance assessment towards one which encompassed qualitative/outcome measures for the client. There is some evidence to suggest that this has been accomplished in part but the comments from a range of participants would suggest that some of the information currently provided is not widely used and therefore of questionable value. At the same time, Disc and Calico have started to develop assessment procedures which examine the quality of the experience from the service provider perspective and place greater emphasis on the use of this information to inform the strategic development of the service – *see later for a more detailed discussion of these issues.*

4. Separation of supported housing and floating support

Under the current arrangements the floating support service provided to individuals who leave supported accommodation for their own independent accommodation is provided through funding from the current floating support contract. All those who participated in the review were asked for their opinions about whether this was the most appropriate mechanism for delivering this service and more specifically, on

whether they felt that an integrated service with the floating support being provided by the support housing staff was more beneficial from a service user perspective. A wide range of views were elicited. While some comments made reference to generic floating support services others directed their views explicitly towards domestic violence floating support as a specialist service. Each of these view points will be considered in turn.

Those currently providing generic floating support services advocated retaining the status quo for a number of reasons. First, it was suggested by a minority of service providers that supported housing staff did not necessarily possess the range of skills and experience required to provide a comprehensive floating support service:

> *'Supported housing and floating support are different things, involve different ways of working and different ways of assessing clients.'*

Second, two participants made reference to a potential capacity issue for support housing staff having to work 'off site' and the consequences for staffing levels generally within the relevant scheme:

> *'Some supported housing managers don't want their staff to be off-site.'*

Third, one of the respondents cited the financial consequences of a reduction in funding to the service provider if supported housing staff undertake the floating support role.

At the same time, a small number of participants were critical of the current way in which the floating support was delivered, suggesting that there was a lack of collaboration between supported housing staff and floating support staff which resulted at best duplication of effort and at worse in a delay for the client in the commencement of their floating support:

> *'The cross-over does not always work. Some supported housing staff do resettlement work but they are not paid for this and there are issues in terms of the links between supported housing staff and floating support providers. It can be hit or miss.'*

The majority of respondents felt that a distinction needed to be made between initial resettlement work when a client first moves into their own accommodation and more general floating support, which was seen as being potentially longer term. The resettlement work was generally regarded as relating to *'the immediate resettlement of the client into their own home and involved very practical support such as supporting them to sort out their energy supplies, the acquisition of furniture and registration for health care.'*

By way of contrast, floating support was seen as responding to their emotional well-being and needs. Various suggestions were made about the time required for this initial resettlement work ranging from 2-8 weeks. However, there needs to be some recognition that certain client groups/individuals may require a shorter or longer period of resettlement support. For example, evidence from the Supporting People team review found that young homeless people would prefer this initial resettlement work to last for 3-6 months, whereas evidence from our own review with a wide range of clients suggested a period of 1-3 months.

It was felt that the supported housing staff were best placed to provide this type of resettlement support and that it also provided a degree of continuity for the service user at a time when they are going through a significant period of transition in their lives and at risk of transgressing. Towards the conclusion of the resettlement period it was felt that the supported housing staff should 'introduce' the floating support worker to the client who would from that point onwards provide the required support. Closer collaboration between the two agencies was seen as a pre-requisite to ensuring that this transfer of responsibility was achievable within a relatively short time period after the client moved into their own home. For example, as one supporter of this approach noted:

> 'Supported housing should provide the resettlement element for the first 6 weeks or so and then the floating support provider should take over. The idea is a phased transition with a 'handover'.'

One of the most compelling arguments for the support to be provided by floating support workers, following the initial resettlement work by the supported housing staff, was in terms of re-enforcing the sense of independence on the part of the client. It was suggested by a number of respondents and service users themselves that the long-term provision of support by supported housing staff could undermine a client's sense of independence reinforcing a 'dependency culture'.' The following comments highlight this view point:

> 'Floating support has more potential to address the client group than being part of supported housing because if it was provided by the supported housing staff it could be too housing focused, I would prefer to see more independence for the client and a separate floating support element would do this.'

> 'As the client moves into their own accommodation they will be exposed to new situations and new relationships and developing a relationship with a new support worker should form part of this.'

> 'Keeping the connection with supported housing staff reminds them of their past rather than moving them forward.'

> I would want a different support worker 'cos you can get too comfortable otherwise.'

> 'You can become too dependent upon people: you can't hang on to everyone. This is part of life, part of moving on. You need to communicate with different people.'

In contrast, a small number of clients, especially from the younger age groups with little prior experience of living independently, tended to favour the continuation of longer-term support from the supported housing staff as this was seen as enabling them to continue the relationship they had developed with such staff.

In the case of people fleeing domestic violence it was contended, predominantly by those directly providing domestic violence services, that floating support should be provided by the supported housing/refuge staff as a continuation of the specialised support by staff with whom the client had developed a relationship. This close

relationship was seen as an essential element in encouraging clients to become more independent. At the same time, however, one of these service providers acknowledged that the floating support is provided by non-supported housing staff on occasions when there is an issue about the capacity of the refuge staff to provide this role. In contrast, those who were opposed to such an arrangement felt that the continuation of the support by the supported housing/refuge staff served to undermine clients transition to independence and secondly, voiced concerns about whether the additional money for the floating support would be used for the intended purpose.

The main contention here is that women fleeing domestic violence require specialist support once they move into their own accommodation and while this view may have merit, it does not necessarily follow that this specialist support has to be provided by the existing specialist supported housing provider but rather by staff with the appropriate level of knowledge and expertise. Furthermore, this notion of specialist provision might be equally argued by other service providers, for example, those responding to the needs of clients with substance misuse issues.

In summary then, and focusing on what is most appropriate for the client, the overwhelming evidence suggests that the initial resettlement work should be undertaken by the supported housing staff but that this should be time limited and during this period, the client is 'handed over' formerly to a floating support worker who will provide the longer-term support. There is a need to recognise that some service users will need specialist support following their move to their own accommodation but that this can be delivered by floating support staff with the necessary skills and knowledge, rather than by specialist agencies who provided the support within a supported housing context.

5. Assessment of need/categorisation

There was widespread recognition among both service providers and other stakeholders that the identified target number of contact hours per Supporting People client group contained within the floating support contract was based on a perceived estimation of the level of need.   The absence of any comprehensive needs assessment by client group and the lack of detailed information available from the pre 2007 floating support provision arrangements necessitated this.   These targets were subsequently used to measure performance of the contractors. At the same time, there was a general appreciation among the local authority representatives in particular, that the number of clients who received floating support, as a percentage of the target figure, was an indication of the current level of need according to client group for floating support services.

However, this approach is somewhat problematic. In the case of Disc, the allocation of the client by Disc's Compass staff to one of the supporting people client categories was based on an assessment undertaken by the referral agency and in the absence of a more detailed assessment (undertaken by the host agency once the individual has been referred to them) may lead to inappropriate categorisation. For example, a homeless young person who is referred to Disc may be initially categorised as homeless for the purposes of monitoring information but the more detailed assessment may uncover significant attendant issues (such as substance misuse or mental health issues) which significantly contributed to their homeless situation and which have much deeper and longer-term implications for the client. In such

situations, and especially where clients with complex needs are concerned, they may be rather arbitrarily allocated to a particular primary client group. This can result in the perception that there is an increase in the level of need/demand for floating support services for a particular client group which may not necessarily be borne out in reality.

In contrast, the approach adopted by Calico is that although there is still an initial allocation of the client to a particular client group category, this is then revisited following a more detailed assessment by the individual case work and if necessary re-categorisation occurs. The latter approach is more likely to provide a greater degree of reliability in terms of reflecting the demand for the service by the different client groups than the former approach.

There are important misgivings then about the way service users are 'allocated' to the Supporting People client group categories by Disc and as such, the value of this information for recording the level of need by client group and for predicating future levels of need for floating support services according to the different service user groups. The level of flexibility in the 'allocation process' also potentially enables a degree of manipulation of the performance monitoring data to present a particular picture to the SP commissioning team and stakeholders. This is within the context of the contractual requirement of achieving the established performance targets for each Supporting People client group. However, no evidence was found of this practice within the review.

6.   Equality of service coverage

Lancashire is characterised by a number of urban centres and a larger rural hinterland. The study participants were asked to comment on the availability of the floating support service across the County. From a service provider perspective it was suggested that there was equality of service coverage and that, irrespective of where clients lived, they would have access to the service. At the same time, there was a degree of recognition that due to the physical location of specific services within the urban centres, due primarily to the pre 2007 legacy, the level of demand for such services from residents in these areas was higher. A slightly different picture emerges in terms of the views of the wider stakeholders and particularly the local authority representatives. Some of this latter group voiced concerns about the level of awareness of some of the floating support services among residents from the more rural and 'outlying' local authorities. The degree of service promotion was seen to be important in this respect. In the case of Disc a small number of the local authorities and sub-contractors were critical of the lack of local promotion of the service: the service providers in particular commented that they were reliant primarily upon Disc promoting their services widely rather than they themselves publicising their services. Some of this group were critical of the role of Disc in this respect:

> *'There is no promotion of the service by us locally. It is done by Disc but I would question how much is done at a local level.'*

> *'There was previously no need to market the services due to long waiting lists. Now we would like to see more publicity to ensure that referral agencies know about Disc.'*

At the same time, however, there was some acknowledgment that there has recently been an improvement in the way Disc promotes the services, by working directly with local agencies:

> *'Probation have done there own promotion and Disc have gone into the probation services at the district level and explained the service they provide.'*

In relation to Calico there was no criticism of the degree of publicity around the service. One reason for this was that there was felt to be greater local presence by Calico staff within the districts, working directly with other key agencies, such as housing options and drugs and alcohol services, undertaking staff awareness raising and training around the floating support services.

It is important to note that while a high proportion of referrals to Calico are self-referrals, in the case of Disc the proportion is small. Therefore, the targeting of information about the service and where the service is promoted will differ slightly, reflecting these different audiences. In the case of Disc then some of the criticisms of the lack of promotional work at a district level may be slightly misplaced as one of the service providers commented:

> *'Residents don't need to know about Disc but the referral agencies should and I think they do.'*

In addition to the qualitative comments above, review of the performance monitoring information held by the Supporting People team was also undertaken.

Table 3: The table below shows the proportion of people receiving floating support for the periods 2005/6 and 2009/10.

Local Authority	Proportion receiving floating support	
	2005/6	2009/10
Burnley	17.0	13.6
Chorley	6.2	8.5
Fylde	8.4	2.7
Hyndburn	4.0	8.9
Lancaster	26.4	11.1
Pendle	10.2	9.6
Preston	9.7	14.8
Ribble Valley	2.9	3.2
Rossendale	3.1	6.2
South Ribble	5.2	9.4
West Lancashire	2.8	7.2
Wyre	3.6	4.0

The above table 3 would suggest that compared with 2005/6, there was a more equitable distribution of people receiving support across the local authority areas in Lancashire in 2009/10 with a decline in the relatively high proportion who were from Lancaster (declining from 26.4% in 2005/6 to 11.1% in 2009/10) and Burnley (from 17.0% to 13.6%) and an increase noted across the local authorities who had relatively low numbers of residents receiving floating support in 2005/6. For example, in the case of Rossendale the proportion increases from 3.1% to 6.2% and West Lancashire, from 2.8% to 7.2%. The one exception is that of Fylde where the proportion decreased from 8.4% to 2.7% over the period.

Looking at the current three contract areas and the respective local authorities (tables 4 to 6), it can be seen that in the case of the East area (Calico) there has been a decrease between 2005/6 and 2009/10 in the large proportion of people receiving from floating support from Burnley and Pendle (by 12.9% and 4.2% respectively) and an increase among the numbers from Rossendale (by 6.5%) and Hyndburn (10.5%).

Table 4: East Lancashire (Calico) proportion receiving floating support between 2005/6 and 2009/10

| Local authority | Proportion receiving floating support | | % change |
	2005/6 No. %	2009/10 No. %	
Burnley	275 45.5	237 32.6	- 12.9
Pendle	164 27.3	168 23.1	- 4.2
Rossendale	51 8.5	108 14.8	+ 6.3
Hyndburn	65 10.8	155 21.3	+10.5
Ribble Valley	47 7.8	57 7.8	-
Total	**600 100.0**	**725 100.0**	

In relation to the North contract (Disc) (table 5) there has been a decline in the proportion receiving floating support from Lancaster and Fylde between 2005/6 and 2009/10 and an increase of 13.3% among those from Wyre

Table 5: North Lancashire (Disc) proportion receiving floating support between 2005/6 and 2009/10

| Local authority | Proportion receiving floating support | | % change |
	2005/6 No. %	2009/10 No. %	
Lancaster	424 68.7	194 62.3	- 6.4
Fylde	135 21.8	47 15.0	- 6.8
Wyre	58 9.4	71 22.7	+13.3
Total	**617 100.0**	**312 100.0**	

In the South contract area (table 6) those two authorities which had experienced the highest proportion of people receiving floating support in 2005/6 experienced a decline compared with 2009/10 (in the case of Preston by 3.6% and Chorley by 4.7%), whereas the proportions increased during this period among those from South Ribble (by 1.8%) and West Lancashire (by 6.5%).

Table 6: South Lancashire (Disc) proportion receiving floating support between 2005/6 and 2009/10

| Local authority | Proportion receiving floating support | | % change |
	2005/6 No. %	2009/10 No. %	
Preston	157 40.6	259 37.0	- 3.6
Chorley	100 25.9	149 21.2	- 4.7
South Ribble	84 21.7	165 23.5	+1.8
West Lancashire	45 11.6	127 18.1	+ 6.5
Total	**386 100.0**	**700 100.0**	

In summary, the qualitative evidence suggests that there are some concerns about the equitability of the floating support service across parts of the County offered by Disc on the basis of the level of promotional work undertaken by the organisation, compounded by the perceived lack of a local presence within the districts. Although little evidence was directly presented to the research team which explicitly confirmed that some parts of the County were less served by the service than others. However, this is only partly borne out by analysis of the contract monitoring information which suggests that since the reconfiguration of the service there has been a more equitable distribution of the service across the county than was evident in the pre 2007 period.

The perception by some participants of the level of local awareness of Disc was directly correlated to service availability which may not necessarily be the case. Certainly, those participants working with Calico when asked about service coverage tended to make reference to the local presence of Calico staff. This is perhaps not surprising given the different relationship that exists between the local authority staff and Disc and Calico respectively – see later section for a discussion of this.

7. Quality of service

As noted above, the performance monitoring information provides little evidence of the quality of the service received by service users. Over the length of the current contract there has been only limited information collected by either Calico or Disc and their partners in terms of exit surveys and client satisfaction surveys. These have tended to be undertaken internally by the service user's case worker with little recognition of the lack of independence of this approach. Also, this approach has not always been consistently applied:

> *'I have never been asked for feedback on the services that I am receiving.'*

This lack of emphasis upon client feedback is likely in part to be a consequence of the contractual requirement to provide a range of input measure accountability and therefore it would be inappropriate to lay the blame for the absence of service quality measures solely on the service providers. One of the important consequences of this emphasis upon quantity and not quality is that little substantiated evidence was available from the contractors concerning the way that user feedback informs service development ensuring that the service is sufficiently dynamic to respond to changing patterns of need over time.

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of measuring quality and how this information can inform their strategic development of the service. Disc is in the process of establishing service user consultation groups and Calico has recently commissioned SITRA to undertake an independent review of their service. The willingness of the clients to participate in such exercises was evident from the service user interviews:

> *'Taking part is a way of saying 'thank you' and you feel like you can give something back.'*

While this development is a commendable step in the right direction, it is important to recognise that user consultation should be an integral feature of service delivery with a range of opportunities being provided for service users to provide feedback on the

services they receive: user consultation needs to be embedded within the framework of the support rather than an 'added' requirement at the conclusion of their support.

In the absence of any comprehensive service quality assessment, this review has drawn heavily upon the review information recently undertaken by the SP team, anecdotal information provided by the stakeholders and the views of the service users who were consulted as part of the review exercise.

One of the most recurrent themes noted from the user perspective is the flexibility of the service provided both in terms of the type of support and level of support provided. Both Disc and Calico reported that they had a 'client- centred' approach to service provision encapsulated by the individually tailored support plans – this was confirmed by the service users themselves. The support provided ranged from 'practical help' (for example, paying bills, sorting out welfare benefits or debts, securing furniture and furnishings,, completing forms, finding voluntary work, facilitating access to education and dealing with private landlords) to 'moral support' (for example, feeling more confident, learning how to deal with situations). The following quotes highlight the flexible client-centred approach adopted:

> *'When I came out of jail my head was all messed up, my head was racing. I didn't know how to live, shop or pay bills. They provided a lot of support at the beginning especially emotional support, which I needed. As I become more confident I started to do things for myself and they gave me less support, which was right.'*

> *'From the beginning I have a clear plan of what my aims were and what my challenges were. Initially, I saw my case worker every week but now it is every 4 weeks. I don't need the same level of support anymore. I started off needing help for me and over time the staff have helped me build bridges with my family and so it is less now about just me, but me and others.'*

Perhaps equally important was recognition by a significant number of the service users that the support worker was the service and, therefore, the quality of the service, as service users experienced it, was dependent upon their relationship with the support worker and their assessment of that individual's knowledge, skills, experience and personal qualities:

Service users tended to characterise their support workers as 'approachable' 'friendly', 'willing to go that extra mile' and 'go out on a limb.'

> *'They are there for you and they help with anything. If I have a problem she will sort it out as soon as possible for example, she helped me when I was on sick leave and this took the stress off and she helped me with my council tax forms etc.'*

A number of the service users interviewed had been receiving support from various agencies over a lengthy period of time and commented on their experience of their current floating support compared with what they had received previously:

> *'I've had amazing support from my case worker. Better than anything I've had before.'*

> *'Before Disc it tended to be just 'all talk' and nothing ever happened. But once Disc were involved, things started to happen and I began to receive the support I needed.'*

> *'It's not until Calico stepped in that I was treated like a human being.'*

Given the generic nature of the floating support contract the issue of signposting service users to other appropriate services is paramount. There was a great deal of evidence that not only was this happening but also that it was greatly appreciated by the clients themselves:

> *'The staff have helped me access a range of courses and services to help with my addiction. They have also helped me get access to the local college, I'm doing maths and English and relationship counselling. I know that if they can't help me they will 'know a man who can.'*

When asked about whether there were any specific gaps in the support they had received, none were alluded to:

> *'I've had everything I needed and more.'*

In summary then, the pre-occupation with performance monitoring, partly as a consequence of the contractual requirements, has meant that the quality of the experience of the service by the user has not been adequately addressed. The use of exit surveys and similar techniques have only limited value in enabling the service provider to assess its performance against service user expectations. Furthermore, until recently, the relationship between customer feedback and the development of a service which is able to respond to changing needs and aspirations has not been fully recognised or explored. It is, however, not appropriate to be overly critical of Disc and Calico in this respect as both organisations have had to develop and embed a range of procedural practices associated with their models of service delivery since being awarded the contracts. The planned developments in this area (user consultation groups, independent reviews etc.) suggest that both organisations acknowledge the importance of formally monitoring the quality of the service they provide.

8. Role of local authorities

The local authority strategic housing lead should have an integral role in the floating support contracts as they are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the needs of their vulnerable residents are catered for by an appropriate service. During the consultations with this group it became evident that there was a divergence of views about their current role and this greatly coloured their perceptions of the service providers and their performance. Some of those from the North and South contract areas were particularly critical of Disc to varying degrees and specifically in relation to their relationship with the organisation. They often felt *'detached'* from the process *'We tend to get told things rather than being actively engaged'*, *'I feel removed from Disc and how it works.'* At the same time, one of the local authorities commented that the relationship with Disc had improved after establishing a 'host desk' in the local office which was staffed by a Disc staff member for a specified number of hours per week. Other comments were made about the lack of transparency in terms of priorities at a local level, a lack of a strategic overview and the absence of

relevant information upon which to base informed decisions. This might explain their collective scepticism about some of the operational issues relating to the delivery of the service due to a lack of detailed understanding and direct involvement:

> *'It feels like the service you get from one member of the consortium is better than the service from another provider but this is only based on anecdotal evidence, I've no real evidence to say that this is the case or not.'*

> *'I don't have a strong relationship with the providers but it seems like a higher level/standard service.'*

> *'I want a better feel about the service user involvement. We just get told that they do it. I want to know more.'*

Some of the local authority staff questioned the current value of the planned meetings with Disc and the Supporting People Team as they tended to feel like 'observers' rather than part of a collaboration. In contrast, one of the Disc local authority leads commented positively about their relationship with Disc commenting that they felt that Disc were proactive to the needs of the authority.

There was some recognition, however, that their relationship with the partnership was improving, noted by the following comment:

> *'I am starting to feel like a commissioner whereas before I certainly didn't.'*

A very different picture emerges in respect of the relationship between the local authority staff and Calico. This has primarily been as a result of a pro-active approach adopted by Calico to working directly with the local authority strategic housing leads and the desire to establish a close working relationship. For example, a joint meeting between the Calico service co-coordinator and the staff from the individual districts occurs every three months to agree actions based on the performance monitoring information. The following example was given:

> *'If there is an under-representation from one client group and the district is concerned about this then the co-coordinator will speak to the relevant referral agencies to boost the number of referrals.'*

Calico was seen as generally being responsive to the needs of the district staff and, in particular, provided briefings on the performance management data which was greatly appreciated. This positive relationship was also seen within the context that Calico had a local presence which engendered a greater sense of collaboration.

It is very evident then that very different relationships exist between the local authority strategic housing leads and the two main contractors. This is very likely to have influenced the views of the respective local authority staff on a whole range of issues and contributed to the differing perceptions about the success or otherwise of the two models of service delivery.

9. Meeting the needs of different client groups

One of the explicit aims of the review was to ascertain whether or not the current service delivery arrangements were meeting the needs of the different Supporting People client groups.

Information was provided by the Supporting People team which identified the proportion of people receiving floating support by primary client group for the period 2003/4 to 2010/11. This information has been collated to provide a comparison of the proportion from each client group in receipt of floating support in the pre 2007 period (accounting for the four years from 2003/4 to 2006/7) compared with the reconfigured service in the post 2007 period (the four years from 2007/8 to 2010/11).

Table 7 below shows that there were some important differences in the proportion from each client group who received floating support in the post 2007 period compared with pre 2007. For example, the proportion of those with mental health problems increased from 8.5% to 13.6% over this period and similarly the proportion of young people at risk increased from 7.9% to 10.4%. In contrast, the proportion of those with drug problems declined from 13.2% to 8.0% and similarly, in relation to women at risk of domestic violence, the decline in proportion was from 19.0% to 15.1%. The proportion of single homeless with support needs who received floating support services varied only very slightly, equating to 10.1% in the pre 2007 period and 10.3% in the post 2007 period. The table also reveals that the proportion of people categorised as receiving generic services declined from 10.8% to 6.4% over this time period.

Table 7: Proportion of people in receipt of floating support, by primary client group for the pre 2007 and post 2007 periods

Client group	Pre 2007 %	Post 2007 %
Older people with support needs	3.6	2.3
Older people mental health	0.2	0.2
Frail elderly	0.3	0.2
Mental health problems	8.5	13.6
Learning difficulties	1.7	2.4
Physical or sensory disability	2.7	5.0
Single homeless with support needs	10.1	10.3
Alcohol problems	7.6	3.2
Drug problems	13.2	8.0
Offenders/at risk of offending	1.6	4.9
Mentally discharged offenders	0.1	0.1
Young people at risk	7.9	10.4
Young people leaving care	0.7	0.4
Women at risk of domestic violence	19.0	15.1
People with HIV & AIDS	-	-
Homeless families with support needs	6.2	7.8
Refugees	-	-
Teenage parents	4.2	2.9
Rough sleeper	0.7	0.3
Traveller	-	0.6
Generic	10.8	6.4

Table 8 below combines both the primary and secondary categorisation of need: in the latter case up to three different Supporting People categories could be identified. It provides comparative information for 2005/6 and 2009/10.

A rather different picture emerges in relation to the above data (table 7) when compared with the findings from table 8. The most notable difference is that the increase in the proportion within table 8 who had alcohol and drug problems (from 9.9% to 12.1% and from 7.4% to 13.6% respectively), emphasising the complexity of support needs of these two client groups. This compares with a reported decline in the proportion receiving support between pre and post 2007 when considering only the primary client group categorisation.

Table 8: Proportion of people in receipt of floating support, by primary and secondary client group for 2005/6 and 2009/10

Client group	2005/6 %	2009/10 %
Older people with support needs	1.9	1.5
Older people mental health	1.0	0.2
Frail elderly	0.7	0.1
Mental health problems	11.8	14.9
Learning difficulties	2.6	3.7
Physical or sensory disability	6.6	8.2
Single homeless with support needs	11.0	11.4
Alcohol problems	9.9	12.1
Drug problems	7.4	13.6
Offenders/at risk of offending	10.3	6.2
Mentally discharged offenders	0.3	0.3
Young people at risk	7.7	6.6
Young people leaving care	1.0	0.3
Women at risk of domestic violence	2.6	2.5
People with HIV & AIDS	0.2	-
Homeless families with support needs	3.1	4.7
Refugees	-	-
Teenage parents	2.7	2.8
Rough sleeper	1.5	1.8
Traveller	0.2	0.1
Generic	17.3	8.7
Total	100.0	100.0

However, given the comments noted earlier about the issues associated with the allocation of service users at the referral stage to particular Supporting People client categories, some caution must be exercised in interpreting the information presented in the tables above. The table does not provide an indication of the level of unmet need and, therefore, it is difficult to gauge whether the service is responding to the level of need for floating support service by the different client groups. During the discussions with the wider stakeholders about this issue little information was put forward to substantiate whether there was unmet need among particular client groups or not. Rather, the participants tended to recite anecdotal evidence which has limited value in this respect.

According to the 2001 Census of Population the non White British population equates to 5.3%, although this figure is widely regarded as being an under-estimation of the current actual size of the BME population due in part to the influx of a range of ethnic

community groups since 2001, such as economic migrant workers from Central and Eastern European countries (known as the A2 and A8 groups) and asylum seekers and refugees under the Governments asylum seeker and dispersal policy. However, that being said, the 2001 census data does provide the only available county-wide information on ethnicity.

According to the performance monitoring information provided by the Supporting People team, the proportion of the BME community who received floating support services in the four years between 2003/4 to 2006/7 averaged at 6.6% per annum, ranging from 5.3% in 2004/5 and 2005/6 to 8.6% in 2003/4 (see table 9 below). In comparison, the proportion of those who received floating support services under the reconfigured service over the four years 2007/8 to 2010/11 averaged at 7.2% per annum, ranging from 5.9% (2008/9) to 9.1% (2010/11). Hence, the figures suggest that a slightly larger proportion overall of those in receipt of such services who were from the BME community under the current models of provision compared with pre 2007.

Table 9: Ethnic origin of receipts of floating support over the period 2003/4 to 2010/11

Ethnicity	Year							
	2003/4 %	2004/5 %	2005/6 %	2006/7 %	2007/8 %	2008/9 %	2009/10 %	2010/11 %
White British	91.4	94.7	94.7	92.8	93.2	94.1	93.1	90.9
BME	8.6	5.3	5.3	7.2	6.8	5.9	6.9	9.1

Looking more closely at the individual BME community groups, defined according to the 2001 Census ethnicity categories over the period 2003/4 to 2006/7, the Pakistani groups were consistently the largest group in receipt of floating support services: in contrast, over the four year period from 2007/8 to 2010/11, while this ethnic group was the largest in two of the years (2008/9 and 2010/11), in the remaining two years, the largest BME group in receipt of floating support services were those identified as White Other, most likely to be economic migrant workers, as referred to above. This would suggest that the service providers are responding to the support needs of new and emerging BME community groups as well as the more established traditional BME communities within the County. The other point to note is that in the four year period prior to the re-configuration of services none from the Gypsy/Romany or Irish Traveller communities received support and this was also the case in 2007/8, while in 2009/10 a small proportion of these groups did receive floating support services (0.4% and 0.5% respectively).

In addition to the interrogation of the performance monitoring information outlined above, detailed information was collected during the review on the approach adopted by the service providers to meeting the needs of the BME community. Most of the agencies had experience of providing floating support to this community and had appropriate support structures in place, such as targeted promotion of their service, access to translation/interpretation and in some cases, staff from a BME background with multi-lingual skills. Without exception, all those consulted reported that they provided floating support services to BME clients (or were able to if the need arose) in a culturally sensitive manner. Six of the service users interviewed were non White British and they were all complimentary about the way that the support they received and the support workers themselves had acknowledged their minority status and associated cultural norms.

10. Local versus sub-regional provision

The service providers, local authority representatives and wider stakeholders were asked to give their opinion as to whether they would prefer in future the current contractual arrangements (i.e. three contracts covering the County) to continue or revert back to the pre 2007 arrangements with each district contracting its own floating support services. Opinions on this issue were very much tempered by an appreciation of the decline in the funding for Supporting People in the future. The minority view espoused by three of the respondents was for a locally commissioned service. This was advocated on the basis that a local service was more likely to be responsive to local needs. However, by far the majority view was that a return to the pre 2007 arrangements was untenable for the following reasons:

- With the re-configuration of the service arrangements in 2007 many of the local agencies who had previously provided floating support services were no-longer in existence;

- Across some districts it was noted that some of the more specialist services had never been available in the locality pre 2007 and therefore a return to the pre 2007 arrangements would represent a distinct decline in the level of service within the locality;

- The current arrangements had developed close working relationships between service providers which was not necessarily sustainable at the local level;

- The current arrangements were able to deal appropriately with service users who needed to relocate to other parts of the County and receive floating support: local authority administrative boundaries would make this problematic if there was a return to the pre 2007 arrangements; and

- Currently there is generally a uniform standard of service which is available to clients which would not necessarily be the case under a return to the pre-2007 arrangements – one respondent mentioned that this would be similar to a 'postcode lottery'.

In addition, two of the respondents did suggest that the 'size of the contract' (i.e. geographical coverage and both cited the potential for just one contract covering the whole of Lancashire) was less important than having a local presence and working with the local authority to identify and meet local needs.

Those who advocated the development of alternative contracting arrangements in the future tended to be those working in the North and South of the County and these views seemed to be coloured largely by their knowledge of or relationship with Disc.

11. Additional issues

In addition to the above, other issues were mentioned by a minority of those consulted as part of the review which are worthy of mention. First, the tenure neutrality of the post 2007 service provision: evidence collected from both Disc and Calico reveals that, unlike the pre 2007 service which was predominantly provided only to those in the social housing sector, the re-configured service is supporting people living in a range of tenures.

Second, a number of comments were made regarding the degree of pre-tenancy work undertaken by Disc and its sub-contractors and Calico. An agreement with the Supporting People team allowed for around 10% of the floating support staff to be involved in this type of work although a degree of flexibility around this figure was anticipated. The service providers suggested that their pre-tenancy work was much greater than 10% and that it was felt that some of this work could be undertaken by the local authority's Housing Options or equivalent staff. The local authority strategic housing leads, in response, contended that their colleagues had insufficient capacity to take on this role. In some cases, there was a general confusion about which organisation had responsibility for the pre-tenancy work.

Finally, there was some discussion about the services provided under the floating support contract being defined in terms of contact hours. Some of the service providers felt that this was a very prescriptive approach and did not encourage staff to be flexible in the type of service they provided. It was also pointed out that within the 'contact hour' time was allocated to administrative tasks and travelling to and from the client. For those clients located some distance away from the service hub, this could mean that the majority of the allocated time is taken up with non-client contact activities.

> *'Because of where we are located it can take at least 30 minutes to get to the client.'*

Some of the local authority strategic housing leads were critical of the impact of this on the level of direct support provided to some clients within their district. None of those who commented on this issue put forward any alternative proposals concerning how the whole issue of designated contact hours could be resolved.

Section 4:   Recommendations

Introduction

This review has covered a range of issues pertaining to the original aims of the post 2007 reconfigured floating support service within the County. A number of important benefits have been identified in terms of the services provided by Disc and Calico, not least in terms of the improved standard of service delivered, the positive experience of service users and the coverage of the service across the County and across the different Supporting People client groups. At the same time, the services have evolved over the last four years with increasing emphasis more recently on developing service quality measures. However, the research has highlighted that there are areas for potential improvement, most notably in terms of: the role of the local authority strategic leads and the development of closer working relationships with the service providers; the refinement of performance monitoring information; and greater clarity concerning the role of floating support staff within the context of resettlement work and floating support to those moving into their own accommodation.

Recommendations

On the basis of the independent review, a number of recommendations are proposed which should lead to further improvements in the service provided to clients. These recommendations are listed under each of the sub-headings used within the findings section of the report.

Models of service delivery

It is recommended that:

- Calico should be encouraged to increase the proportion of staff with specialist knowledge and expertise, building on the success of the gypsy and traveller 'champion' approach.

The referral process

It is recommended that:

- A review should be undertaken of the way that Disc and Calico register the client at the referral stage to one of the Supporting People client groups to ensure the approach is consistent and reflective of the characteristics of the specific client groups. The current approach adopted by Calico should be regarded as good practice.

- In order to ensure that an individual's particular support needs can be met, DISC and Calico should ensure that processes are in place to enable clients to be offered support by the most appropriate sub provider or support worker

- Consideration is given to the potential for 'repeat clients (i.e. those where the floating support has been withdrawn but where, due to unforeseen circumstances, the re-introduction of floating support provision is required) within the two year period to be 'fast-tracked' by Disc and referred back to the original floating support provider to ensure continuity of service; and

- Further investigations are undertaken regarding the proportion of clients who are self referrals to Disc and Calico and the implications for the client in terms of floating support services received with a view to ensuring that services become more accessible and offer more choice

Performance monitoring information

It is recommended that:

- Rationalisation of the current performance monitoring information requirements is undertaken, differentiating between mandatory and preferred information. Particular attention should be given for all stakeholders to comment upon information needs, frequency, format and use of such information; and
- Greater attention should be given by Disc and Calico to promoting the outcome measures collected among all stakeholders

Separation of supported housing and floating support

It is recommended that:

- Consultation is undertaken with supported housing providers to examine the potential for their staff to undertake the initial resettlement work for a specified period when a service user moves into their own independent accommodation. Floating support agencies should then provide the longer-term floating support with a phased handover of responsibility between the two staff groups during the latter period of the resettlement work;
- A maximum time limit is set on the resettlement period, agreed between the Supporting People team and supported housing providers; and
- This separation of resettlement work and floating support should be extended to all services, although it should be recognised that for some clients (e.g. those fleeing domestic violence and those with substance misuse problems) may require floating support from a staff member who has experience/skills or training to provide support to these client groups.

Equality of service coverage

It is recommended that:

- Disc should be encouraged to have a greater presence within the districts and promote their services with other providers, local referral agencies and potential customers at the local authority level.

Quality of service

It is recommended that:

- Both Disc and Calico should be required to develop mechanisms for consultation with service users about their experience of the service they receive. Such mechanisms should be embedded within service delivery plans

and be independent in nature. The quality assurance findings should be made available to all stakeholders on a regular basis; and

- Both Disc and Calico should be required to produce plans on how quality assurance feeds into service improvement reviews.

Role of local authorities and other commissioners

It is recommended that:

- The role of the local authority strategic housing leads and other commissioners (e.g. Probation, LDAT) in the Supporting People floating support commissioning and monitoring process should be reviewed on the basis of the requirements and expectations of the districts;

- Disc should be encouraged to adopt the Calico approach of a closer working relationship with the local authority strategic housing leads and other commissioners by convening regular meetings with each of the districts to discuss performance and agreed future priorities; and

- Greater attention should be given to strengthening local accountability of the floating support services provided under the current arrangements.

Local versus sub-regional provision

It is recommended that:

- Adopting the recommendations/proposals outlined above, the current arrangements of three contracts covering the County should be continued as this approach offers a number of important benefits over locally-based commissioning.

Additional issues

It is recommended that:

- With floating support providers having a greater local presence, support planning should be undertaken to reduce travel time or alternatively, travel time and contact time should be separated. In this way rural clients should receive the same support as those clients living in the more urban areas.