

## **Supporting People Communications Plan**

Support to help you live more independently  
(through housing-related support)

This communications plan outlines the background, objectives, key messages, audiences and actions for a campaign to raise awareness and increase take up in Supporting People services across Hertfordshire.

### **Background**

Supporting People is a Government initiative that funds support services to a wide range of vulnerable people. Funding from Supporting People can only pay for housing related support – it cannot pay for care services or other support services.

Supporting People was launched in April 2003. It is a joint initiative between social care, housing, probation and health. Hertfordshire County Council is the administering authority for Supporting People in Hertfordshire and it is managed by Adult Care Services.

Adult Care Services is working in partnership with the 10 district and borough councils, colleagues in health and the probation service to deliver the Supporting People programme.

The Audit Commission inspected Hertfordshire's programme in May 2006, it was rated 'poor with promising prospects for improvement'.

To take Supporting People services through the next five years, building on what has been established and to address the challenges and criticisms from the inspection, the strategy for 2007 – 2012, aims to be robust, needs led and service user focused.

The Hertfordshire Supporting People programme has identified that the key priority areas are young people, older people, mental health and value for money. In Hertfordshire £21 million is spent on Supporting People services.

### **Objectives**

This communications plan has been created to support the work of the Supporting People programme in achieving the objectives set out in the Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 2007 – 2012.

The communications plan aims to ensure that:

- The aims of the Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy are clearly communicated
- All stakeholder groups are aware of Hertfordshire's Supporting People programmes and the support it provides to vulnerable adults
- Clear and accessible information is provided on what the Supporting People programme is, who is eligible for support and how services can be accessed

- Stakeholders are involved in the rollout of the strategy and the continuous improvement of Supporting People services
- Communications about the programme takes into consideration the diverse needs of all user groups (e.g. easy read information and information available in other languages and formats)

## **Key messages**

Supporting People and housing-related support can be confusing terms. It is not always easy to differentiate between what is housing-related support and what it is not i.e. care services and other support services. Therefore all our communications must be clear about what Supporting People is (and is not).

To help with this clarity the overall strapline for Supporting People is:

### **Support to help you live more independently (through housing-related support)**

Key messages to further clarify this are:

- Supporting People helps vulnerable people to achieve stability in their lives, maintain their independence and improve their quality of life
- The views of service users and carers are essential to Hertfordshire's Supporting People programme and central to its development
- Supporting People plays a central role in addressing homelessness in Hertfordshire
- Supporting People contributes to making Hertfordshire a safer, healthier and more inclusive place to live
- Hertfordshire's Supporting People programme depends on effective partnership working – “together we can make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable people in Hertfordshire”
- The Supporting People strategy for Hertfordshire addresses the issues raised in the 2006 inspection
- In order to improve Supporting People services in Hertfordshire, changes must be made to ensure we are funding those groups most in need
- Priority groups have been determined in consultation with service users and carers, providers and partners
- Supporting People is not a standalone service – it contributes to the strategic plans of all partner organisations and Hertfordshire's Local Area Agreement

- Hertfordshire's Supporting People strategy will play a significant part in assisting all stakeholders in meeting the challenges of Our Health, Our Care, Our Say – it supports choice and control, voice, jointly-commissioned services, improved access and supporting people to live independently in the community

## **Key audiences**

### ***Service users and their carers***

There are 21 client groups listed in the Supporting People programme. In the Hertfordshire strategy some of these are grouped together in the following way:

- Older people
- People with mental health problems
- People with learning disabilities
- People with physical and/or sensory impairment
- Homeless people
- People who abuse substances
- Offenders
- Young people
- People who have experienced domestic violence
- Gypsies and travellers
- Other vulnerable people who may need housing support

The Hertfordshire Supporting People strategy identifies priority groups for funds and service re-design over the next five years. Communication with service users will therefore be more frequent and detailed with certain groups at times, although it is important to maintain a level of communication across all groups. The priorities for communicating with service users over the next five years are:

1. 2007-2008 (year one) – Older people, young people and people with mental health problems
2. 2008-2010 (years two and three) – Substance abusers, offenders, homeless people, people fleeing domestic violence and people with a physical disability
3. 2010-2012 (years four and five) – People with learning disabilities, gypsies and travellers

Our communications need to raise awareness and understanding of Supporting People so that those who could benefit from these services can make informed decisions about the services they receive.

### ***Providers***

Currently there are 109 organisations, offering 559 different services in county linked to Supporting People. As the key organisations delivering services to users it is essential that we communicate with them regularly.

### ***Partners***

These include district and borough councils, the probation service and health partners including Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust and Primary Care Trusts. District and borough council housing officers are critical to delivering Supporting People services so it is essential that there is effective communications with them.

### ***Staff***

There are approximately 2000 members of staff within Adult Care Services of which many are front line staff who work directly with vulnerable adults in Hertfordshire. Frontline staff in particular should be fully aware of, and understand, Supporting People so that they can confidently refer people to the programme when appropriate.

The 'back office' staff within ACS, and also staff from within the rest of the council should also be made aware of Supporting People as they, or someone they know, might be eligible for support.

There are approximately 24,000 people working for Hertfordshire County Council so, in addition to our specific communications with ACS staff, we should raise awareness of Supporting People with them.

### ***Service users and carers***

There are currently approximately 15,000 people in Hertfordshire who receive support through Supporting People. Many people may not even realise that the support they receive is from Supporting People – for example Supporting People pays for wardens at all the sheltered housing accommodation in the county.

### ***Elected members***

This includes elected members of both district/borough councils as well as county councillors.

### ***Regulators***

As regulators of the programme the Audit Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Government department Communities and Local Government (CLG) must also be included as our target audiences.

### ***Voluntary organisations***

Some voluntary organisations are also providers of Supporting People services, others provide independent information and advice to service user groups so awareness of Supporting People services is important.

### ***General public***

Some effort should also be focused on reaching the general public. They, or someone they know, might be eligible for services but not know what is available or how to access them.

## **Media**

The local media are an audience as well as a vehicle for us to promote our messages to other audiences and effort should be focused on briefing them about Supporting People services.

## **Communications channels**

Work is already underway to improve communication with the various Supporting People stakeholder groups (audiences). It is important that existing channels of communication, where effective, remain in place and that new methods are used where appropriate.

There are many different types of communication methods that could be used, some will be more appropriate for some stakeholder groups than others. These can include:

- Information leaflet
- Information poster
- Stakeholder newsletter
- Newsletter articles (eBriefing and other internal newsletters including those of our partners like health and district/borough councils)
- Press releases
- Media briefings
- Information/display stands
- Seminars
- Website (dedicated pages already on [hertsdirect.org](http://hertsdirect.org) with a shortcut [hertsdirect.org/supportingpeople](http://hertsdirect.org/supportingpeople))

Distribution of information is a key element of any communications campaign and any distribution of materials will be targeted. Information will be sent to outlets including:

- District / borough council receptions
- GP surgeries
- Libraries
- Voluntary organisations (e.g. CABx)
- Hertfordshire County Council buildings, including day centres
- Women's refuges
- Housing associations

## **All stakeholders**

Supporting People has its own section on the county council website at [hertsdirect.org/supportingpeople](http://hertsdirect.org/supportingpeople). This web address should be promoted on every piece of communications that we produce. Partners and providers have been asked to put a link on their own websites to our Supporting People pages so information isn't duplicated - and we have control over what is said. Therefore it is essential that the Supporting People web pages are relevant and up to date. The Supporting People team currently meet every two

months to look at the website but changes are also made in the interim period as necessary. As part of this campaign we should also seek to publicise Supporting People services through news features on the front page of [hertsdirect.org](http://hertsdirect.org)

### ***Providers***

The Supporting People team is planning to send out a regular newsletter to providers. Other Supporting People programmes across the country have also adopted this approach and it is a good way to update professionals on the latest developments both locally and nationally.

As above, communications with partners should promote the Supporting People web pages.

### ***Partners***

Our district and borough council partners are key to us delivering Supporting People services.

The Supporting People team plan to deliver the leaflets and posters in person so that they can talk directly to housing and reception staff to help raise awareness of services.

We will also ask partners to include an article about Supporting People in their staff newsletters/magazines and to put a link from their website directly to our Supporting People pages on [hertsdirect.org](http://hertsdirect.org)

### ***Hertfordshire County Council staff***

There will be regular features in eBriefing, Adult Care Services' monthly newsletter for staff. This can include:

- Meet the team – a feature focusing on the work of the team, who they are, what they do and how to contact them for more information
- Article launching the new Supporting People strategy
- Article(s) on the preparations for the inspection

There is an opportunity to raise awareness of Supporting People through the fortnightly Board Briefing, which is attended by senior managers within ACS. Board Briefing looks at the discussions and outcomes from the previous day's ACS Board meeting but we should investigate whether it would be possible to add Supporting People as an AOB at sessions over the next few months so that managers are aware of progress within the programme and plans for the inspection.

We will ask colleagues in other departments to include an article in their staff newsletters – CSF News, Encore (corporate services), Environment News, Highways news, In Focus (fire & rescue).

The article(s) that we ask colleagues in other departments to publish could be amended for the web and put on Connect, the county council's intranet. We will investigate having a Supporting People section on the ACS pages of Connect in the period running up to the inspection.

### ***Service users and carers***

A new leaflet for service users and carers has been created, input from service users and carers was central to this process.

The ACS Communications team has compiled a comprehensive distribution list for all Supporting People information, which was handed over to the Supporting People team so that they could add to the list and use for distribution (with support from the communications team).

To draw attention to the leaflet a poster has been produced which gives brief details about Supporting People and will signpost people on where to go for more information.

In the past it has sometimes proved difficult to get information displayed in certain places, especially GP surgeries, so some extra work may need to be done to encourage their support – our partners in health may be able to help with this.

### ***Elected members***

All elected county council members receive eBriefing which will include regular articles about Supporting People during the autumn and winter.

Sarah Pickup meets regularly with the executive member for adult care and health and there may be an opportunity to discuss Supporting People at one (or more) of these sessions.

If there is a regular information bulletin (or similar) for members it would be worth including a report on Supporting People, especially regarding the re-inspection.

We will also investigate the possibility of providing information to district councils for them to distribute to their elected members.

### ***Regulators***

The regulators of Supporting People need to be kept informed of the progress of the Hertfordshire programme, especially the re-inspection. This will be done through the inspection project group.

### ***Voluntary organisations***

The voluntary organisations that we work with on a regular basis will receive a small supply of leaflets and posters to display in their offices and discuss with clients who may be eligible for our services.

### ***General Public***

Hertfordshire Horizons is the county council's new residents' magazine (formerly known as HertsDirect). Hertfordshire Horizons is published three times a year and is delivered directly to almost one million homes in the county by Royal Mail. We will aim to put in an article about Supporting People in the next edition in January 2008.

The ten district and borough councils in the county also produce residents' magazines and we will liaise with communications colleagues to see if they would include an article in these, especially if we use case studies showing how people in their area have benefited from the programme.

See following section on local media.

### ***Local Media***

The local media is very 'town/area' based in Hertfordshire so a bank of local case studies of people receiving Supporting People services, together with facts about the programme (like paying for all the sheltered housing wardens) would be useful to feed to local media.

We may also wish to consider inviting local journalists to a press briefing about Supporting People, particularly around the re-inspection so that we can brief them about the progress we have made since our first inspection.

An action plan of all the points above, with timescales, is shown below.

## Communications activities

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Communications activity</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Providers	hertsdirect.org – SP pages and front page	Ongoing	SP team to regularly update SP pages liaise with Elizabeth Jones, ACS web manager when necessary. AB to look at front page articles
	Newsletter	Quarterly, first one issued in September 2007	SP team to write – AB to proofread
Partners	hertsdirect.org – SP pages and front page	Ongoing	As above
	Article in staff newsletter / magazine	Autumn	AB to contact district PROs Possibly also resident magazines
	Meetings with reception & housing staff (SP team)	September/October	Supporting People officers to meet with reception / housing staff
Staff (ACS and rest of HCC)	eBriefing articles (including meet the team, launch of strategy, preparation for inspection)	First one in October then ongoing	eBriefing published 1 <sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month. Copy needed at least one week before
	Staff meetings	????	SP team to take leaflets to staff team meetings to explain what SP is
	ACSMB	Fortnightly	Barbara Austen/Anne Bretherton to discuss as

			regular item on board agenda
	Board Briefing	Fortnightly	
	Other departmental newsletter articles	AB to check times	
	Connect article(s)	AB to draw up schedule	
	ACS 'wailing wall'	AB and MJ	Stats, excerpts from strategy and images to be used to create a 'storyboard' on the wailing wall.
Service users & carers	Leaflet	Out end of September	Comms to distribute leaflet except to district/borough councils. SP team meet with each one individually As above
	Poster		
	hertsdirect.org – SP pages and front page	Ongoing	As above
	Hertfordshire Horizons article	January 2008	AB to check publication schedule for copy deadline
Elected members	Members' Information Bulletin	AB to check dates	
	eBriefing	Monthly	As above for staff
	Executive member briefing		
Audit Commission	???	???	???
Voluntary organisations	hertsdirect.org – SP pages and front page	Ongoing	All as above
	Leaflet	As above	
	Poster		
General public	hertsdirect.org – SP pages and front page	Ongoing	As above

	Leaflet	As above	Poster possibly to go on town/parish council notice boards if appropriate
	Poster		
	Hertfordshire Horizons article	January 2008	AB to check publication schedule for copy deadline
	Local media		Through press releases – see below
Media	Press briefing		
	Press releases		

## **Evaluation**

Consultation and involvement of service users and other stakeholders is a critical part of the Supporting People strategy and of this communications plan.

Service users, carers, providers and partners were consulted on the new leaflet and their comments were incorporated into the final version where, and if, appropriate.

As part of the inspection process some mystery shopping will be carried out <<more info needed from Barbara>> and then again in January.

We will also monitor press coverage during the implementation of the communications plan to see how much take up of our press releases there has been in the local media.

MORE HERE ON EVALUATION