

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Acknowledgements	5
Index of practice examples	6
1. Introduction and context	7
1.1 Reasons for the study	7
1.2 Context	7
1.3 Study methodology	11
2. Research findings and practice examples	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Defining quality	12
2.3 Measuring quality	16
2.4 Commissioning/procuring for quality	27
3. Emerging issues	31
3.1 Themes	31
3.2 HouseMark Cymru and Cymorth Cymru views	32
3.3 Issues for consideration by commissioning organisations, housing-related support providers and the Welsh Assembly Government	35
4. Bibliography	37
Appendix 1	40

Executive Summary

Achieving high quality housing-related support is clearly very important given the vulnerability of users and - in many cases - the role which support services play in the quality of their lives. Yet defining, measuring and commissioning for 'quality' is less straightforward in this field than it is for other services. This report examines these three aspects of quality from the perspectives of policymakers, commissioners and providers.

The study approached the task in three main ways:

1. a web search, literature and 'positive practice' review
2. a survey of local authorities and housing-related support providers in Wales
3. interviews with representatives of national stakeholder organisations.

For each key area of the research a number of practice examples and resources were identified.

Key findings

Defining quality – no universal definition

A wide variety of components to the definition of quality were identified. However some common elements in defining quality came through the research. These were:

- positive outcomes for service users
- services that meet the needs of service users, are person-centred and provide choice
- compliance with Supporting People aims
- contribute to wider policy and societal aims and are strategically relevant
- services that achieve value for money, are efficient and reliable
- effective joint working

How important are definitions?

Whilst the research demonstrated the subjective nature of definitions of quality, there was no discernible agreement that a clear definition was needed and indeed it was felt that to do so may create tensions between strategic aims and service user needs. However, this left an unanswered question: whether and to what extent do these varying definitions and perceptions impact upon the nature and quality of services delivered?

Measuring quality - inconsistent but inevitable?

There was significant agreement that the only information consistently collected in relation to housing-related support services across Wales was national performance indicators; yet these are of limited value at local level and have little role to play in achieving quality.

The report identified a wide range of methods employed by both providers of services and by commissioners to measure quality, including several promising practice examples. Some use is made of comparative methods, such as benchmarking and peer review.

However, there is no clear agreement on which methods or combination of methods best capture the evidence of quality across the range of support services provided. Nor is there any assessment of which methods best measure quality from the different perspectives of:

- service users
- commissioners and funders, or
- service providers.

It could be argued that an assessment of approaches best suited to measuring different aspects of quality would be inappropriate because it could lead to overly prescriptive approaches being adopted, which may stifle creativity in delivering support.

However, the report concluded that the most appropriate way to generate the range of information that is required for a range of reasons and to suit a range of organisational needs is likely to require a combination of measures, rather than a single technique.

The future: a 'softer' approach?

The research also revealed a strong appetite for softer outcomes in identifying and measuring quality alongside more meaningful (national) performance indicators. Soft outcomes - those associated with service user views and experiences - have an important part to play in assessing the quality of services, in line with a citizen-centred model of service delivery.

Procuring/commissioning for quality – potential improvements

Views on how commissioning and procurement can support quality also varied considerably.

Local authorities pointed to a range of factors including:

- putting quality at the core of the commissioning process
- making use of the SPIN commissioning principles
- recognising that partnership is an important component of commissioning
- possibly establishing a benchmark of costs for services so that commissioning can then focus on quality

In addition, different authorities mentioned factors such as the use of specialist knowledge of providers/frontline staff and the use of service specifications to measure quality compliance.

Service providers mentioned an even wider range of factors determining quality in the commissioning process, including individuals being at the centre of the process, the need for transparency and clarity in service expectations, flexibility, and support for an outputs-based approach and outcomes monitoring.

Stakeholder organisations believed that to achieve quality organisations need to be 'clever commissioners', not focussing solely on costs but using evidence of needs, learning from other areas of commissioning (eg health), while being consultative and also being conscious of political motivations which can drive the commissioning process.

The views of HouseMark Cymru and Cymorth Cymru are also included.

Actions and issues for the future

In setting the agenda for quality in housing-related support, the key players are clearly the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and service providers.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- set out strategic objectives for Supporting People funded services
- review its national data collection and monitoring requirements, ending any requirements which do not support quality services
- in reviewing data requirements, take account of the range of considerations set out in this report
- in line with the other developments in the housing sector, review its approach to inspection of housing-related support services to ensure that it is sufficiently strategic, proportionate and that activity is targeted where it is needed most and supports the greatest improvement in the quality of services
- not be prescriptive about how housing-related support providers undertake the measurement of service outcomes

Local authorities and housing-related support providers should:

- consider the practice examples provided in the report to inform the development of their approaches to measuring quality in housing-related support
- work together to develop locally appropriate methods for identifying and measuring the quality of housing-related support services
- use appropriate techniques to measure outcomes at strategic, service and service user levels
- consider when and how comparison between services/the outcomes of services might appropriately be undertaken and what infrastructure is needed to support this
- ensure commissioning/procurement processes support quality in housing-related support services through the use of the range of methods outlined in the research findings

Finally, the piloting of an outcomes framework for monitoring housing-related support services would provide an opportunity for all local authorities to review their data collection and monitoring requirements to ensure they are proportionate, appropriate and contribute to quality services

Acknowledgements

This report was written by HouseMark Associate, Tamsin Stirling with contributions from Lisa King of HouseMark and Joy Kent of Cymorth Cymru. It was edited by John Perry. Mike Vigar of Cymorth Cymru undertook the survey of local authorities and housing-related support providers, analysed the results and followed up the practice examples. Tamsin Stirling undertook the literature and positive practice review and the national stakeholder interviews

Thanks go to all those local authorities and housing-related support providers that completed questionnaires and provided follow-up information and the representatives of the national stakeholder organisations who were interviewed.

November 2009

Index of practice examples

Defining quality

- 1: Defining a quality housing-related support service
- 2: Audit Commission characteristics of excellence in Supporting People services

Measuring quality

- 3: The outcomes star, a distance travelled technique
- 4: Distance travelled as one of a range of techniques
- 5: A quality of life approach
- 6: Identifying outcomes from floating support
- 7: Externally accredited methods of evaluating quality
- 8: An organisation wide quality of service monitoring system
- 9: Service user involvement
- 10: Benchmarking
- 11: Worcestershire outcomes framework
- 12: Piloting an outcomes framework for Wales

Commissioning/procuring for quality

- 13: Supporting People commissioning and procurement principles
- 14: Cross authority working to enhance procurement
- 15: Joint commissioning with social care
- 16: Partnership for Excellence
- 17: Outcomes based commissioning

1. Introduction and context

1.1 Reasons for the study

The study on which this report is based was undertaken by HouseMark Cymru and Cymorth Cymru during 2008/09. It explored three key issues in achieving quality in housing-related support:

- defining/describing quality
- measuring quality
- commissioning/procuring for quality.

The report provides a range of perspectives on defining and delivering quality in housing-related support and measuring the outcomes of housing-related support services. Its aim is to contribute to the ongoing debate on these issues.

These issues are important because of recent strategic and operational changes to the design and delivery of housing-related support. These include:

- Increasing interest in the measurement of the outcomes of housing-related support services - the study sought to identify the key players in developing approaches to outcome measurement and question why there was this interest. (Section 2.3 of the report covers this issue in detail.)
- Debate within local authorities (as commissioners of Supporting People funded services) and among support providers about how the outcomes of housing-related support might be monitored.
- Moves towards outcomes-based commissioning and planning in related service areas, in particular social care and health services. (Discussed in 2.4 of the report - see in particular practice example 17.)
- Financial challenges faced by support services in relation to overall budgets, distribution of funding across Wales and potential transfer of Supporting People Revenue Grant funding to local authorities - as well as the overall challenge posed by the economic downturn. (Discussed in detail by Cymorth Cymru in section 3.2 of the report.)
- Calls for public services to be focused on citizens and their needs. The citizen-centred model of public service delivery and reform in Wales set out by Sir Jeremy Beecham and embraced by the Welsh Assembly Government sees citizen voice as a main driver for service improvement (as distinct from the consumer choice model which is prevalent in England).

1.2 Context

It is important that any debate around defining, delivering and measuring quality in housing-related support is firmly seated within the context for such services in Wales. This includes factors specific to Wales but also the influence of developments in England and Scotland.

Welsh context

Strategy

The first national housing-related support strategy for Wales (currently in draft) sets out the future direction of the Supporting People programme in Wales as:

- using support as part of a range of innovative approaches to social care
- using the programme to address underlying needs of individuals, by providing the stability on which co-ordinated and successful interventions can be made
- tackling the underlying causes of repeat homelessness
- professionalising the work of providers in the sector and increasing the strategic focus of commissioning.

The strategy notes that the Welsh Assembly Government wants to see the establishment of administrative arrangements for Supporting People which can protect existing service users as well as ensuring fairer access for future users. The draft strategy can be found at <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/housingcommunity/supportingpeople/?lang=en&status=closed>

Financial

- Evidence that housing-related support can also reduce homelessness, tackle offending and substance misuse, and help improve mental ill health, saving a minimum of £1.68 for every £1 spent.¹
- Increasing pressure on public services which will result from reduced investment in coming years, alongside increases in demand for Supporting People services. This has already had an impact on procurement and commissioning, with pressure for cost to be the over-riding factor rather than a balance between cost and quality.²

Alliances

- Closer working between Cymorth Cymru and the Supporting People Information Network on a range of issues, including discussions about outcomes monitoring, bringing greater opportunities for commissioners and providers to address their concerns.

Quality

- Debates about how services that are related to housing-related support, eg social care, can best be delivered to meet individual needs - for example, models of self-directed support that include individual budgets so that users can control the type and style of support they receive.

¹ Recently published research in England suggests that the level of savings generated by housing-related support services is higher than this at over £2 for every £1 spent on housing-related support **Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme, 2009** www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/financialbenefitsresearch

² See for example **Re-tendering housing-related support: a tale of what not to do** Welsh Housing Quarterly issue 75, page 36 article by Cymorth Cymru

Performance measurement/outcomes monitoring

- Supporting People is one element of the performance measurement framework for local government in Wales. There is one national indicator for Supporting People which is the average number of units of housing-related support per 1,000 head of population for a range of types of housing-related support service (floating support, direct access, temporary accommodation, permanent accommodation, sheltered accommodation for older people and community alarm services). However, there are no outcomes measures at a national level for housing-related support services. The draft housing-related support strategy notes:

'The Supporting People programme has a Performance Indicator framework which has been developed in conjunction with the Data Unit Wales. It is broadly acknowledged that this system could focus more strongly on outcomes. There are current models in use that are more outcome focused and we will be looking to adopt this approach in future for all support services provided. We will be flexible about the mechanisms used to gather evidence, but will develop a national outcomes measurement framework for housing-related support'.

The context for Supporting People services in Wales is significantly different from that in England and Scotland, both because of specific decisions about Supporting People funding and the overall delivery and performance management of local government services. However, there has been considerable debate in England and Scotland about measuring the quality of housing-related support and about commissioning such services to ensure quality. It is therefore worth noting some of these differences.

What's happening elsewhere: England

Strategy

A national Supporting People strategy has been in place for some time which sets out these strategic priorities:

- keeping people that need services at the heart of the programme
- enhancing partnership with the Third Sector
- delivering in the new local government landscape
- increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy

Outcomes monitoring/measuring

Part of the implementation of the national strategy is the development of a Supporting People outcomes set which has five high level outcomes:

- achieve economic well-being
- enjoy and achieve
- be healthy
- stay safe
- make a positive contribution

Each of these is measured through a basket of indicators specifically related to independent living. A national system of collecting information requires providers to submit information about each service user who leaves Supporting People funded services. This national system of measuring outcomes sits alongside locally determined processes such as distance travelled tools developed by service providers.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs), which are put in place by each local authority, consist of a series of outcomes and national indicators. There are 198 national indicators, two of which refer to housing support, as well as others that refer to support of specific client groups. Each LAA is expected to include up to 35 national indicators in service areas targeted for improvement. The government monitors performance against the indicators through Comprehensive Area Assessments undertaken by the Audit Commission. To date, housing support indicators have not generally been prioritised within LAAs.

In addition, the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), which, although no longer mandatory, is written into many contracts, is a standard tool scoring service performance in:

- assessment and support planning
- security, health and safety
- safeguarding and protection from abuse
- fair access, diversity and inclusion
- client involvement and empowerment

The QAF has recently been reviewed to ensure that it is more flexible, offering providers the opportunity to provide evidence of excellence, rather than simply being a tick-box exercise.

Funding

There is one funding stream for Supporting People services, with all finance directed through local authorities and no tariff system.

The ring fence for Supporting People funding was removed in April 2009 and it now operates within the overall context of Local Area Agreements outlined above. A number of organisations have expressed concerns that removing the ring fence may reduce the resources directed to housing-related support and harm the expertise built up within local authority Supporting People teams. There is some evidence that this is beginning to happen. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into Supporting People services which will include the implications of the removal of the ring fence.

What's happening elsewhere: Scotland

In many ways, the context for Scotland's housing-related support services is similar to England, with the ring fence removed a year earlier than in England, in April 2008. Housing-related support services are seen as having an important role in delivering some of the 15 new national outcomes and 45 national indicators; there is no separate national indicator around housing support, although there is an indicator on care and support in the suite of local indicators that has been developed.

1.3 Study methodology

The study took a qualitative approach and had three main elements:

1. A web search, literature and positive practice review to identify relevant initiatives and projects and examples of positive practice outside Wales.
2. A survey of local authorities and housing-related support providers in Wales, analysis of the results and follow up of a series of practice examples. The survey sought to gather individual and organisational 'perceptions'. Those surveyed were asked to provide both organisational and personal views on a range of issues in relation to defining and measuring quality in housing-related support. Survey responses were received from seven local authorities and 30 support providers.
3. Interviews with national stakeholder organisations – the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, Community Housing Cymru, the Supporting People Information Network Co-ordinator and the Welsh Assembly Government. Again, these interviews focused on the views/perceptions of people in relation to the three areas of the study.

The study therefore gathered views from service commissioners, designers and deliverers. Some interesting contrasts and variations in views emerged. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of the questions asked of local authorities, support providers and national stakeholder organisations).

Although the study mainly relates to Supporting People Revenue Grant funded services, many of the issues raised are equally relevant to Supporting People Grant funded services and a number of the practice examples come from organisations that provide such services.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** – research findings and practice examples – practice examples come at the end of each sub-section and all have a weblink or contact for further information.
- **Chapter 3** – taking the agenda forward.
- **Bibliography** – providing useful reference material and resources for readers.
- **Appendix 1** – questionnaire surveys and stakeholder questions.

2. Research findings and practice examples

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings from the surveys and the stakeholder interviews and includes summary information about a range of practice examples. It is divided into three sections:

- defining quality
- measuring quality
 - how quality is currently measured
 - other methods of evaluating quality
 - comparing performance/outcomes
 - measuring quality in the future
- commissioning/procuring for quality

In order to adequately reflect the variety of views expressed, we have included appropriate quotes from respondents in relation to the three areas explored by the study.

2.2 Defining quality

*'We all know quality when we see it, and we certainly recognise the lack of it. But when applied to the complexity of organisational life, the term is often used too vaguely.'*³

All those participating in the study were asked for their personal views on the quality of housing-related support services as well as how their organisation defines quality. As can be seen, a wide variety of components of quality were identified. In addition, there were similarities and differences in responses between the personal and organisational views of those surveyed.

Local authorities

Respondents expressing their *personal views* identified a range of components of quality including:

- positive outcomes for service users such as independence, empowerment and making positive contributions to society
- services that meet the needs of service users and are responsive to their needs and provide some choice

However, these factors were balanced with other factors such as the strategic relevance of services, evidence of robust monitoring, review processes being in place and achieving value for money.

Two respondents identified compliance with Supporting People aims as an important component of quality, one noted that quality services contribute to wider policy and societal aims such as reduction of crime and social isolation and another that a quality service involves an element of added value, meeting the specialist needs of service users.

'On a strategic level, quality services should reduce homelessness, social isolation, crime and fear of crime, institutionalisation and unnecessary stays in hospitals and support independent living and qualify lifestyles for service users.'

'Quality services listen to service user's views and opinions to improve service delivery.'

Respondents identified that the way that their *organisation* defined quality in housing-related support services was focused significantly on the strategic context for such services, with important elements identified as:

- effective arrangements for planning and commissioning
- meeting identified needs and being strategically relevant
- achieving value for money
- services that are visibly efficient and reliable

³ Sam Matthews *The quality of organisations is hard to measure* Society Guardian online 26 June 2009 www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2009/jun/25/quality-voluntary-sector

- effective joint working
- compliance with service specifications and other commissioner requirements, and
- arrangements to ensure continuous improvement.

One respondent identified the SPIN commissioning principles as a quality assurance mechanism, while another noted that their authority identified quality standards in all contracts. A further respondent noted that their organisation did not currently have a clear definition of quality in relation to the housing-related support services it commissions.

'Quality services are those that are strategically planned to be needs led, cost effective, reliable, efficient and which complement existing care and other specialist support services.'

'A quality service is one that meets the aims of the commissioner and this would involve delivering the following opportunities/life chances to vulnerable clients:

- *promoting quality of life, independence and inclusion*
- *preventing homelessness and events leading to homelessness*
- *rebuilding lives*
- *promoting and enabling opportunity for independent living.'*

'A quality service is one that supports and empowers service users to achieve their independence and integrate into their local community.'

Housing-related support providers

Respondents expressing their *personal* views identified quality housing-related services as those which:

- enable service users to set their own goals and expectations and decide how the service will assist them to achieve them, rather than working towards someone else's expectations
- are based on a person-centred approach led by service user experiences
- are based around a robust assessment of need
- maximise control and opportunities for service users while emphasising their responsibilities
- take an holistic approach
- deliver outcomes about improved quality of life for service users, empowerment and positive contributions to society

It was felt that such services require well-trained staff, clear policies and procedures and clarity of aims, stable funding, and flexibility in delivery, innovation, partnership working, and monitoring and review to ensure continuous improvement.

'A quality service is one that enables clients to achieve outcomes that have a positive impact on their lives and opportunities and enhances their ability to become active participants in their communities.'

'A quality service is professional and provides value for money, is service-user focused, timely, focused on delivering good outcomes for users, covers all the needs of the individual and addresses complex overlapping needs.'

'Quality is the extent to which something is fit for its purpose.'

Respondents identified a number of ways in which their *organisation* defined quality in housing-related support services. A significant number noted that how the service users benefited from the service was central to a quality service, with quality defined as service user led services which are empowering, flexible, holistic, creative and innovative. In addition, the maintenance of a tenancy and/or access to housing of the service users' choice was felt to be an important indicator of a quality service from the organisational perspective.

A number of respondents noted that their organisation had a set of organisational aims structuring the way in which services are delivered, which has a role in delivering quality. Others talked about a whole systems approach to quality which encompassed a wide range of activity from management systems and processes to monitoring.

Monitoring and/or auditing services to ensure that they achieve quality were seen as important. A number of respondents also noted that their organisation had some basic measures of quality which were about harder outcomes.

'We define quality as to how well we achieve our purpose and core business.'

'Quality is about supporting the person, not only to maintain a home, but also to take on the role of valued community member and to do so as independently as possible.'

'Services that meet the needs of service users and local strategic objectives and have positive outcomes in line with service aims and individual goals.'

Stakeholder organisations

A variety of *personal* views were expressed by representatives of stakeholder organisations.

'My view differs from the service user perspective – it's about how services are configured, whether they are evidence-based and whether they are a positive match to local, regional and national strategies. This is different from the service user perspective which will be about how they are treated and whether their quality of life has improved and the provider perspective which is about whether they have a stable organisation, with well-trained staff ultimately though, it's about outcomes.'

'Quality is about the service having a clear vision of what it wants to achieve – not necessarily constrained by the SPRG specification. It is also about flexibility to meet the needs of the individual – again not necessarily constrained by the SPRG specification.'

'Supporting People is about independence – a measure of quality is how successful the service is at achieving this overall objective – this will mean different things for different people.'

'Quality is defined by the outcomes that the housing-related support service delivers.'

Stakeholders also identified the way in which their *organisation/network* defined quality in housing-related support.

'We measure quality through performance indicators, annual returns, data from inspections and Supporting People Operational Plans, visits to local authorities etc but there is no agreed view about what constitutes quality.'

Practice example 1: Defining a quality housing-related support service

As noted earlier, in England the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) originally developed for Supporting People services has been revised by Communities and Local Government in conjunction with SITRA. It can be used as a self-assessment tool or by someone independent from the organisation to assess the services provided. The revised QAF looks at the following areas of performance and sets out a number of standards for each:

- assessment and support planning
- security, health and safety
- safeguarding and protection from abuse
- fair access, diversity and inclusion
- client involvement and empowerment

Further information is available at

www.spkweb.org.uk/Subjects/Quality_and_monitoring/Quality+assessment+framework+-+revised

Practice example 2: Audit Commission characteristics of excellence in Supporting People services

The Supporting People key line of enquiry used by the Audit Commission to assess the management of the Supporting People programme by English local authorities considers the following to be components of an excellent service:

- service user involvement and participation
- evidenced and reported outcomes for service users
- demonstrable understanding of current needs
- strong and effective governance and partnership working
- constructive relationships with providers
- effective delivery, value for money and integration with other related services

Further information is available at

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/inspection/keylinesofenquiry/pages/supportingpeoplekloe.aspx

2.3 Measuring quality

*'The only way to provide an excellent service is to thoroughly understand what matters to your customers (purpose) and establish and use measures that help you continuously work towards that purpose.'*⁴

Participants in the study were asked about how quality is currently measured/monitored, other ways in which quality can be evaluated, the role of comparison/benchmarking and how quality might better be measured in the future. These four issues are explored in turn.

How quality is currently measured

Local authorities

Respondents identified a range of ways in which quality of housing-related support services is currently measured which included:

- quarterly monitoring of services against the service specification set by the Welsh Assembly Government
- assessments of strategic relevance of services
- annual reviews of services
- performance indicators
- joint reviews of services with community care

Such information is used in a variety of ways including to make decisions about decommissioning and commissioning services and reducing or increasing funding.

Housing-related support providers

Providers use a range of ways to collect information about the quality of their services. These include:

- service user and staff surveys
- service user interviews as part of annual reviews
- performance indicators – voids, turnover, complaints, tenancies maintained successfully, referrals, etc
- project checks
- staff supervision
- self-assessment of quality
- complaints
- partner and stakeholder questionnaires

⁴ Vanguard presentation to Cymorth Cymru conference, March 2008

The information collected is used to develop action plans to improve services, inform change and set future business plan objectives.

A small number of respondents noted the measurement of service outcomes, including use of the outcomes star (see below).

Stakeholder organisations

Representatives of stakeholder organisations noted that the only information that is consistently collected in relation to housing-related support services across Wales is the national performance indicators and that these have limited use. Local monitoring forms and review processes directly linked to the SPRG specification are also widely used but differ in detail.

Practice example 3: The outcomes star, a distance travelled technique

Solas (part of the Seren Group) use the outcomes monitoring star which is based on a model originally developed by St Mungo's for use with single homeless people. It is a way of identifying the distance the service users have travelled in relation to a number of factors while they are in receipt of a housing-related support service. It is based on the views of service users and staff and uses a numerical way of capturing these views.

Solas's outcomes monitoring system enables tracking of how people have developed while they are in receipt of services, in relation to a number of outcomes:

- personal responsibility
- living skills
- social networks
- substance misuse
- managing physical and mental health
- meaningful use of time/employability
- accommodation

For each of these aspects, a scale has been developed along which clients and their support workers can identify where the service user is at any one time. The system is used as part of the support planning process and the resulting data is captured by the SPriNT database.

The experience of Solas in developing the outcomes monitoring star was that clients found the process visually motivating and an easy way to measure progress in important aspects of their life while they access Solas services. Staff found that it allowed them to communicate differently with clients, gave them good insight into how effective key working was and a clearer understanding of what aspects of client need should be the focus of key working.

Solas Cymru have produced a CD rom about how they developed the outcomes monitoring star - further information is available from www.solas-cymru.co.uk

A number of organisations across Wales are now either using, or considering using, a version of the outcomes monitoring star. Some developments have involved groups of organisations, eg in Cardiff, a number of organisations delivering tenancy support services are using an agreed form of the outcomes star.

The introduction to the toolkit on the outcomes star developed by Solas notes that it will not be appropriate for all organisations. It also notes that the range of organisations that provide housing-related support services is diverse. Each has different values and strategic priorities and provides a unique combination of services and projects. Therefore what suits Solas is not likely to suit another organisation without at least some adaptation. In many instances, significant adaptation will be needed. Nevertheless, the outcomes star is flexible and can be adapted easily to suit different client groups.

The use of distance travelled methodologies for measuring outcomes from Supporting People funded services has been explored in Scotland with a pilot involving 31 providers which finished in March 2008. The interim evaluation of the pilot raised a number of issues including:

- not all service users enjoyed using this method
- it was less applicable to service users where the primary aim of housing-related support is to maintain the status quo, eg services to older people
- inconsistency in gathering information meant that the Outcomes Framework could not be used to compare different services

The full report from the pilot is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/231399/0063114.pdf

Practice example 4: Distance travelled as one of a range of techniques

Llamau also uses a distance travelled method of monitoring which is considered alongside quantitative data about the number and complexity of users' support needs, disclosed during the support process and addressed during their stay with the organisation. The following are monitored when service users first access a Llamau service, during their stay and when they leave:

- I feel confident setting up my own flat/home
- I am able to budget my money
- I feel in control and do not let others take advantage of me
- I am able to find my way around my local area and access local services
- I feel good about myself

In addition, the monitoring identifies the impact that support has on reducing/ceasing or improving the service user's ability to manage key support issues:

- drug issues
- alcohol issues
- offending behaviour

- mental Health issues
- learning difficulties/disabilities

The results from the distance travelled technique are considered alongside:

- comprehensive monitoring information of every project's aims, objectives and outcomes
- quantitative monitoring of the number and complexity of support needs that service users present with and disclose during their stay with the organisation
- a 360 degree evaluation of the whole organisation which incorporates the views and opinions of service users, stakeholders and staff

Further information: www.llamau.org.uk

Practice example 5: A quality of life approach

Perthyn has developed a quality of life process to enable the organisation to focus on supporting people to develop valued roles within their community. It is based around John O'Brian's Service Accomplishments for people with learning difficulties:

- Valued Community Presence - by having and maintaining a tenancy the person is able to live in an ordinary house/flat within natural centres of population.
- Competence - the person is able to carry out the functions necessary to maintain their tenancy as independently as possible.
- Support is provided in areas that that the tenant is unable to manage themselves.
- Choice - the person has been able to make an informed choice about where they live and with whom. The person has a clearly defined role in choosing, or having a say in, who supports him/her.
- Individuality - the physical design and location of the property meets the person's physical, clinical and social needs.
- Status and Respect - the quality and level of maintenance of the property and its surroundings promote a valued image of the tenant.
- Continuity - the person is supported to maintain important links from his/her previous community when he/she moves into the house, or similarly if he/she plans to move elsewhere.
- Relationships - the person has positive relationships with co-tenants, neighbours and others in the vicinity. As far as possible the person is seen as a community member, not as a 'person in care'.

Further information: John Gilkes, email john@perthyn.org.uk

Practice example 6: Identifying outcomes from floating support

Torfaen Floating Support comprises 232 units of support that can be delivered to a vulnerable person in their own home or place of safety by a number of organisations including Torfaen Mind, Gofal Cymru, Women's Aid, Hafan Cymru (formerly known as Tai Hafan), Age Concern, Trothwy Cyf and the Council's own Temporary Accommodation Floating Support Service. During 2008, the service supported 513 people.

A number of outcomes are measured in relation to each service user. While some of them are processes such as enabling access to relevant services such as health, education etc, others are clearly outcomes, including:

- decrease in hospital admissions/medication
- decrease in alcohol/substance misuse
- increase in income
- reduced debt
- positive outcomes from court proceedings
- accessing employment or voluntary work

Further information: Gwent Supporting People newsletter, July 2009

www.torfaen.gov.uk/Housing/SupportedandShelteredHousing/SupportingPeople1/SPGwentNewsletter.aspx or contact Torfaen Supporting People direct on 01495 766949 or Supporting.People@torfaen.gov.uk

Other methods of evaluating quality

Local authorities

Three of the seven authorities that responded to the survey are developing soft outcomes monitoring systems, with one developing the use of the outcomes star. Other mechanisms identified included quarterly reviews of projects supported by a review pack which sets out the standards expected of providers, a quality assessment framework against which projects could be monitored against and monthly meetings with providers.

Housing-related support providers

Providers identified a wide range of mechanisms by which quality can be evaluated:

- internal audit
- internal reviews
- external reviews by Supporting People team, housing associations, Welsh Assembly Government or consultants employed to undertake this role
- questionnaires, house meetings and service user forums to seek service user views
- groups whose role is to monitor performance, eg sub-committees
- support/supervision, staff and team meetings and annual staff appraisal

- informal networking with other providers to compare information
- established accreditation models such as PQASSO, Code of Practice for housing-related support providers and Investors in People

A number of respondents noted that their organisation had the provision of quality services as one of its values and so a whole range of systems and processes were in place to support this.

Practice example 7: Externally accredited methods of evaluating quality

Caer Las uses the **PQASSO** (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) quality assurance system. The system is based on self-assessment built around 12 topics or quality areas:

1. planning
2. governance
3. leadership and management
4. user-centred service
5. managing people
6. learning and development
7. managing money
8. managing resources
9. communications and promotion
10. working with others
11. monitoring and evaluation
12. results

PQASSO is suitable for small, medium or large voluntary and community organisations, or for project teams in very large organisations.

Further information about the PQASSO model is available at www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=42

CAIS uses the **European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model** which is a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria. Five of these are 'Enablers' (Leadership, Policy and Strategy, People, Partnerships and Resources and Processes) and four are 'Results' (Performance, Customers, People and Society). The 'Enabler' criteria cover what an organisation does. The 'Results' criteria cover what an organisation achieves.

Further information available at www.walesqualitycentre.org.uk

The Centre for Housing and Support (formerly known as the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies) has developed a **Code of Practice for Housing-related Support Services** which is a quality standard encompassing services eligible for Supporting People funding including building-based services, hub and spoke models of provision and floating support services to any vulnerable client group in any setting regardless of tenure (including extra-care). Originally developed for sheltered housing, it now comprises ten standards associated with providing professional, person-centred housing-related support services:

1. service delivery, review and continuous improvement
2. policy and legislation
3. access, equality and diversity
4. rights and responsibilities
5. confidentiality, privacy and information sharing
6. independence and empowerment
7. professional role and responsibilities
8. collaboration and community development
9. staff recruitment, training and support
10. physical environment (to be completed in relation to any building-based support service)

The process of working towards the code normally takes between 12 – 18 months, and enables those who provide these services to vulnerable clients to benchmark their service delivery against nationally agreed standards. Further information: www.cshs.co.uk

Practice example 8: An organisation-wide quality of service monitoring system

Cartrefi Cymru has established a quality of service monitoring system based around monthly, quarterly, six-monthly and annual self-assessments of service delivery by service managers and their teams. The reports are structured around a scoring grid which is collated in a spreadsheet format and the data used to evaluate performance against several company key performance indicators. The issues assessed vary according to the time period concerned.

Further information: www.enquiries@cartreficymru.org

Practice example 9: Service user involvement

The City and County of Swansea's Supporting People and Homelessness Strategy Teams have established a service user involvement framework called **Join In** which supports service users to have a voice in the day to day running of their individual services as well as ensuring that their views feed into the planning of services across the city. The framework has five elements:

- An annual monitoring questionnaire for service providers about the service user consultation they have undertaken and the issues and views put forward by service users.
- Five service user focus groups hosted by the local authority and attended by service users independently of providers: mental health, older persons, young people, women, and single homelessness. They meet annually to consider what impact the service user involvement framework is having on service user involvement and to discuss their views about services.
- A charter of rights and service standards established and agreed by service users and providers across the city. There are two versions – one for advice agencies and one for services funded by Supporting People Revenue Grant.
- A resource pack for providers with materials that can be adapted to encourage the development of service user consultation.
- A regular community service user consultation group meets monthly to gather views and feedback on national strategies, eg Welsh Assembly Government 10-year homelessness plan, health & homelessness standards, national supported housing strategy, as well as local strategies and services. The group has also produced a leaflet to recruit new members and has undertaken training which allowed them to facilitate the five focus groups.

Outcomes to date include improvements to services from individual service providers and an increase in the focus on service user priorities in planning and improving services. In addition, a DVD was produced in 2008 outlining the principles and advantages of effective service user consultation.

Further information: Martin Whatty, martin.whatty@swansea.gov.uk.

Comparing performance/outcomes

Local authorities

Three of the seven respondents did not compare the performance of housing-related support services they commissioned. Three noted that they compared performance information, one that outcomes were shared informally through identifying good practice and one that information was compared between Supporting People teams.

'Comparisons are only made in so far as how the organisations work in partnership with the council, the feedback from service users and the outcomes of reviews.'

Housing-related support providers

Half of the respondents noted that they benchmark informally through good practice, Supporting People forums or relationships with other providers. These comparisons mainly focus on quantitative information.

Many respondents had tried comparison but had found it difficult to identify sufficient meaningful data to make it worthwhile. A number noted that if a national system was in place, it would be beneficial to providers. However, some respondents felt that benchmarking is inappropriate for housing-related support because individual projects are very different.

'We compare results where we can and we also ask our stakeholders how we compare to other organisations.'

'We do not currently engage in a systematic or developed process of comparative analysis or benchmarking ...this may be a result of a number of factors, not least the lack of any nationally developed process, system or partnership to examine these issues..... We are subject to comparative analysis from commissioners, but this is more to do with cost.'

'Trying to find a similar service against which we can benchmark has proved difficult.'

'We regard each project as different and each to be judged on its own merits.'

Stakeholder organisations

Representatives of stakeholder organisations noted that benchmarking and peer review are useful and important processes, but that factors such as tendering can militate against it. It was also felt important for providers and local authorities to be able to select their own peer groups so that appropriate comparisons are made. The more providers can influence the comparators the better, as they need to be comfortable with them.

It was felt that comparisons should be used to investigate the processes that are in place and disseminate effective practice. Comparative information should inform the Supporting People team about areas for further investigation but should not be the basis for any decisions to withdraw funding. Comparative information can only be one factor in commissioning/procurement decisions.

Practice example 10: Benchmarking

HouseMark have worked with SITRA for 5 years to provide a benchmarking service for support providers. In 2008, 1,965 services - delivered by 120 providers representing a total of around 65,000 service users - submitted data.

The service provides participants with information about average costs per support hour for staff and other costs analysed by different primary client groups, service types and the degree of cover normally provided within the service. It also provides information about average QAF scores for each category of analysis to enable organisations to put information about service costs alongside their quality assessment.

Further information is available at www.sitra.org.uk/index.php?id=897

Trothwy gathers performance data and statistics, including outcome data, on a quarterly basis. The organisation has made significant efforts to establish benchmark data by which the organisation is able to make comparisons. The shortage of data in Wales means that it relies heavily on data from similar organisations in England.

Trothwy considers that benchmarking is a critical aspect of measuring performance, both internally and externally, and to do this effectively there is a need to establish agreed standards and criteria.

Further information: www.trothwy.com

Measuring quality in the future

Local authorities

Most respondents identified a greater role for softer outcome measures in assessing quality along with more meaningful performance indicators. One respondent suggested that a national system should be created to enable improved measurement of quality. More input from frontline staff and service users was felt to be important in improving quality measurement, as was the sharing of information between Supporting People teams.

'By moving to a more outcome-based approach, quality could be better measured.'

'We need to measure the long-term outcomes of support in a way that is not too onerous for organisations and the council.'

Housing-related support providers

Respondents emphasised the importance of measuring soft outcomes and moving away from the current focus on quantitative information. Other issues raised included improving the focus on individuals/service users, the development of standards against which to benchmark and whether it was possible to identify savings to other sectors from the provision of housing-related support.

Some organisations felt that it would be inappropriate to try and develop a framework for measuring quality as it is simply not possible and is necessarily subjective.

'We have entered into a Knowledge Transfer Partnership to increase the resources available to us to develop our monitoring.'

'Effectiveness is entirely in the context of the nature of the project. A true reflection of effectiveness is a combination of the measurement of soft outcomes supplemented by a contextual narrative.'

Stakeholder organisations

Representatives of stakeholders noted the following:

- Wales is currently gathering information for its own sake, not for making decisions, eg the national performance indicators.
- The strategic relevance of housing-related support services should be assessed through homelessness, community safety and domestic abuse forums and strategy processes based on an evidence base, including needs mapping information.
- Monitoring the recommendations from inspection has a role to play, but there is a need to target inspection effectively.
- The quality of outcomes achieved needs to be monitored against the purpose of individual projects – the purpose can then be mapped against the strategic objectives of local authorities which may include independence, health and well-being, employment/meaningful use of time and community safety.
- Quality needs to be measured at an individual scale/level as far as possible, but this needs to be linked to the local authority/national level.

- There are two different levels of activity – outward-facing systems such as internal audit, practical outcomes, quality assurance systems etc, and quality assurance systems which are more focused on working with tenants which do not interface with national strategic targets. These are two separate tasks and trying to mix them is difficult.
- Quantitative and qualitative data are needed but any system of measuring quality needs to be proportionate, given the limited capacity within Supporting People teams.
- Meaningful performance indicators are needed which are contingent on a non-adversarial relationship between local authorities and providers.

Practice example 11: Worcestershire outcomes framework

The Worcestershire Supporting People Partnership has developed an outcomes model for the services it commissions. Three levels of outcomes have been defined:

- Strategic outcomes as set out in the Supporting People five year strategy – which are to prevent or limit: homelessness and repeat homelessness, re-offending, the longer-term need for people to access adult social care services, the need for people to access primary health care, and social exclusion.
- Service level outcomes – enjoying and achieving, being healthy, safety and security, social and civic partnership, economic well-being.
- Service user level outcomes – softer outcomes that link strategic and service level outcomes, – initially identified by providers, but subsequently by service users.

Further information is available at <http://worcestershire.whub.org.uk/home/wcc-social-sp-usefullinksprov>

Practice example 12: Piloting an outcomes framework for Wales

The Supporting People Information Network and Cymorth Cymru have been considering what an outcomes framework for housing-related support services might look like. Representatives from the network and Cymorth have looked at what organisations are doing and considered the Welsh context for Supporting People services. A brief questionnaire was also circulated within the network to identify the level of support for developing an agreed set of outcomes. The results indicated that some authorities consider that outcomes measures should have more than one purpose, ie measuring the performance of providers/Supporting People Services and the journey of individuals, as well as aiding commissioning and proving the strategic relevance of services.

A draft framework has been developed, in partnership with Cymorth Cymru board members, comprising 11 core outcomes which it is intended to pilot with 15 authorities from October 2009 to April 2010. The outcomes to be piloted are as follows:

- the project is promoting personal and community safety

People are:

- feeling safe
- contributing to the safety and well-being of themselves and of others

- the project is promoting independence and control

People are:

- managing accommodation
- managing relationships
- feeling part of the community

- the project is promoting economic progress and financial control

People are:

- managing money
- engaging in education/learning
- engaged in employment/voluntary work

- the project is promoting health and well-being

People are:

- physically healthy
- mentally healthy
- leading a healthy and active lifestyle.

An outcomes delivery group has been established to co-ordinate this work and will report to the Welsh Assembly Government so as to influence any future framework.

Further information: Chris Price, chris.price@swansea.gov.uk or Joy Kent, joykent@cymorthcymru.org.uk

2.4 Commissioning/procuring for quality

*'Commissioning means securing the services that most appropriately address the needs and wishes of the individual service user, making use of market intelligence and research, and planning accordingly. Put succinctly, it is about effectiveness. This focuses upon outcomes and outcomes and outcome-based management.'*⁵

Respondents were asked how commissioning/procurement can promote and achieve the provision of quality housing-related support services.

Local authorities

Respondents made a range of comments including:

- putting quality at the core of the commissioning process
- making use of the SPIN commissioning principles
- recognising that partnership is an important component of commissioning
- possibly establishing a benchmark of costs for services so that commissioning can then focus on quality

⁵ Definition of commissioning used by the Institute of Commissioning Professionals

Other factors noted as important were the use of specialist knowledge of providers/frontline staff in the process, service specifications to measure quality compliance, working with the finance department during the process, having a robust system in place, the value of regional working, contractual monitoring/reviews, feedback from service users and stakeholders and ensuring a transparent process.

Other factors identified by individual respondents were building a healthy market, helping providers develop within the Supporting People market, and the desirability of a more prescriptive service specification.

'Quality will be enhanced through transparent tendering processes that focus on quality of services and do not compromise the service for the sake of cost.'

Housing-related support providers

The issues most commonly identified as affecting quality were:

- individuals being at the centre of the process
- a transparent process with feedback
- local authorities to be clear about what they want
- quality rather than cost being the competitive element
- joint working across commissioning (social care and health, etc)
- knowledgeable commissioners
- minimum bureaucracy
- flexibility in delivery
- recognition of soft outcomes, such as distance travelled, within the process rather than focusing on outputs
- commissioners not being involved in service design
- a non-prescriptive approach

'There are serious concerns about the value for money procurement agenda and where quality sits within this context.'

'Commissioners need to be less prescriptive and allow flexibility in delivery within an agreed price.'

Other issues raised were striking a balance between new providers and existing trusted ones, longer funding periods/adequate funding, incorporating the personalisation agenda, commissioning holistically and using a non-stakeholder as part of the process. Only one respondent wanted to abolish tendering altogether.

'There needs to be recognition of individual service users' starting points and "miles travelled" as well as the measurement of crude data, eg tenancies created and sustained.'

'There is still no transparency as to how local authorities procure and commission and providers are not made aware of practices that can prevent them from providing services until it is too late.'

Stakeholder organisations

Representatives of stakeholder organisations identified the following issues:

- Organisations need to be 'clever commissioners', with significant expertise and a strong steer on strategic objectives linked to needs mapping, thereby delivering evidence-based commissioning.
- Commissioners can learn from health and other areas. The Communities and Local Government/Care Services Improvement Partnership/Integrated Care Network 2008 publication **Commissioning housing support for health and well-being** was identified as an example.
- Organisations need to be aware of local political motivations which can be more important in commissioning than evidence of need.
- 'Bad' organisations in relation to commissioning/procurement have only a cost focus while 'good organisations' talk to providers.
- Commissioning is an art with a scientific base and should be a consultative process.

Practice example 13: Supporting People Commissioning and Procurement Principles

The commissioning and procurement of supported accommodation and housing-related support services need to be based on wide-ranging, diverse and often complex factors. The Supporting People Commissioning and Procurement Principles have been jointly developed by Supporting People Teams across Wales and are supported by the all-Wales Supporting People Information Network. The principles reflect values that guide the commissioning and procuring of supported accommodation and housing-related support services in Wales.

They are available at www.ssiacymru.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1109

Practice example 14: Cross authority working to enhance procurement

The Supporting People Teams in Blaenau Gwent CBC, Caerphilly CBC, Monmouthshire CC, Newport CC and Torfaen CBC have been working in partnership since the inception of the Supporting People programme in 2003. The partnership assesses the regional need for housing-related support services, delivers effective solutions to meet the gaps in service provision, simplifies the requirements of service providers (eg by developing common reporting mechanisms) and ultimately aims to benefit individual service users.

In 2008, a Regional Planning Group was established to formally identify services which could most effectively be delivered regionally or jointly between authorities. This enables better assessment of the need for services and creates cross-authority working arrangements to meet them.

Across Gwent, the teams are jointly looking at addressing the needs of client groups who are transient, have chaotic lifestyles or have complex and/or multiple needs. There are also benefits to the range of services which can be offered by jointly planning services where there is not a sufficient level of need in a single local authority, or where the number of units of support required would not be sufficient to establish a viable service. The Supporting People pot of funding is limited, so by pooling finance across two or more authorities, services can be provided which may not have been possible otherwise. Examples include those for prolific and priority offenders.

Further information: Jenny Prince, 01633 857 550, jenny.prince@newport.gov.uk

Practice example 15: Joint commissioning with social care

For services that are jointly funded by Supporting People and Community Care, the Vale of Glamorgan Council carries out joint commissioning exercises. Practitioners from Supporting People, social workers in the relevant team and a service user representative make up the majority of the appointment board, alongside the head of service. This means that people who work with service users can ensure that the most appropriate services are commissioned and service users' opinions are taken into account.

Further information: Pam Toms, PToms@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Practice example 16: Partnership for Excellence

Cymorth Cymru in partnership with ARC Wales, Community Housing Cymru, Learning Disability Wales, Unison and WCVA are working on a Partnership for Excellence (P4E) project, which aims to promote:

'A Made in Wales approach to the commissioning and provision of services to vulnerable people which is collaborative, ethical and achieves quality and value by making best use of the Welsh pound.' The three principles that P4E members believe should underpin commissioning are:

- respecting the citizen
- investing in communities
- strengthening the Welsh nation.

The principles are also aligned with those underpinning sustainable procurement which focuses on beneficial outcomes around environmental, economic and social sustainability, and relational commissioning which breaks down the provider/purchaser divide in order to create more effective, citizen- focused services.

Further information: Cymorth Cymru, www.cymorthcymru.org.uk

Practice example 17: Outcomes-based commissioning

Northamptonshire Supporting People (a regional Supporting People champion) has undertaken work to link outcomes to commissioning. Practical mechanisms to make this happen include:

- in specifying services, move towards what we want to achieve, not how this is to be done
- build outcomes into the scoring system used to assess proposals (50% cost, 50% outcomes and process – or even braver!)
- test ability to manage outcomes-based service provision – including service user involvement
- build in flexibility and allow continuous revisions
- seek feedback from service users, stakeholders and service providers

Further information:

www.spkweb.org.uk/NR/rdoonlyres/3850FC56-55E0-4B81-B202-EC43729F72BD/14317/OutcomesbasedcommissioningPerformanceMonitoring.ppt

3 Emerging issues

3.1 Themes

The responses to the survey and stakeholder interviews indicate that there is a wide range of views about what constitutes quality in housing-related support, how it might be measured and how commissioning/procurement can support quality. However, there are various common threads:

- Possible tension between definitions of quality which are focused on the service user and those which prioritise strategic and organisational factors.
- Significant agreement that the existing methods of data collection at a national level, including national performance indicators, are not satisfactory and have little part to play in supporting quality services. (As noted in section 1, the draft housing-related support strategy identifies this as an issue to be tackled.)
- A range of ways in which organisations ensure, assure and evaluate the quality of services, including quality assurance and accreditation systems, management processes and systems, and internal and external reviews, as well as monitoring.
- A desire to improve the way in which quality is identified and measured, with significant effort being invested into developing ideas at local, regional and national levels.
- Recognition that soft outcomes (ie those associated with service user views and experiences) have an important part to play in assessing the quality of services, in line with the citizen-centred model of service delivery.
- Different opinions on whether and how comparisons or benchmarking between organisations have a role to play.
- Significant potential for commissioning/procurement processes to support quality services and outcomes.

3.2 HouseMark Cymru and Cymorth Cymru views

HouseMark Cymru

How important are definitions?

This research has demonstrated the subjective nature of definitions of quality. It is beyond the scope of the report to answer issues on the impact of definitions and perceptions upon the nature and quality of services actually delivered. However, the research does suggest that further debate is needed to determine whether or not there is a need for clear definitions of quality that resonate with providers, service users and commissioners?

Understanding methods and what works best

The report has attempted to describe the range of methods employed by commissioners and providers of services to identify quality. There is currently no assessment of which methods or combination of methods better capture the evidence about the quality of housing-related support services. Nor is there an assessment of which of these methods best assesses quality from the perspective of:

- customers
- commissioning organisations and funders
- service providers

It could be argued that an assessment of the best ways of measuring different aspects of quality would be inappropriate because it could lead to the use of overly prescriptive approaches, which may in turn stifle creativity.

Benchmarking

For five years, HouseMark has worked in partnership with SITRA, NHF and IPF to deliver a Supporting People benchmarking service.

Data is collected annually so that participants are able to compare a range of services with similar ones operated by other providers against standard measures - cost, financial performance, outputs, outcomes, quality and user satisfaction. For some however, benchmarking alone does not provide all the information needed to determine service quality.

Service user involvement

As we have seen from a range of practice examples and in the emerging issues section of this report, finding ways to measure what service users need and want, ie soft outcomes, is an important aspect of defining quality.

From a general social housing perspective, the objective of service user involvement is to ensure that tenants are able to influence service design, hold their landlord to account on their performance and help landlords to deliver better services. Social housing providers should now be able to demonstrate that responding to residents' views runs through all their activities, as part of their culture. This is particularly important for social housing tenants who, generally speaking, are not able to take their custom elsewhere.

Without a doubt, the challenges to delivering quality in supported housing services will be different to those in general or older persons housing. There is nevertheless a 'not to be missed' opportunity to debate the role of service user involvement in the design and monitoring of housing-related support.

In particular, thought should be given to enabling service users to:

- define what is important to them
- express preferences about the shape of services, including the setting of standards
- monitor performance and hold the provider to account.

This perspective runs through the use of the QAF to assess and demonstrate the quality of services. Service user participation is also a key characteristic of the Audit Commission view of an excellent Supporting People service.

Evidencing a national picture of quality

The research has shown the absence of national indicators to support robust assessment of quality by supported housing providers across Wales. This issue is picked up in the next section of the report on issues for the Welsh Assembly Government.

When considering how and if this 'gap' should be addressed by the regulator, a number of issues are worth exploring, ie:

- Do we need to re-invent the wheel? - ie are there any approaches such as those discussed in the research that can be used to 'fill the gap'?
- How do we avoid making the same mistakes? ie what approaches could be used that do not rely on straitjacket performance indicators, but on flexible evidencing which can also provide an overall national view?
- Could a clear set of national standards be developed? ie standards that could require commitments to be made to demonstrate value for money, through to commitments to provide impact assessments for each service user.

What is being suggested here is only a starting point, intended to help stimulate debate. Clearly as part of this debate, the administrative burden placed upon organisations in demonstrating compliance with national standards would also need careful consideration.

Sharing good practice

HouseMark has over 10 years experience in identifying, investigating and publishing good practice in relation to social housing. The collection and sharing of good practice is a key ingredient in helping organisations to continually improve. HouseMark would recommend that the same approach to collecting good practice in a central repository should apply to housing-related support.

Cymorth Cymru

In its 2008 think piece paper **Addressing support, accommodation and care needs in Wales**, Cymorth Cymru said this about measuring quality in housing-related support:

'Assessing outcomes for individuals with complex needs is a challenge. Wherever performance indicators are used, there is always the risk that information gathering will skew organisational behaviour towards the needs of those implementing the indicators and away from the citizen; this is especially the case with services that are people-centred and where qualitative, rather than quantitative, data gives a truer picture of the complexity of outcomes achieved for people with multiple needs.'

As is evidenced in this report, at a local level, individual providers of housing-related support, homelessness and care services have developed various methods of monitoring the outcomes of what they do – to establish for themselves and/or for commissioners and regulators how effective they are.

Key questions about measuring quality in housing-related support include:

- Can a system of outcome monitoring be developed that doesn't skew behaviour away from the needs of the user?
- How can we assess the contribution that services make to national agendas/priorities when the outcomes are felt in other areas of public service delivery (eg impact on health, community safety, etc)?
- Should we judge the quality of services or should we ensure that users are able to do so?
- How do we effectively measure progress made by individuals accessing services?
- Can outcomes monitoring demonstrate value for money?
- Who should be comparing the performance of different organisations/services and why?
- Do we need the information collected in the same way by all organisations providing housing-related support to be held centrally, and is this achievable?

It is crucial that providers can evaluate the quality of their services and evidence the value of what they do, but we need to be clear about what information needs to be collected, at what level and why.

Different approaches are needed for different types of information and purposes as well as to meet the different needs and wishes of clients. Board members need to know that their organisation is meeting the needs of their clients and commissioners need to know that their money is being spent wisely. Politicians and policy makers need to be able to compare one funding programme with another to assess how they are contributing to the objectives they have set.

A range of information gathering techniques including research, locally determined monitoring techniques and benchmarking can all help to provide a fuller picture, but the starting point must be clarity on what information we want at what level, why we want it and what we intend to do with it - if we are to match the right approach to the evidence base we are trying to establish. If we aren't clear on this, the information gathered will not be robust and decisions based on it will be flawed.

Services that are arranged around a support (and/or care) plan are able to put the citizen at the centre of service design and delivery. Some data collection techniques undermine this, and can result in the organisation being under pressure to move away from meeting the needs of citizens to meeting the requirements of commissioners or regulators who aren't best placed to know what individuals need. We should trust the citizens using services to know what they need, help provider organisations to develop effective ways to find this out and ensure commissioning and regulation does not pressure providers to move away from their primary aim of helping clients build as independent and positive lives as possible. If we truly believe in citizen-centred services, this is the only outcome that matters.

Cymorth Cymru is currently working with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Supporting People Information Network to develop an outcomes framework that it hopes will help providers and commissioners develop a tool for assessing the effectiveness of services from the perspective of service users, and the outcomes they have achieved as a result (see practice example 12).

3.3 Issues for consideration by commissioning organisations, housing-related support providers and the Welsh Assembly Government

This section considers a number of policy and practice issues which HouseMark has identified from this piece of work. It is by no means exhaustive and is intended to contribute to the ongoing debate about how improvements can be made in each of the three areas covered by the study.

Welsh Assembly Government

- In the final version of the housing-related support strategy, the Welsh Assembly Government should clearly set out strategic objectives for Supporting People funded services.
- The Welsh Assembly Government should review its data collection and monitoring requirements in relation to housing-related support services and consider ending any activity where the information is not used to support quality services.
- In deciding what data to collect in future, the Welsh Assembly Government should carefully consider what techniques are best placed to:
 - assess the contribution that housing-related support services make to national agendas/priorities
 - judge the quality of housing-related support services
 - assess value for money of services
 - compare the performance of different organisations/services, and
 - what information is appropriate to be collected in the same way by all organisations providing housing-related support services.

It may be appropriate to differentiate between methods used to identify outcomes at strategic level, service level and service user level. The most appropriate way to generate the range of information that is required for a range of reasons and to suit a range of organisational needs is likely to use a combination of techniques (such as practice example 4), rather than a single technique.

- In line with the Essex Review, the Welsh Assembly Government should review its approach to inspection of housing-related support services to ensure that it is sufficiently strategic and proportionate, and that activity is targeted where it is needed most and supports the greatest improvement in service quality. This will require the development of an agreed self-assessment framework and triggers for inspection as well as other forms of regulatory response from the Welsh Assembly Government.

- The Welsh Assembly Government should not be prescriptive about how housing-related support providers undertake the measurement of the outcomes of housing-related support services.

Local authorities and housing-related support providers

- should consider the examples provided in this report and practice more broadly to inform the development of their approaches to measuring quality in housing-related support
- work together to develop locally appropriate methods for identifying and measuring the quality of housing-related support services
- use appropriate techniques to measure outcomes at strategic, service and service user levels
- consider when and how comparison between services/the outcomes of services might appropriately be undertaken and what infrastructure is needed to support this
- ensure commissioning/procurement processes support, not undermine, quality in housing-related support services through:
 - putting the service user at the centre of the process in line with the citizen-centred model of public services
 - using the knowledge gained through measuring the outcomes of housing-related support services to inform specifications
 - transparent processes
 - taking a partnership approach
 - considering quality of service is sufficiently weighted within procurement processes

Local authorities should review their requirements in relation to data collection and monitoring of housing-related support services and consider ceasing any activity where the information does not support the delivery of quality services. The piloting of an outcomes framework for monitoring housing-related support services provides a useful opportunity for all local authorities to review their data collection and monitoring requirements to ensure they are proportionate, appropriate and contribute to quality services.

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Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies – **Code of practice for housing-related support**
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Appendix 1

Questionnaire surveys and stakeholder questions

Questionnaire for Cymorth Cymru members

1. In your personal opinion, what is a *quality* service in housing-related support and how can it be achieved?
2. How does your organisation describe/define *quality* in relation to the housing-related support services it provides?
3. What performance/monitoring information does your organisation currently collect in relation to the quality of housing-related support services and what happens to the information/how is it used?
4. Does your organisation use any other ways to evaluate the quality or measure the outcomes of its housing-related support services? If so, please describe briefly.
5. Does your organisation compare its performance/outcomes with other organisations? If so, how is this done (eg through benchmarking)?
6. Do you have any views as to how the effectiveness of measuring performance/outcomes/quality of housing-related services might be improved in the future?
7. Is anything being done within your organisation at the moment to improve how performance/outcomes/quality is measured?
8. How do you think that housing-related support services can be commissioned/ procured to promote and achieve quality?
9. Please provide examples of effective practice that you feel demonstrate and promote *quality* in housing-related support. This doesn't need to be in great detail; we can follow this up later in the project.

Questionnaire for Supporting People Information Network members

1. In your personal opinion, what is a *quality* service in housing-related support and how can it be achieved?
2. How does your organisation describe/define *quality* in relation to the housing-related support services it commissions?
3. What performance/monitoring information does your organisation currently collect in relation to the quality of housing-related support services it commissions and what happens to the information/how is it used?
4. Does your organisation use any other ways to evaluate the quality or measure the outcomes of the housing-related support services it commissions? If so, please describe briefly.
5. Does your organisation compare the performance/outcomes of the various housing-related services it commissions? If so, with which other organisations?

6. Do you have any views as to how the effectiveness of measuring performance/outcomes/quality of housing-related services might be improved in the future?
7. Is anything being done within your organisation at the moment to improve how performance/outcomes/quality is measured?
8. How do you think that housing-related support services can be commissioned/ procured to promote and achieve quality?
9. Please provide examples of effective practice that you feel demonstrate and promote *quality* in housing-related support. This doesn't need to be in great detail; we can follow this up later in the project.

Questions for national stakeholders

1. How would you personally define quality in relation to housing-related support services? (if you want to consider different aspects of housing-related support separately, eg assessment, support planning, risk management, customer service, outcomes etc, please do so)
2. Does the organisation/network you represent have a view on what defines quality in housing-related support services?
3. How do you personally think that quality can effectively be measured?
4. Does the organisation/network you represent currently collect any monitoring/ performance information about the quality of housing-related support services and, if so, what happens to the information/how is it used?
5.
 - a) what are your personal views about comparing information about the performance/quality/outcomes of housing-related support between organisations?
 - b) what is the position of the organisation/network you represent on the comparison of performance/quality/outcomes between organisations?
6. Do you personally have any views as to how the effectiveness of measuring performance/outcomes/quality of housing-related services might be improved in the future?
7. Is the organisation/network you represent currently doing anything to improve how the performance/outcomes/quality of housing-related services is measured?
8. How do you personally think that housing-related support services can be commissioned/procured to promote and achieve quality?
9. Are you aware of any examples of how this has been done in practice?
10. Any other issues that you would like to raise?

Further information

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www.housemark.co.uk or call 024 7646 0500.

HouseMark, 8 Riley Court, Millburn Hill Road,
University of Warwick Science Park, Coventry CV4 7HP.



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