

Supporting People Inspection Report

December 2007



Supporting People

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

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Supporting People Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. Supporting People inspections are carried out with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Supporting People is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing-related support services which help vulnerable people live independently.

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG), and the probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (ALA). Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

Administering local authorities work in partnership, with districts where this is relevant, to agree Supporting People strategies and delivery mechanisms for housing related support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service providers. Negotiation and consultation is also required with service users, all housing and support service providers, other statutory service providers, the private sector and voluntary organisations to plan and commission support services to meet identified needs.

The former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)¹ has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local authorities and their partners will need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: www.spkweb.org.uk.

¹ Now Communities and Local Government (CLG).

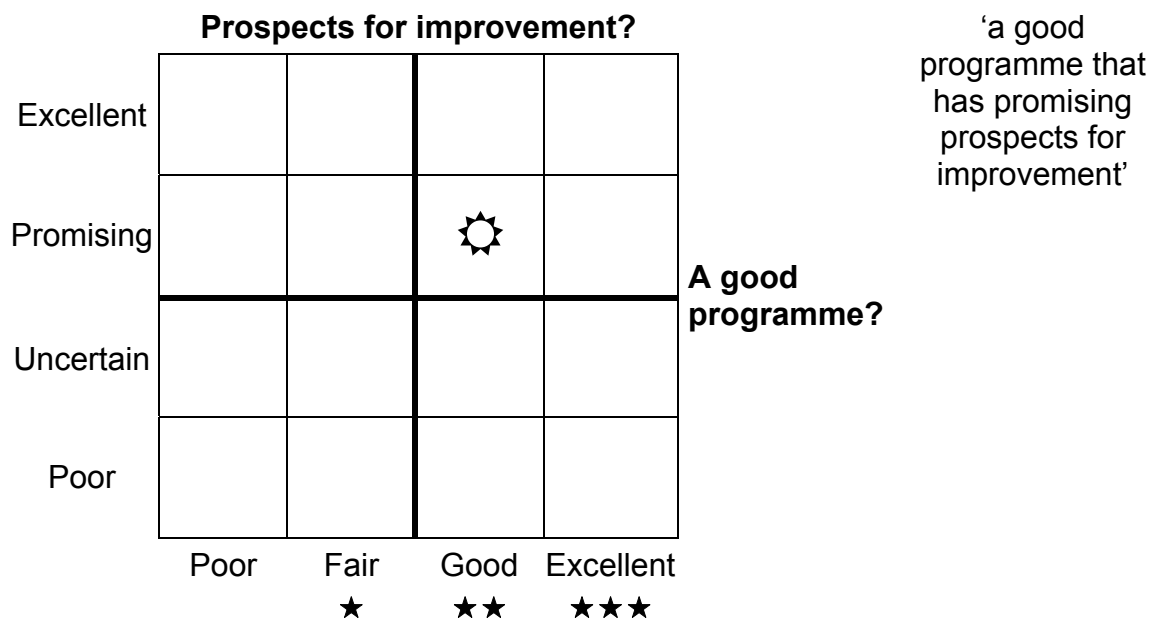
Summary

- 1 Blackburn with Darwen Council administers a good Supporting People programme that has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Council is the administering local authority (ALA) for the programme and runs it in partnership with the Blackburn with Darwen Primary Care Trust and the Probation Service Lancashire. The programme for 2007/08 will cost £6,031,664. There are 45 contracts for 116 services. These provide 1,274 units of support.
- 3 The Commissioning Body has effectively governed the development of a strong programme based on a robust strategic framework. Relationships with partners and providers are effective. Contract management is very strong, ensuring grant compliance and the efficient use of resources. Firm, but fair, decisions have resulted in schemes being decommissioned and others reconfigured. Efficiency savings have been recycled to complement a broad range of external funding for new and better services. Services are accessible and Supporting People funding has made a significant difference to the lives of vulnerable people in the area.
- 4 However, providers and service users are not yet effectively involved at a strategic level with the programme. In focusing on its strategic priority to improve customer service through contract reviews, the Council has been slow to develop a thorough approach to diversity. It cannot demonstrate that there is fair access to all services. There are still some gaps in knowledge about the needs of some client groups, particularly hard to reach groups. It has been slow to develop joint commissioning and procurement with partners.
- 5 Services will continue to improve. The Council has a strong track record delivering new and improved services. It has a clear vision and effective leadership which ensures that priorities for further improvement are delivered. Partnership working and the positive relationship with providers increases the Council's capacity. The Council focuses on continuous improvement through good communication, learning from others and generally effective performance management.
- 6 There are some barriers to improvement. Improvement plans are challenging but unrealistic in some areas. This has led to some targets not being met on time. Providers, service users and the voluntary sector are not involved in governance arrangements. This improves skills and capacity and helps to ensure that improvements reflect customer and provider priorities. Although the Council and partners are committed to the Supporting People programme, this is not explicit in their own plans and strategies. Performance is not routinely reported to the Council's scrutiny panel.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 7 We have assessed Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council as providing a 'good', two-star programme that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

- 8 We found the programme to be good because it has a range of strengths including:
- making a significant difference to the lives and the choices available to some of the area's most vulnerable people;
 - service users are increasingly involved, particularly during service reviews;
 - it is generally easy to access services and advice;
 - corporate commitment to the programme;
 - the Commissioning Body effectively directs improvements for new and existing service users;

² The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the programme is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a programme that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent programme (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the programme, also on a four-point scale.

- strong joint working relationships with key partners and providers, improving and integrating a range of services for users;
 - eligibility criteria is effectively used to decommission, reconfigure and improve schemes;
 - a robust strategic framework is delivering agreed priorities for service development;
 - effective delivery arrangements;
 - very effective risk based contract management is supporting and directing providers to improve services for users;
 - transparency in achieving value for money, improved quality of services for users, delivering significant savings and providing additional units of support; and
 - creativity in making best use of resources and funding to ensure services meet identified need.
- 9 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- the approach to meeting the diverse needs of existing and potential service users is under developed;
 - the role of Supporting People is not explicit in council and partners strategies, or the Local Area Agreement;
 - governance arrangements are not fully effective with an unclear role for the strategic development group, and a lack of involvement of providers, service users and the voluntary sector;
 - some gaps in knowledge of unmet needs and a lack of resourced plans to deliver some strategic priorities; and
 - some delivery arrangements are under developed, including: low targeting and take-up of fairer charging; complaints systems are not integrated and monitored effectively; lack of joint commissioning; and performance reporting is not integrated with the Council's framework.
- 10 The programme has promising prospects for improvement because:
- the Council has a strong track record delivering improved housing support services and efficiency savings;
 - clear vision and leadership ensures effective joint working with partners and providers;
 - the Council has successfully secured funding from many sources to develop new services and improve existing services;
 - the Council has a high level of self awareness and commitment to learning;
 - there is good communication, staff support and supervision and generally effective performance management;

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- financial and risk management is effective; and
- staff have the appropriate skills required to deliver the programme.

11 However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include:

- improvement plans lack some measurable targets, are not always resourced and some targets are unrealistic, not being delivered on time;
- performance reporting is not fully effective; reports to the Commissioning Body do not summarise key issues, and some performance indicator reports do not show targets and comparison with top performers;
- some wider council capacity issues have restricted the level of support available to help the programme deliver some targets;
- best use is not made of the strategic development group to support the Commissioning Body and providers and service users are not effectively involved in governance;
- the Council cannot demonstrate that all parts of the programme reflect the diversity of the local community; and
- the programme lacks a medium term financial plan and procurement strategy.

Recommendations

- 12 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs³ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with service users, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve the approach to diversity by:

- *completing and implementing an equality impact assessment for the programme;*
- *developing robust diversity monitoring and reporting systems;*
- *ensuring that information is available in a variety of formats and is consistently promoted;*
- *ensuring that all services are culturally sensitive and are tailored to meet the needs of a diverse community; and*
- *ensuring that all services, and elements of the programme, fairly represent the make-up of the local community.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services, advice and information are delivered in ways that meet the needs of existing and potential customers; and
- access to services is fair and equitable.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

³ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Improve service user focus by:

- *identifying service users who may be eligible for fairer charging payments, promoting and targeting assessments, and robustly monitoring performance and take-up;*
- *coordinating referral and advice arrangements, and developing an overarching move-on accommodation strategy; and*
- *ensuring effective integration of provider and council complaints systems; closely monitoring performance and identifying and responding to trends; ensuring that that closure of complaints is agreed with service users.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- service users receive more financial help and benefits;
- learning from complaints further improves services;
- it is easier to access services and a variety of support; and
- service users move to independent living releasing resources for new users.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

Recommendation

R3 The ALA should improve governance structures by:

- *reviewing the role of the Strategic Development Group, ensuring that providers and the voluntary sector are effectively involved, and managing the operational delivery of the programme on behalf of the Commissioning Body;*
- *exploring, with users and their advocates, methods for ensuring each major user group has opportunities to influence decision making and take part in all aspects of the programme; and*
- *improving council member involvement and awareness of the programme and that performance reporting integrates with council structures.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater awareness of Supporting People programme performance and how it contributes to broader objectives; and
- meaningful involvement of users, providers, carers and advocates and in decisions which influence how existing services and new services are developed to meet agreed priority needs.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

Recommendation

R4 Improve the delivery of key strategic priorities by:

- *ensuring Supporting People objectives are appropriately reflected and aligned with partner strategies and key council plans including the Local Area Agreement;*
- *coordinating research to robustly identify unmet needs for future services, and ensuring that resources are available to meet prioritised needs;*
- *establishing a rolling programme of risk-based, strategic sector-wide reviews to consider the needs and supply of services across all client groups; and*
- *establishing a medium term financial plan, procurement strategy and an overarching commissioning plan that determines how gaps in provision will be addressed.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- coordinated and joint working between partners;
- better understanding of needs for housing support services in the area for all client groups;
- focused action to meet agreed and prioritised needs; and
- more efficient commissioning and procurement of services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

Recommendation

R5 Strengthen improvement planning and performance management by:

- *ensuring all plans are SMART, with measurable outcomes and targets that are prioritised and resourced to ensure that challenging, but realistic, deadlines can be met;*
- *reviewing performance monitoring arrangements, ensuring that reports to relevant group (including strategic development group; Commissioning Body, departmental management team and council scrutiny panel) receive the level of information it requires to effectively manage the programme; and*
- *ensuring performance reports highlight key issues, trends against targets and comparison with top performers.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- better decisions acting on key performance data; and
- improved services in line with top performance.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

- 13 We would like to thank the staff of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 15 to 19 October 2007

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Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Blackburn with Darwen is a mixed urban and rural area in East Lancashire, with the countryside of the Pennines to the east and the Forest of Bowland to the north. It has good access to the regional road network including the M65 motorway.
- 15 The borough has a population of 137,500 (2001 census) with 23 per cent of residents from black and minority ethnic communities (BME). The largest groups are Indian (10.7 per cent) and Pakistani (8.7 per cent). Thirty three per cent of the population is under 20 years old, and 30 per cent of the school age population is from Indian and Pakistani communities. The local population is expected to rise, but slowly – 2.6 per cent growth by 2021 is forecast. Levels of teenage pregnancy are high at 58 per 1,000 population compared with a national average of 45.
- 16 Unemployment stands at 6.7 per cent⁴, which is higher than both the regional and national averages. The manufacturing sector remains a principal source of employment. Overall, average weekly earnings in the borough are around 20 per cent below the national average.
- 17 The borough is ranked 34th most deprived of 354 local authorities⁵. Some 21 lower super output areas (out of 91) are in the 10 per cent most deprived nationally. Mortality rates continue to be high compared to regional and national figures, although life expectancy has improved over the last decade.

The Council

- 18 The Council became a unitary authority in 1998 and inherited service responsibilities from Lancashire County Council including education, social services, highways, waste and planning.
- 19 Since May 2007 the Council has been controlled by a partnership agreement between Conservative/Liberal Democrat/For Darwen parties. The Council has adopted a leader and cabinet model. The executive board is the key decision making body. The main scrutiny body of the Council is a policy and review committee, which oversees four overview and scrutiny committees.
- 20 The Council is the major employer in the borough and it employs 3,524 staff across all services (excluding schools). For the year 2007/08 the Council's net revenue budget is £29 million.
- 21 The Council transferred 10,000 former council homes to the housing association Twin Valley Homes in 2004.

⁴ Source: ONS Annual Population survey

⁵ 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Supporting People programme

- 22 Blackburn with Darwen Council (BwD) acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £6,031,664 for 2007/08 which is an increase of only £25,000 on the previous year.
- 23 The Council receives an administration grant of £158,954 to contribute towards the administrative requirements of the programme. To maintain service provision, the Council has provided additional financial support of £99,800 in 2007/08 (£75,300 in 2006/07).
- 24 The service is located within the adult services department. The Supporting People team consists of nine staff (with two working part time) and also draws on support of finance and 'informatics' staff from the department.
- 25 In total, 45 contracts cover 116 services. The programme funds 1,899 accommodation based units of support and 375 floating support units.
- 26 The five-year strategy identifies that there are gaps in provision across all client groups. It identified particular gaps with no Supporting People funded services for: floating support services for older people; community alarm services; services for people with alcohol dependency problems; young homeless people with chaotic lifestyles and services for people with a physical disability. There is also under provision of support services for the BME community and ex-offenders.
- 27 The highest cost service at £389 per unit per week is an accommodation based service for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £2.32 per week and relates to low level support in a sheltered housing scheme.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 28 The vision for the programme is set out in the five-year strategy 2005-2010:
- 'To deliver a diverse range of high quality housing related support services to vulnerable people living in the Borough, making best use of available resources, ensuring that the services we deliver meet peoples needs, that they are integrated with existing services and strategic plans and take account of the views of service users, partners and stakeholders.'*
- 29 The strategy identifies the following objectives.
- To commission Supporting People services for vulnerable people based on clearly evidenced need.
 - To enable vulnerable people assessed as needing supported housing services to live as safe, full and independent lives as possible.
 - To develop a range of services which maximise value for money, choice and benefits for service users.
 - To develop a range of supported housing services that are able to meet the diverse range of needs within the local community.
 - To increase service user involvement in the delivery and development of Supporting People services.
 - To ensure the delivery of joined up and responsive assessment and referral arrangements for people accessing Supporting People services.
 - To ensure strategic partner engagement that enables effective programme delivery at a local level.
 - To deliver a range of Supporting People outcome focussed objectives that effectively contribute to the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement priorities.
- 30 These programme objectives are in line with broader corporate objectives. The Council has seven strategic objectives which form the basis of a Performance Agreement. These are to:
- improve health and social well-being;
 - create sustainable communities and neighbourhoods;
 - improve the environment and housing;
 - cut crime and improve community safety;
 - promote economic regeneration;

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- deliver positive outcomes for all children and young people; and
- deliver the highest quality services.

Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?

31 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance and partnerships;
- grant compliance, strategy and needs;
- delivery arrangements;
- commissioning and performance;
- value for money;
- service user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance and partnerships

32 The CLG has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.

- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
- Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
- Core strategy group (strategic development group in Blackburn with Darwen): proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
- Commissioning Body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
- Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body.
- Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

- 33 Strengths balance weaknesses in this area of the programme. Blackburn with Darwen Council has a strong commitment to Supporting People but this is not explicit in its corporate plans and objectives. The Commissioning Body (CB) is generally effective and has directed the Supporting People programme improvements. Relationships and joint working with partners and providers is strong. However, providers and service users are not formally represented, or involved with the development of the programme in line with national strategy. The role of the Strategic Development Group (SDG) is unclear with the CB too involved with operational issues. The voluntary sector is not effectively involved.

Corporate commitment

- 34 The Council demonstrates a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme, and an understanding of its role as the administering local authority (ALA). Since the change of political administration in May 2007 the Council portfolio holder for adult social care has demonstrated a keen interest in Supporting People, and is a new member of the CB. The programme plays a key part in delivering the Council's community plan objectives, and those of the local strategic partnership (LSP) and local area agreement (LAA). The Council is committed to developing effective housing support services in line with its broader objectives. It has supported reconfiguration of existing services and the provision of new services while protecting, and enhancing, Supporting People funding. It has contributed £90,000 this year to support the Supporting People administration grant. Recognising the value of the programme ensures it contributes fully to broader corporate objectives.
- 35 Corporate commitment is not yet fully effective. Until recently councillors have not been closely involved with the programme. Council members only attend CB meetings occasionally. Performance with the programme's delivery is not routinely subjected to scrutiny panel examination and it has only recently received briefings. Supporting People is not explicit in broader corporate plans and partners' strategies, although operational links are strong. A wider group of councillors are not routinely kept informed about the programme. Councillors are unable to contribute to programme development if they lack a clear understanding of what it is, and what it seeks to achieve.

Commissioning Body

- 36 The Commissioning Body (CB) is well run and has provided effective strategic leadership to the programme. It is well established and meets regularly. All statutory agencies are partners, and signatories, to a memorandum of understanding which was updated in May 2007. Terms of reference clearly set out membership, responsibilities and voting arrangements. It receives comprehensive reports covering relevant issues, and representation is at an appropriate level to enable effective decision making, including about de-commissioning and re-modelling services. It has a detailed work plan linked to key targets in the Supporting People annual plan. This ensures that the programme has developed in line with its strategic objectives.

- 37 The CB is not fully effective. The CB takes too much responsibility for the operational management of the programme, leaving the Strategic Development Group's (SDG) role uncertain. Some partner attendance at CB meetings is inconsistent and the lack of continuity of partner representatives limits full effectiveness. Probation has only attended 63 per cent of meetings since May 2005. However, there are effective links and working relationships between partners, who meet regularly, both operationally, and as part of other working groups. External providers are not represented. No conflict resolution protocol has been developed, relying on good relationships to resolve potential conflict. Ensuring the SDG oversees operational delivery would allow the CB to focus more on the strategic development of all aspects of the programme.

Core Strategy Group - known as Strategic Development group (SDG)

- 38 The SDG is not operating effectively. Its original purpose of developing a Supporting People strategy and delivering service reviews has been achieved. It now lacks a clear role and purpose. It meets irregularly and attendance by some key partners is poor. Probation and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) have attended few meetings since May 2005 and have had limited input to developing and updating the five-year strategy. External providers and service users are not represented. Partners, providers and service users are not making a full contribution to delivering and developing the Supporting People programme.
- 39 Positively, the SDG has links with a wide range of other groups to help ensure that service developments are integrated. This includes the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), Health and Homeless Project Group, Domestic Abuse Strategic Group, Learning Disability Strategic Review Working Group, Extra Care / Sheltered Housing Project Group and the Youth Housing Strategy Group. Providers have not raised concerns about lack of representation on the SDG and CB due to strong relationships with the Supporting People team. Despite a lack of formal representation, they feel that their views are listened to.
- 40 The CB aims to review the vision for Supporting People and the roles for both CB and the SDG to further develop the programme early in 2008. The ALA has confirmed that this will include provider and service user representation which will build capacity and expertise of governance arrangements.

Accountable Officer

- 41 The Accountable Officer (AO) is not yet fully effective in overseeing the Supporting People programme. The AO has been in position for less than a year and, due to wider responsibilities, has not had the capacity to fully oversee and champion the role of Supporting People within the authority and with partners. The AO is a senior officer who has a clear understanding of what is expected, and is well placed to champion the programme corporately. The AO has positive links with internal and external Supporting People partners.

- 42 Supporting People has a high profile within, and outside, the Council and does not have to rely on the AO to champion the programme. It makes best use its limited resources through CB representation on other key groups. There are positive links between partners and stakeholders at a strategic level. The CB chair is a member of the LSP, and is lead officer for its health and social well being group. This ensures Supporting People's role is effectively championed across the authority and in wider partnerships.

Health, Housing, Social Care and Probation/criminal justice partnership arrangements

- 43 There are strong inter-agency links between health, housing, and probation/criminal justice partners. The Supporting People team has close working relationships with the strategic housing service, working jointly on the youth housing strategy and within adult services on the older persons housing strategy. Effective joint working with children's services is helping integration between services. Probation is increasingly engaged with the programme. The DAAT was closely involved doing joint visits during service reviews of relevant providers. Probation was a key partner in the persistent and prolific offender (PPO) review producing a revised PPO protocol. Joint working with the youth offending team (YOT) is developing. Effective relationships and joint working delivers higher quality care and support services to users.
- 44 Multi-agency initiatives complement Supporting People programmes. New joint funded schemes are being provided for a single homeless hostel and extra care housing at James Street and Mill Street respectively. There are effective joint working arrangements with the NHS Trust for hospital discharge and MAPPA arrangements are working well. Joint contract reviews are carried out with children's services, the DAAT commissioning team, and joint quality assurance scheme reviews for domiciliary and residential care provision. Coordinating work between partners and exploring opportunities for additional funding ensures the best use is made of resources to address needs.
- 45 The ALA is developing a joint approach to strategic commissioning. Initial progress was slow but work is developing strongly through a new management and joint commissioning structure. The Council funds 20 per cent of the PCT's chief executive post. The chief executive will develop the health and well being agenda across the PCT and the Council. Two joint commissioning posts are currently being advertised. The director of public health post is also joint-funded between the PCT and the Council. A new joint approach to strategic and community based commissioning will give increased efficiency savings through integrated services, including Supporting People.
- 46 Key partner strategies lack clear reference to the Supporting People programme. There is currently no regular reporting to the Probation Board regarding Supporting People issues and performance, or an accommodation strategy for offenders. Clear strategic connections help to ensure that services are appropriately and collaboratively planned.

Service providers

- 47 Relationships are exceptionally good with provider organisations. Providers working across the region confirm that their relationship with the ALA is good, and generally better than experienced elsewhere. The Supporting People team are open, approachable and willing to help providers. Provider satisfaction with Supporting People arrangements is very high, demonstrated through the programme's own survey and the Audit Commission's own provider survey. In particular, the quality of contract management, service and contract reviews, improvement planning support, grant administration and value for money assessments are acknowledged by providers. Providers are effectively informed and involved with the programme.
- 48 The provider forum is effective. Quarterly meetings are well attended and providers chair the meeting after a briefing by the Supporting People team. Minutes and papers are widely circulated. Providers are regularly canvassed to establish their views, and agendas reflect their needs. The Supporting People team provide comprehensive support and information to providers. Good practice is shared and providers' suggestions are incorporated into plans. Suggestions led to a 'speed dating' event of all agencies to share information and increase awareness about providers and services. This event was successful leading to increased understanding of each others services and an increase in cross provider referrals. A young peoples' sub group has been formed and supported by the Supporting People team at the request of providers. This is helping to identify, and respond to, issues regarding this hard to reach group. This ensures providers are meaningfully engaged helping to develop the programme.
- 49 There are some weaknesses. Individual support to providers is good, but general training is not fully effective. Providers would like more dialogue and training on national priorities, including LAA alignment, individual budgets, Supporting People grant distribution formula and local priorities. As mentioned previously, providers are not formally part of the governance structure of SDG or CB. This has not been an issue for providers due to effective working relationships. However, representation of providers, and other stakeholders, would enhance the skills and capacity of the SDG and CB to strategically develop the programme.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

- 50 Engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) with the Supporting People programme is weak. Carers and voluntary organisations are not well integrated into the Supporting People governance arrangements. Representatives of carers and other groups are not involved in the SDG or provider forum. Consequently their views are not routinely influencing the development of services, and the benefits of their knowledge and experience have not been effectively utilised to benefit the programme.

- 51 The Council recognises the importance of investing in the voluntary sector and has an action plan to develop links with advocacy groups and carers. Work has begun by making links with local services such as the East Lancashire Advocacy Service. The Supporting People team are working closely with the Care Network Service to develop a pathway project for service users to access healthy living and support such as DIY and gardening. The Supporting People team has worked closely with, and supported, some small voluntary organisations to help provide valuable housing support services. For example, Humraaz, Nightsafe and the East Lancs Deaf Society. Their work is valued and this promotes a healthy and continuing relationship with the sector.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 52 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Clear eligibility criteria have been used to decommission schemes and re-align spending to appropriate budgets. The five-year strategy is robust and is updated through an annual plan. Detailed needs mapping gives a clear understating of priorities to meet the most pressing needs. Effective working arrangements are used to access move on accommodation. However, the ALA lacks robust and resourced plans to meet all identified needs. The Council helps service users move to achieve more independence, but there is no overarching move on accommodation strategy.

Grant conditions and eligibility criteria

- 53 The ALA complies with grant conditions. There has been a strong focus on the strategic relevance of schemes, and now on addressing ineligibility. An initial eligibility model was reviewed and developed into a more robust model in 2006. Providers were consulted on the model. The service review process identified services that had the most significant ineligible funding issues. Six schemes have been decommissioned after service reviews. All services were assessed against eligibility criteria which identified significant ineligible tasks in 95 assessments. These are now subject to retraction planning or contract negotiation. A clear retraction plan has been approved by the CB which will release Supporting People expenditure of £553,078 over two years. The plan clearly highlights key issues and impact for users and providers. Close dialogue with relevant partners and integration with the Council's adult services is ensuring that services are funded by appropriate budgets, and that savings do not threaten services for users.

Five-year strategy

- 54 The five-year strategy 2005-2010 is robust. The strategy recognises national priorities and has clear links to other key corporate strategies, the LSP, Local Area Agreement and council's performance agreement. Needs and supply information has been used to establish where gaps exist and where priorities lie. It is published on the website and an easy read guide of the Supporting People strategy includes photographic images to represent Supporting People activities. The strategy provides a solid basis which drives the programme and enables stakeholders to understand and contribute to the programme.

- 55 The strategy is regularly reviewed and updated as a key working document. Stakeholders and partners are engaged developing the strategy and annual plan, and demonstrate understanding of the priorities. A backward and forward look at outcomes, and a revised needs analysis, is used to produce the annual plan. The annual plan is beginning to align to the LAA with recent performance reporting relating to corporate themes. The CB thoroughly reviews progress when approving the annual plan. This includes assessing outcomes in meeting identified needs, and helps inform its decisions about future priorities.
- 56 Although the strategy identifies gaps it lacks robust plans to address some priorities. This includes the lack of floating support such as community alarms for older people, provision for BME groups, and people with a physical disability. Floating support services for offenders will be linked to findings from a Probation countywide needs analysis and incorporated in the 2008/09 annual plan. The CB has not approved a medium term financial plan and it is not yet clear how development priorities will be funded, particularly if there is a reduction in Supporting People funding.
- 57 The links with Supporting People are not generally explicit in partner organisation's strategies. This would ensure that all strategies are clearly integrated to achieve broader local and regional objectives.

Needs mapping, analysis and review

- 58 The ALA has undertaken detailed needs mapping and ensured that identified shortfalls in service provision for client groups inform the five-year strategy. It makes positive use of data from a range of sources to regularly update its needs mapping through the annual plan. For example, data from Age Concern has fed into the updated needs analysis. The need for additional mental health floating support was met by the expansion of services by an existing provider. The ALA understands its priorities for service development, which include: people with alcohol problems; ex-offenders; young people with mental health problems; and extra care services for older people.
- 59 Research is used to give a better understanding of gaps in provision. A gap for people with dual diagnosis led to further research by the housing strategy team who identified that 30 people at any time would benefit from bespoke services. This has informed early work in developing a youth housing strategy to deliver a new gateway service for young people, some of who display chaotic lifestyles. The ALA, and other local councils in Lancashire, recognised the gaps in service provision for travellers. This identified 48 pitches in Blackburn with Darwen compared to a total residential need of 53-65 pitches between 2006 and 2011. Additional provision will be considered as part of annual planning process for 2008/09. The survey results will be used to inform strategic provision across the sub region.

- 60 However, research is opportunist. The ALA lacks an integrated approach to collection and gathering of data to support needs analysis. There are no formal links with corporate and partner research and policy teams, or arrangements with groups who represent specific user groups, to ensure a more structured approach to researching housing support needs. To help address this it is conducting a survey with stakeholders, providers and users.
- 61 The ALA lacks a robust programme of prioritised strategic reviews of key client groups. Progress completing strategic reviews of learning disability and older people has been slow. Both reviews have been affected by other issues, such as broader reviews of social care and capacity problems within adult social care services. Strategic reviews help inform future service priorities and may identify further ineligible expenditure.

Strategy for access to move on accommodation

- 62 The Council uses a number of options to help service users move on to achieve more independence. These include: a protocol for prolific and persistent offenders; rent deposit bond; discretionary housing benefit top-up payments; agreements with hostels to move on users with priority under choice based lettings; resettlement due to closure of projects and a sanctuary scheme for domestic violence survivors. The Council has increased the capacity of the housing needs service by funding a BME homelessness worker in response to findings that 39 per cent of applicants were of BME origin. Planned services include a 'gateway'⁶ for young people. Priority is given to nine clients per quarter for move on, using CBL, through partnership with homeless service using discretionary homelessness powers. These initiatives help users achieve more independence and releases accommodation for new users needing support services.
- 63 There is no overarching move on strategy that integrates initiatives to help people move from short term supported housing. The ALA lacks accurate data about the number of people requiring move on accommodation, has not robustly assessed barriers to moving, and coordinated action to address these barriers. The Probation offender accommodation strategy is out of date. Providers indicated that move on is an issue. The CB in October 2007 recognised this weakness and recommended developing a strategy and carrying out a scoping exercise with hostel providers to implement the move on plans protocol (MOPP) in line with CLG proposals. This will make more housing support available to vulnerable people.

⁶ Gateway: planned move on for young people from hostel accommodation

Delivery arrangements

- 64 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The team bring significant skills and expertise to the programme and have strong relationships with corporate colleagues and with service providers. Work planning is effective, linking closely to national, LAA and Supporting People objectives. Performance management is generally strong, particularly monitoring contracts. Risk assessment and management is effective. However, the role of Supporting People is not explicit in the LAA and performance management is not integrated within the Council's performance agreement. Although fairer charging arrangements are in place, their availability is not proactively promoted and take-up is very low.

Supporting People team

- 65 The Supporting People team is well resourced. Team members have a wide range of skills and experience. The administration grant is supplemented by the Council. Following a corporate restructuring in 2006, location in the adult social services department (ASSD) provides closer integration with care services. The team draws upon additional corporate support, such as financial and ICT support. This helps improve delivery of the programme
- 66 The Supporting People team has effective working arrangements with key partners. It has helped to improve the capacity of the Asian women's domestic violence refuge. Examples of joint working arrangements were considered in the previous section. This enhances the services available to vulnerable customers.
- 67 The team works very effectively with providers. Communication is good and guidance is given to providers through regular newsletters and briefings to the Provider Forum. Providers value this support; 78 per cent are satisfied with support from the ALA. Improvement plans following contract reviews are seen by providers as helpful and supportive in improving services. This supportive and positive approach recognises the valuable contribution of providers.

Work planning

- 68 Work planning is effective. The Supporting People five-year strategy forms the basis for work planning through the annual service plan. This annual plan updates the strategy, assesses progress and success with previous action and reassesses priorities for the forthcoming year. It includes outcome focused objectives and updates the risk assessment. Targets are reflected in individuals' objectives and targets. This is reinforced through regular one-to-one meetings and annual appraisals. Links are in place with other key strategies such as housing and homelessness. All plans are agreed at a staff annual work planning event. Clear plans ensure that staff and partners understand their roles, and work is coordinated to deliver positive outcomes for users.

Local Area Agreements (LAA)

- 69 The Council recognises the role Supporting People can play in the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Council was at the forefront of public sector agreement pilots (PSA) which developed to a LAA for 2007/08. The LAA was developed with partners involved in the LSP, including the CB's chair. The Council's performance agreement has targets in line with the LAA's key priorities. Supporting People objectives are linked to the LAA, and there is a clear understanding that the Supporting People programme will help deliver some of the LAA targets, particularly in the priorities of 'health and well being' and 'community safety'. The programme has started to be reported to an LAA sub group. Supporting People plays an important role helping to deliver LAA targets.
- 70 The LAA lacks specific reference to Supporting People. Supporting People funding has not yet been aligned with the LAA. The Council has already had considerable freedom (as an 'excellent' council) over how to use different funding streams to meet its broader objectives. It has plans to align Supporting People funding by 2009. The role of Supporting People within the LAA lacks clarity and clear targets.

Performance monitoring and management

- 71 Performance and programme monitoring arrangements are comprehensive. Progress with the programme and outcomes are regularly reported to the CB. General performance with key performance indicators (KPIs) and service performance indicators (SPIs) is monitored quarterly and an annual report for each scheme identifies trends in performance. Contract monitoring focuses on the right things. It is open, transparent and risk based, with low risk contracts being visited less frequently. Poor performers are monitored on a three monthly cycle from performance indicator returns and client record forms. Providers' performance meeting objectives under the quality assessment framework (QAF) is rigorously assessed and monitored. Progress against agreed targets is clearly linked to measurable outcomes for service users. Effective controls are in place to ensure that services are continually improved to agreed standards.
- 72 A new comprehensive programme monitoring report was presented to the CB in October 2007. This includes a wide range of key information including budget expenditure, performance indicators and exception report, progress with contract reviews, an outcomes report, complaints and risk assessment. This will ensure the CB has the information it needs to challenge performance and improve services.
- 73 Making payments to providers is efficient. Performance making payments has improved since administration was brought back in-house in April 2007. Staff resources have increased and staff training has improved flexibility and cover. Payments are made on time and the number of queries by providers has reduced. However, performance making payments on time to providers, and dealing with queries, is not routinely measured and reported. Without this senior managers can not recognise good performance and ensure that any areas of concern are quickly identified and tackled.

- 74 Performance management arrangements are not yet fully effective. There are no specific targets for Supporting People within adult social services or children's services. Performance reports are not presented to the scrutiny panel. This means that the departmental management team, and scrutiny panel, do not routinely know how well the programme is performing. This will be addressed in future reports.

Fairer charging

- 75 The approach to fairer charging is not yet effective. Take-up is low and fairer charging is not proactively promoted. A recent promotion of the fairer charging leaflet led to few applications. Service users who are not eligible for HB have not been identified and targeted for assessments. However, the Council positively promotes general benefit take up campaigns. There are no targets for take up of fairer charging. The ALA does not separate fairer charging applications for care assessments and Supporting People. It does not know how many successful fairer charging payments for SP have been made to date. Performance meeting service standards is not measured. The ALA cannot be sure that the three day immediate response service standard is being met. Without effective promotion some service users who are entitled to assistance may not be receiving it.
- 76 Positively, a clear fairer charging policy has been in place for the programme since its inception, and was reviewed in April 2007. The policy identifies groups of people who are eligible for charging and sets out the basis on which charges will be applied. Fairer charging assessment has been brought back in-house and is aligned with care assessments. Applicants are offered full benefit checks. A suitable appeals process has been used to challenge non-payment.
- 77 Fairer charging assessments are customer focused and a range of easy to read information is available, including on the website. No services attract top up charges for housing related support and fairer charging is understood by providers. Joint work between departments successfully identified double counting in terms of Supporting People and HB payments in some schemes. To date £180,000 savings has been identified and more are expected through contract reviews. Anticipated savings will assist both council and other budgets.

Risk management

- 78 Sound arrangements are in place to manage risks to the Supporting People programme. Steady state contracts ensure that risk management and business continuity plans are in place for emergencies. There is a comprehensive risk register. A range of risk assessment is undertaken, including financial risk, contract risk, provider continuity risk and risk assessment of users. This has been developed in line with the corporate approach to risk management. This differentiates the level of risk and identifies mitigating actions. Risk assessments feed into the team, departmental and corporate plans. Staff have received mandatory training on risk and providers have been trained at a forum meeting. Risks are reported regularly to the CB. This helps ensure risks to the programme, and users, are identified and managed effectively.

- 79 The Council is developing business continuity plans. The accreditation process requires providers to develop their own business continuity plans, and immediately notify the Supporting People team of any key incidents. The Supporting People team tested its business continuity plan when a provider recently went into liquidation. This enabled service users to be rehoused in an inclusive and consultative way. Continuity plans help ensure that essential services will continue in the event of a provider being unable to provide services.
- 80 There are some remaining weaknesses. The ALA does not have a robust risk management plan. Risk monitoring has just started being reported to the CB and plans have not been developed to mitigate potential key risks. For example, the risk of reduced SP grant funding has not been modelled and contingencies planned. Risk management helps reduce the likelihood and/or impact of identified risks, minimising potential disruption of services to users.

CLG data upload

- 81 The Supporting People team closely monitors provider SPI returns. SPLS data uploads are submitted on time to Communities and Local Government (CLG). The service has an average 86 per cent workbook response rate. The management of the IT system has recently been brought back in-house. Training using a new, comprehensive training manual is currently being developed. Reliability of returns help to ensure data is uploaded on time with no errors.

Commissioning and performance

- 82 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Contract management and review arrangements are robust. They are risk based and are used effectively to improve services. After slow progress a timetable to provide steady state contracts is on track to be completed by the end of 2007/08. Cross authority working shares good practice and resources to develop systems and protocols. Services are improved and configured in line with strategic objectives, delivering improved outcomes for service users. However, complaints systems between the ALA and providers are not integrated and managed effectively. There is no agreed joint commissioning plan.

Contracts

- 83 Contract management is effective. The contracts management business process is robust, including a thorough value for money (VFM) assessment, option appraisal and impact assessment if re-modelling is required. Service reviews were not completed by the government's required deadline of March 2006, but by November 2006. The extension allowed more robust and thorough reviews, which have led to significant changes including decommissioning, re-configuration of services and robust individual improvement plans. All providers are accredited with the exception of two of whose service reviews have not been formally signed off by the CB due to some outstanding issues. This approach provides the platform to continually develop the programme and its VFM.

- 84 The contract review process is thorough and drives service improvement. Best use is made of resources prioritising reviews according to risk. There are three levels of review, full, partial and light touch. A risk matrix determines the frequency and type of review. This could be quarterly, six monthly or annual. Five services are considered high risk and receive quarterly monitoring. Key issues are discussed with providers at pre-review visits and separate interviews with users obtain essential feedback. Written reports to providers and service users follow each visit. An action plan is agreed with providers and reported by an exception format to the CB. This ensures support is given where most needed, minimises risk and improves the quality of services for users.
- 85 Providers are positive about the review process. Supporting People staff are helpful, supportive and work closely with them to agree action and improvement plans. Supporting People officers fairly assess and challenge service provision and engage with providers and users constructively during reviews. This approach supports providers in improving services for users.
- 86 Reviews are used effectively to highlight and tackle weaknesses as well as share good practice. Good practice with 'living support plans' which tracks user progress to independence, was used to train providers at the forum. Review officers raised concerns about ineligibility, user complaints and possible service user abuse in a scheme for people with learning disabilities. A comprehensive review involved key partners and identified significant issues of poor management practice and service user abuse. No criticism was made of Supporting People procedures. As a result of the review, recommendations have been made to improve safeguarding procedures to protect users, with the service to be redesigned and put out to tender.

Quality assurance

- 87 Clear internal quality assurance arrangements ensure consistency with contract reviews. All review reports are checked by the service and contracts development manager, agreed by the programme manager, and approved by the CB. To improve quality assurance of the contract review process the programme manager has recently started to visit providers to discuss the review process. The success of procedures is borne out by provider satisfaction and lack of appeals.
- 88 However, there is no external moderation system to ensure transparency in review assessments. Best use is not made of positive cross authority partnerships, or by utilising a broader membership of the SDG.

Reporting

- 89** Positive recent progress has been made moving to steady state contracts. Model contracts were developed as part of cross authority work, tailoring the North West steady state contract model, and agreeing it with providers. Contracts include a comprehensive monitoring framework of outcomes for service users. The Council has waived tender contract procedures delegating authority to the director of adult social services to sign steady state contracts for up to three years. Currently, 15 steady state contracts have been signed and negotiations are on target to complete 37 by the end of December 2007, with the remaining six by the end of March 2008. This compares well with progress benchmarked with 11 other ALAs in the North West Contracts Group. Remaining contracts are subject to broad strategic reviews and retraction plans. Contracts provide a sound basis and stability for future services and ensure a strong focus on improved outcomes for customers.
- 90** Service and contract reviews are reported to the CB. The CB actively challenges recommendations and the content of reports. It is able to take difficult decisions, such as about decommissioning.
- 91** The contract review programme has recently experienced slippage due to staff illness. Reports to the CB do not summarise how many reviews were completed on time and how many are overdue. Similarly, progress with providers keeping to actions in improvement plans is not summarised and reported to the executive team, SDG or CB. This would help to ensure service improvement is delivered and recognised, as well as ensuring lessons are learned from good practice. The Council has confirmed this will be done. This gives the CB a better overview of progress, issues and helps direct any action they need to take.

Cross-authority

- 92** Cross-authority working is effective and delivers benefits for the programme. The team has taken a leading role developing a wide range of SDG work with the North West Supporting People Officers Group. Work has focused on improving consistency and sharing good practice. Partners recognise the value of joint working with their own programmes. The group has:
- developed a steady state contract model, accreditation protocol and information sharing protocol;
 - used the NW accreditation scheme to help passport five providers; and
 - recently established a procurement project group.
- Close working has shared good practices and helped to reduce burdens for providers who work in neighbouring authorities.
- 93** However, limited use is made of passporting, which was only undertaken fully with one provider. Services for older people have been jointly assessed with Lancashire County Council and passporting of policies has been adopted. Limited passporting is largely due to the high standards set by the ALA, and the desire to build up relationships with all providers through service reviews.

Improvement planning

- 94 The ALA has a robust approach to encouraging service improvements. Improvement plans are agreed with providers during service and contract reviews to address weaknesses and improve QAF scores. The working relationship is supportive and progress is closely monitored by the Supporting People team. Action plans and recommendations are logged on a detailed spreadsheet and monitored to ensure required action is taken by target dates. Progress against QAF recommendations for all providers is monitored annually. Providers are encouraged to apply for re-categorisation when they feel that improvements have been delivered. Two schemes have been tightly monitored and the service review process has not yet been signed off until remaining issues are resolved. Improving the quality of services helps service users achieve more independence.
- 95 The programme has ensured that services have improved. At the time of the original service reviews 96.6 per cent of services were assessed at level C or above with 3.4 per cent at level D against the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The quality of services has improved. Currently 97.6 per cent of services achieve level C or above and 2.43 per cent achieve level D. However, no providers are currently assessed as A. Improvement with 47 services measured since the first assessments include:
- Level B: an increase from 32 to 64 individual objectives;
 - Level C: an increase from 221 to 257 individual objectives; and
 - Level D: a decrease from 9 to 8 services.
- 96 Incentives encourage improvement. When a provider exceeds targets or achieves a high standard of service (such as level A) the CB will consider allowing 'freedom and flexibilities' such as a 'lighter touch' contract review. QAF targets are to be introduced over a three year period. The team are working with two providers with level D services to improve performance. Other schemes showing no improvement from a level D assessment have been decommissioned. Good quality services improve the quality of life for users.

Complaints

- 97 Complaints procedures are not fully integrated and are not being managed effectively. Positively, the corporate 'comments, compliments and complaints' policy is clear and has recently been updated. The new procedure links to the corporate complaints system and applies to appeals following reviews, service users and providers. The complaints procedure and Supporting People service standards are publicised to service users, including an easy to read leaflet that is recently available on the website. Providers have responsibility for dealing with complaints in the first instance. Complaints made to Supporting People and referred to providers are closely monitored and followed up.

- 98 There is some evidence of learning from complaints. For example, complaints to the Supporting People team about access to one scheme helped identify weaknesses with exclusion policies and the quality of information about referrals. Access procedures have been reviewed and improved helping to prevent future complaints.
- 99 There are some significant weaknesses with complaints procedures. Complaints made directly to providers are only picked up during contract reviews. The Supporting People team does not routinely monitor complaints made to providers as part of their own complaints procedures. Performance is not monitored or used to identify trends and opportunities to improve service development. The Supporting People team do not ensure complaints are resolved quickly and it is not always clear to users how long they should expect to wait. Procedures lack clear targets to resolve complaints and does not measure performance against service standards, or monitor the diversity of complainants. The CB has only started to receive reports about complaints. The ALA is missing an opportunity to systematically learn from complaints.

Appeals process

- 100 A robust appeals procedure is in place to challenge decisions within a clearly defined timeframe. Service providers consider that the process is accessible and clear. They are satisfied with the opportunities to challenge decisions and to date one provider has challenged the outcome of a service review leading to decommissioning a hostel. The process is fair and transparent.

Outcomes

- 101 Services are being configured in line with strategic priorities. Outcome measures have been developed and are included as an integral element of steady state contracts. An outcomes milestones template forms part of the contact monitoring process. The annual service plan process reviews previous years' actions and outcomes. This is used to inform future improvements.
- 102 Positive outcomes for service users can be demonstrated over the past two years which are considered in detail in later sections on 'outcomes for service users' and 'prospects for improvement'. Services have been reconfigured to more effectively meet strategic priorities and others have been de-commissioned, with savings used to help develop new services in line with key priorities. More users are receiving better services.
- 103 The ALA does not have a detailed commissioning plan. The five-year strategy identifies key priorities but clear commissioning plans have not been developed to meet these needs. A medium term financial plan and procurement strategy are still being developed. The lack of an overarching commissioning plan means that information and proposals are not pooled between key partners, and used to most effectively share resources to meet jointly agreed strategic priorities.

Value for money

- 104** Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The ALA has a clear understanding of its costs and comparison with others. The programme has a clear assessment framework for achieving value for money (VFM) with all Supporting People services. A VFM 'matrix' focuses discussions with providers where improvements are required. The process is fair, transparent and highly rated by providers. Significant efficiency savings have led to new and reconfigured services. More are planned through a retraction plan. The Council cannot demonstrate the VFM of its administration costs. It lacks an overarching procurement strategy.

How do costs compare?

- 105** The ALA closely examines unit costs when determining the VFM of services during service and contract reviews. This has helped identify drivers for service improvement and efficiency savings. The following table shows how a range of current unit costs compare favourably with regional and national average unit costs from the time of the platinum cut in 2003.

Table 1

Service	BwD mean unit cost 10/07	BwD Mean unit cost 2003	Regional mean unit cost 2003	National mean unit cost 2003
Floating Support	£69	£105	N/A	N/A
Accommodation (excluding sheltered)	£128 (£182)	£185	N/A	N/A
Accom single homeless	£67	£76	£138	£167
Floating Support single homeless	£44	£66	£102	£74
Accom Learning Disability	£224	£212	£374	£343

Source: BwD & Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. N/A - not available

- 106** Following decommissioning and reconfiguring services after service reviews average unit costs of floating support services have reduced from £105 to £69 per week. Accommodation-based unit costs have increased from £97 to £128 per week, due to decommissioning some low cost services.

Defining VFM

- 107** The ALA has a clear value for money business process and guidance which outlines how VFM is defined and calculated. This covers cost, quality and performance and also takes account of stakeholder and user views. Market diversity is encouraged by avoiding set limits on unit costs. This approach to VFM is robust and demonstrates flexibility recognising the relationship between cost and quality when assessing VFM. It provides an effective basis for commissioning and contract review assessments.

Methodology for contracted services

- 108** The VFM business process and guidance provides a comprehensive, transparent and consistent framework to determine VFM from its contracted services. Contract reviews include a cost effectiveness analysis using a thorough standard assessment model, developed using external expertise. Reviews include detailed discussion with providers. The cost and quality matrix helps focus discussions. The clear scoring of each factor in the assessment ensures that conclusions are seen as fair and transparent, applying to both internal and external providers. Action to improve VFM is included in review reports and agreed by the CB. This may require the contract price to be re-negotiated, changes to the number of hours or support offered, or reconfiguring the way support is provided. This ensures continual improvement with efficiency and VFM for all contracted services.
- 109** Providers are closely involved in assessments and have a clear understanding of the process. The model ensures that providers can see which elements need to be addressed to make the greatest improvement to VFM. All providers in our survey said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the approach to determining VFM of the service. A robust but fair approach ensures that value for money assessments seek to improve the quality and efficiency of services and not just seek savings.

Benchmarking

- 110** The ALA has a thorough understanding of the costs of individual services as well as by provider and primary client group. A robust unit cost spreadsheet is maintained that compares individual costs locally, regionally and nationally. Benchmarking is used during cost and performance analysis to determine VFM where high costs are identified. The process is applied consistently across external and internal services. Information used during service reviews helped inform decisions regarding decommissioning and reconfiguring Supporting People services. Detailed examination of unit costs of a service provider in comparison to other local and national average costs helped identify potential efficiencies. This led to making savings of £12,000 used to support an additional floating support service for older people.

Procurement

- 111 The ALA lacks a procurement strategy that ensures new services are commissioned with a focus on value for money. However, a procurement strategy plan has been drafted. This was agreed by the CB in October 2007. A North West Procurement Project Group is developing guidance and principles for a procurement strategy based on best practice. The plan gives a clear framework for developing a procurement strategy that integrates with adult social services' and the Council's. Joint work is targeted for completion by February 2008.
- 112 The ALA uses efficiency savings to procure new services. The CB agreed to recycle savings from decommissioning a mental health supported accommodation service, developing a floating support service for young people who lead a chaotic lifestyle. This meets an identified gap in strategic provision. It is also proposed to explore a pilot project within the new contract, based on purchasing specific outcomes as opposed to traditional contract inputs and outputs. The ALA is innovatively exploring new ways to provide new and improved services.

Improving VFM

- 113 The ALA has had significant success reconfiguring services and improving VFM. Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 it achieved £86,858 cashable savings and £192,998 non-cashable savings. Projected savings in 2007/08 amount to £178,460 cashable and £63,143 non-cashable savings. The retraction plan will deliver further savings and efficiencies of £553,078 over the next two years.
- 114 Good use is made of resources to maximise provision. Schemes have been decommissioned and savings used to provide new improved services, such as a new hostel for young single homeless. Although they are challenging, the team's intervention is seen as positive, enhancing, rather than threatening the continuance of services. The new Mill Hill extra care scheme is a joint initiative with the housing department, utilising capital funding from the department of health. Service reviews and evaluation by the children's commissioning manager has led to additional Supporting People services being purchased from mainstream budgets. There has been an appropriate focus on improving existing services, by getting more for the same, and developing new services to meet identified needs, rather than making cash savings.
- 115 Reconfiguration of services meets additional needs at the same cost and increases the effectiveness of the programme. The ALA has provided an additional:
- 67 units for the same cost;
 - 8 units of floating support for families to help prevent homelessness;
 - five units of floating support and three accommodation units for those with enduring mental health issues;

- 33 additional units of floating support for single homeless; and
- 15 units of floating support and three units of accommodation for those with drug addiction.

Cross authority approach

- 116** Limited progress has been made in the area of SDG commissioning. Cross authority procurement is just beginning to be discussed around small specialist services. Joint commissioning would benefit users who require specialist services on a small scale which may not provide value for money if delivered alone.

Administration grant

- 117** The Council is unable to demonstrate it gets good value for money from the administration grant. The administration grant of £158,954 is being fully spent and the Council committed an additional £99,800 during 2007/08. This enables more staff to effectively administer the programme. Little comparative work or benchmarking, has been done to demonstrate that expenditure is reasonable compared to others. The Supporting People team does not have any efficiency targets, and is unable to demonstrate that existing expenditure is an accurate reflection of the actual cost (including support from other departments) of the time staff spend administering the Supporting People programme. This means the Council can not demonstrate it is providing value for money in its administration of the programme.

Service user involvement

- 118** Strengths and weaknesses are balanced. There is a good framework for involving users in a range of ways, particularly during service and contract reviews. Innovative ways are used to communicate with users. User involvement is well resourced and a new service user panel is developing ways to engage excluded groups. However, service users are not formally represented in governance arrangements. There are still few effective links with hard to reach groups. Outcomes from user engagement are ad hoc rather than resulting from systematic strategic engagement.

Opportunities

- 119** The ALA has a solid framework to involve service users. It has a well developed service user involvement strategy and annual plan. The work plan reviews previous outcomes and is updated annually. It provides a wide and varied menu for user involvement, from involvement in support plans, to meetings, training, drama and art and the recruitment of staff. Additional resources have been invested to develop service user involvement. This has focused on involvement with the service review processes. A new service user panel is helping to involve hard to reach service users. It has worked with customers with learning difficulties to review the strategy. Effective service user involvement helps to improve services and develops users' life skills.

- 120 The ALA has developed some innovative approaches to communicating and involving users. Interpreters, including those using BSL, have been used to communicate with users. The ALA uses a photograph gallery that represents activities in support planning. The photographic images were used to improve surveys and consult on the easy read guide of the Supporting People strategy. These images encourage feedback and help users to shape future services.
- 121 The service user panel is not yet fully operational. Service user involvement is a clear priority of the team but work to engage users has been ad hoc and not structured. The panel has no definitive forward plan of involvement and lacks planned capacity building for members. The lack of a consistent group on the panel, and clear programme to involve specific needs groups restricts the development of effective service user involvement.
- 122 Some groups are still not effectively engaged. There is no specific arrangement in place within probation to consult users, and it is not clear how Supporting People is engaging offenders. There are no links with other excluded groups including new migrant communities and refugees, gypsies and travellers and those with HIV/Aids. Without input, needs information is incomplete and it will be difficult to ensure services meet needs. The involvement of carers and advocates in the programme is underdeveloped. Carers and advocates can articulate improvements for users and help to enhance the programme.

Involvement in contract and monitoring

- 123 Service users are well engaged in the service review process. Service users we spoke to were aware of the work of the Supporting People team and had opportunities to speak to staff. Service users receive individual feedback from their involvement in reviews stating what will change as a result of the review. Letters are clear and easy to understand, but lack clear timescales for proposed action. Close involvement ensures that service users influence the assessment of providers and their services.
- 124 Service users are not formally engaged in governance arrangements, or mystery shopping to test whether access arrangements, and performance, meets standards. Some service users accompany their support worker to the provider forum, but there is no formal arrangement for this. Users are not directly involved in governance arrangements which help to shape future services.
- 125 Service users have limited involvement in designing and procuring new services. The development of a new hostel, following decommissioning of three former hostels, was as a direct result of service user dissatisfaction. This led to intensive work with 98 single homeless people to identify priority outcomes for the new hostel service. However, there was no formal involvement in the tendering process. This prevents service users from influencing the cost and quality of future services.

Outcomes from user involvement

- 126** The ALA has been proactive in delivering service user identified improvements. Suggestions from service users during reviews have been incorporated in action plans to improve services. Young people involved in service reviews have influenced mainstream commissioning decisions in children's services. Expansion of domestic violence refuge services for the Asian community followed feedback. The Supporting People team helps build the capacity of both service users and providers. It worked with service users to involve them in the design of a new hostel for young homeless people. Service users can influence improvements that improve their quality of life.
- 127** Other council services have benefited from the strong service user focus in the Supporting People team. Consultation with users with dual diagnosis during service reviews led to joint contract review visits with the DAAT. This helps joint learning.
- 128** The service user panel is quite recent and there are few identifiable outcomes so far. Service users helped develop outcome focussed objectives for inclusion in the Supporting People annual plan 2007/08.

Access to services and information

- 129** Strengths balance weaknesses. Referral arrangements are good and agencies effectively signpost applicants to appropriate providers. The website directory of services is comprehensive and easy to use. There is a limited range of high quality information. However, referrals routes are not robustly monitored. Information, including about fairer charging, is not available at some access points and the provision in different formats is inconsistent.

Access and referral to services

- 130** Referral arrangements for short term services are accessible and generally well managed through a wide range of agencies. These include the Council's housing needs service and reception points, voluntary agencies, GP surgeries and the Supporting People team. Customers are effectively signposted to appropriate services. Staff responded quickly to our random checks at a range of access points. The Supporting People team are accessible by telephone, email and postal address, which are publicised widely. Information is available on the programme at all access points. The provider forum 'speed dating' workshop helped providers understand each others services. This ensures that customers' support needs are identified quickly and appropriate help and advice given.

- 131 Several protocols are in place with partners and providers to ensure that access, and move on from these services is well structured. These protocols include regular meetings and monitoring, appropriate training and formal referral arrangements. Supporting People leaflets at voluntary agencies and council offices resulted in 150 leaseholders receiving support. The access to services for young people is being enhanced. A joint protocol is being developed to enable a gateway to access accommodation as part of a youth housing strategy. This service will mean that young peoples' housing and other support needs can be provided for more effectively.
- 132 Provider exclusion policies are challenged during service and contract reviews to ensure fair access. Exclusion policies of several providers have been amended to ensure potential users with support needs, such as people with some challenging behaviour, are not unfairly excluded. This ensures access to services is fair and understood by referral agencies and service users.
- 133 Referral routes into, and from, short term services is not yet fully co-ordinated. Referrals are monitored through client record forms but this, and information from other referral agencies, is not robustly analysed to identify trends and potential barriers to access. There is no joint panel to assess referrals where there is a shortage of accommodation. A high level of users (average 25 per cent) come from outside the ALA area. The ALA is not working with other authorities to understand and tackle these issues. Outcomes measurement is not used to identify problems and tailor improvements such as targeted marketing. There may be potential access problems that the Supporting People team is unaware of.

Information

- 134 A good range of high quality information is available for new and existing service users. This includes information on the Supporting People strategy; annual service plan (including an easy read version), service user annual plan, Supporting People leaflet, fairer charging leaflet, better care, higher standards leaflet. More recent documents include service standards and complaints and compliments. Regular Supporting People newsletters are provided for frontline staff and service users. High quality information and easy to read documents help customers to access services they may need.
- 135 Information is available on request in alternative formats. The Council is a member of languageline. The general Supporting people information leaflet has been translated into Polish, Urdu, Gujarati and Bangladeshi. Interpreters, including BSL, have been used during service and contract reviews. Interpreters translated the SP easy read annual plan during one to one consultations. The Supporting People general information leaflet is being translated into BSL, which will be made available on DVD. This ensures customers get information in formats that suit their requirements.

- 136** Some key information is not displayed at access points. Random checks at several access points only found the general Supporting People leaflet. Other literature, such as the fairer charging leaflet, is accessible through the website and was not always brought to the attention of customers at service points. There is no programme of mystery shopping to check availability and standards. Some customers may not access services they need.
- 137** Translation and interpretation through languageline is not advertised at service points. No corporate information is available about the level of interpreting or translation that is provided. The format of leaflets is inconsistent; some do not include straplines for other formats. Others offer translation in English with an incorrect telephone contact. People with particular communication requirements may not be able to access appropriate information.
- 138** Service users are not routinely involved in developing information and publicity. The Supporting People leaflet is well written and easy to read, but has not been reviewed since 2005. Some contact numbers are no longer in use. Involving users developing information ensures it is better tailored to service user needs.

Directory

- 139** The Supporting People directory of services is comprehensive and easy to access. Information is available by service type, provider and service name. The directory also contains a helpful list of voluntary organisations. The interactive website enables users to filter schemes to display information suitable for their needs. A hard copy of this information is available to the out-of-hours emergency services. The information is not advertised as being available in other languages and formats, but the Council has ready access to interpreters. New and planned services are not included in the directory. A comprehensive directory helps potential users access services they may need quickly. The provision of good quality with easy access enables information to reach service users quickly.

Website

- 140** Information on the website is of good quality. It includes minutes of the CB, an enquiry site for providers, and links to the homeless UK emergency directory and the national Supporting People directory. Well written information about Supporting People includes practical examples about types of support individual providers can give. The site is easy to navigate; the search facility works well and contributes to the effective administration of the programme. Customers can easily access support and services information.
- 141** The website offers only Browsealoud as an additional format. It does not offer translations into other community languages, large print, audio tape or colour controls and therefore offers a restricted range of access. This restricts some people with impairments accessing information.

Better care: higher standards

- 142 The programme is well publicised through the better care, higher standards leaflet of adult social services, which was reviewed in May 2007. This explains the role of the service and gives contact details of where to find alternative information, including on the website. This enables users and carers to understand the range of support services and to determine the suitability of services to meet needs.

Access to fairer charging

- 143 Information on fairer charging is not widely circulated and limited efforts have been made encourage fairer charging take-up. Without targeted promotion existing and potential service users may be unaware of the assistance that is available to them.
- 144 A new fairer charging leaflet is easy to read and informs service users what fairer charging is and how an application can be made. There are links to detailed information about fairer charging on the website, so service users are clear about the process and rationale behind it.

Diversity

- 145 There are more weaknesses than strengths. The Council demonstrates a commitment to diversity but staff training is not comprehensive. Baseline data and research is used to inform strategies but this is ad hoc and there are gaps in knowledge about several excluded groups. There is no equality impact assessment for Supporting People. Contract management requires providers to review services to address cultural sensitivity of users, but this is not robustly monitored by the ALA. The ALA does not analyse service uptake to ensure fair access.

Identifying diverse needs

- 146 The Council encourages better practice in diversity. It is working to achieve level four of the equalities standard in 2008/09. The LSP has made an ambitious pledge to improve life in the area through a three year vision which is also reflected in the community plan 2006-2009. The Council has recently held a high profile 100 voices community cohesion conference and is unveiling a local version, 'neighbourhood voices', with people at neighbourhood level around key cohesion issues. The Council ensures diversity issues are given a high profile and is equipped to help the Supporting People programme to address specific issues.
- 147 The ALA uses a range of demographic information to identify diverse needs and inform its strategies. Baseline data, such as from the housing needs survey, census data, client record data and homelessness returns provide information about needs and supply. This data informed the five-year strategy and strategic priorities for the service. A range of stakeholders were involved developing the strategy, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of requirements.

- 148** Client data and corporate research is not used effectively to shape the programme. Data about the numbers and diversity of clients applying for, and receiving, services are not collected and analysed. Similar information is collected in care assessments in adult services. Ethnicity data about service users is not used to map need and identify potential problems where users do not reflect the local population.
- 149** The approach to diversity training is weak. Diversity training provided to ALA staff has been mixed. A half day in house course for new adult services staff has been received, but not all staff have undertaken more comprehensive, and mandatory, corporate training. A booklet has been completed for elected members and the intranet carries comprehensive information on equalities. Diversity training for service providers is not provided, although awareness of issues has been raised including about the disability equality duty. Coordinated equalities and diversity training for everyone involved in the programme will help develop a better understanding of diversity and cultural needs.
- 150** The Supporting People programme manager is the new chair of the adult services diversity working group. The diversity group champions the annual work plan on diversity for adult services and feeds into the Council's annual plan. This will raise the profile of Supporting People and the diverse needs of service users.

Excluded groups

- 151** The Council does not have a robust approach to identifying gaps in provision for excluded groups. Information relies on the programme manager picking up relevant corporate research and service review information and feeding this into the annual review of the workplan. This is open to chance and may lead to significant gaps in provision for potential service users.
- 152** There are still gaps in knowledge about groups not currently receiving services. The Council has started to consider the needs of new communities from Lithuania, Poland and Zimbabwe as well as the existing communities from Bengal and Pakistan. The needs of new migrant and refugee communities are not researched. There are no studies planned for people with HIV/Aids, although the ALA is confident that such users are picked up by existing generic services through referrals from the housing needs team. Without effective needs analysis some excluded groups' needs may not be met by the programme.
- 153** The ALA has not yet completed an equality impact assessment for the Supporting People programme. An original impact assessment by Social Services was completed in 2002/03. The role of the programme is not explicitly recognised in the Councils race equality and disability equality schemes. The Supporting People team have approached the corporate centre for support in completing a full assessment. This will ensure equality and diversity issues are fully considered in developing the programme.

- 154 As mentioned previously, engagement with some hard to reach groups has been slow. Links between the Supporting People team and the BME community and representative groups are not strong. The ALA recognises this and plan to use corporate expertise, and a local consultant, to help complete the equality impact assessment. This will help to ensure that the needs of excluded groups are understood and catered for.

Cultural sensitivity

- 155 The ALA checks that services have a focus on diversity and equality issues through contract reviews. It uses information from client records to identify diversity issues prior to contract reviews. On site discussions determine how housing support services can be tailored to meet diverse needs. Significant efforts are made to involve service users during reviews. Appropriate arrangements are made for translators or pictorial questionnaires. This ensures the widest engagement. The review process led to each provider having at least one action to further improve their accountability relating to diversity. This improves the accessibility and suitability of services for vulnerable clients.
- 156 There is little evidence of services being tailored to reflect cultural requirements. The steady state contract requires that the cultural needs of service users are considered and can be monitored by the team. Providers are expected to cater for diverse needs and preferences. There are no robust diversity targets for service providers. Records are not monitored for each provider and client group. The proportion of BME service users who accessed services in 2006/07 was only 13 per cent compared to the local population of 26 per cent. Without accurate baseline data the ALA cannot robustly monitor, and analyse, information and ensure action is taken to address possible inequity.

Outcomes for service users

- 157 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The programme demonstrates a strong focus on improving outcomes for service users. This is evidenced during review visits, ongoing contract monitoring and improvement planning. There are numerous examples of improved outcomes for service users. The outcomes framework is robust and outcomes are recorded in a register and regularly reported to the CB. The choice of services available to users has increased. However, limited progress has been made in addressing gaps in service provision, particularly for excluded groups.

Supporting People service improvements

- 158 There have been clear improvements to the quality of services for users. The ALA regularly reviews improved outcomes for service users with providers. This includes maintaining a register of case studies. The ALA has maximised resources to provide additional services and others are being reconfigured in line with agreed priorities. Improvements include:
- reducing the number of accommodation based units (from 2,109 to 1,935) and increasing in the number of floating support units (from 288 to 364);

- providing 85 additional units of service provision including 48 units of extra care accommodation, 20 units of floating support for people with sensory impairment; 6 accommodation based units for Asian women suffering domestic violence; 11 units of floating support for people with enduring mental health difficulties;
- services that were not strategically relevant, or were of unacceptable quality, have been decommissioned or reconfigured;
- improved QAF scores demonstrate better services for users;
- A provider for single homeless has extended its services to cover young people at risk and increased the provision from 19 to 24;
- links with other teams have added services, such as joint working with the 'healthy communities collaborative' developing a ten week pathways project helping five users to access local leisure facilities;
- additional help and support provided through the care network service;
- a multi-agency approach for people with drug problems has seen a reduction in drug use, and service users are more able to sustain and manage tenancies safely and securely; and
- floating support for people at risk of offending has reduced the risk of re-offending;

There are clear improvements for service users who have been supported through these schemes.

- 159** The ALA has worked with providers and made improvements in response to service user feedback. However, the service users' panel is only beginning to be formally engaged in improving services. It is too soon to see examples of services improving due to its involvement.

Choice for service users

- 160** Choice is improving for service users. The programme is providing a broader range of support which is more flexible and can be designed to address individual needs. Following service reviews, a number of schemes have been reconfigured to provide a wider range of services for users. These are detailed above. Capacity has improved at some schemes such as for young people with mental health needs and ex offenders. Owners and leaseholders are increasingly accessing Supporting People services. This helps vulnerable people stay in their own home with support. This is bringing choice to vulnerable people on how their services are accessed and delivered.
- 161** The lack of provision for some groups has not been sufficiently addressed. Some gaps identified in the five-year strategy still exist and plans to address these are insufficiently developed. A medium term financial plan is being developed to ensure that resources are available to address this issue, but it is still at an early stage.

- 162 There is still too much reliance on accommodation based services. Seventy five per cent of services are accommodation based. There has been some change in this as a result of decommissioning and the provision of additional floating support services. The prevalence of accommodation based services, reduces opportunities for owners, private tenants and leaseholders to access services and restricts choice for those in supported rented accommodation.

Support plans

- 163 Support planning is effective for service users. Support plans were found to be in place in the schemes that we visited. They had been agreed with service users and are generally subject to regular review. A providers' development of 'living support plans' is innovative and has been shared with other providers at the forum to promote good practice. This helpfully tracks users' progress to independence. It includes pictures, poetry and art, for those users who might find this a more accessible record of their progress. Joint working with adult and children's services ensure that support plans are linked with relevant care plans. As a result, service users benefit from a joint and co-ordinated approach to support provision.

Outcome measurement

- 164 A comprehensive outcomes based performance framework forms a key part of the contract review process. The framework was developed in close consultation with other North West ALAs in advance of the CLG model. It integrates with the CLG model. An outcomes workbook is completed by the provider prior to a contract review meeting. Outcomes are recorded on a milestone record for each service user. Quarterly returns are evaluated and any concerns addressed with the provider. If performance is not improving, this is discussed with providers and targets for improvement are set. This framework focuses the programme on service users achieving independence.
- 165 The first outcomes report to the CB in October 2007 (April-August 2007) identified 1,062 positive individual outcomes for service users. These are broken down into agreed themes such as 'economic well-being' and 'being healthy'. Inevitably, actions will be double counted and also repeated in subsequent reports. Measurement is not absolute, and does not give a 'final' measurement of success helping users lead more independent lives.

What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

What is the Council's track record in delivering improvement?

- 166** There are more drivers for improvement than barriers in this area. The Council demonstrates a strong track record of sustained improvement. It has successfully secured a wide range of funding to develop new services and has reconfigured existing services in line with its strategic objectives. Improvements have delivered many improved benefits for vulnerable service users. It has a good track record of delivering efficiency savings. Improvement on key performance indicators (KPIs) is mixed. It has not addressed all weaknesses in its self assessment and annual service plans.
- 167** The Council has made good progress improving the Supporting People programme. It has provided 54 new accommodation based units and 31 new floating support units, in line with strategic priorities, since 2003. Services have been reconfigured to provide seven more accommodation based, and 60 more floating support units. It has carefully focused on improving services to meet gaps in existing provision, helping some of the most vulnerable people and excluded groups. This includes services for people with drug problems, Asian women at risk of domestic abuse and providing floating support for people with sensory impairment. This has delivered positive benefits for vulnerable people.
- 168** The Council has effectively secured support from a wide range of sources to fund new services. It has made use of new and existing resources to fund new services. It has done this through improved efficiency savings, decommissioning ineligible schemes and the provision of new schemes through joint capital funding. Six services have been decommissioned, and funding from two homeless services recycled to support the provision of a new hostel. Funding from alternative sources maximises resources for new services. This includes:
- £2.3 million capital funding for a new single persons homeless hostel;
 - an additional £100,000 SG grant award form CLG to support the Council's family intervention project; and
 - a new joint initiative with housing for a 48 unit extra care scheme obtained Health funding of £3.9 million.

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- 169 Funding to ensure that future developments can go ahead in line with the strategic plan has already been secured. This includes:
- provisional Housing Corporation capital funding of £800,000 for a homeless families re-provision in 2008/09; and
 - Housing Corporation capital grant of £240,000, together with £105,000 from a housing association partner, to re-model and improve an existing service for young people at risk.
- 170 The ALA has established strong working relationships with key partners and service providers. Although service reviews were completed six months after the government's deadline they were very robust and have ensured improved services. A register records improvements against QAF standards and the new outcomes framework. Its success is contributing to wider corporate objectives in the LSP and LAA, particularly, 'health and well being' and 'local community safety' objectives.
- 171 Sustained improvement with performance indicators (PIs) has been mixed, but mainly positive. Some PIs show improvement over the last three years.
- KPI 1 (service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living) increased from 96.7 per cent (2005/06) to 97.3 per cent (2006/07).
 - KPI 2 (service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements) improved from 54.3 per cent (2005/06) to 62.9 per cent (2006/07).
 - Accommodation based services:
 - SPI 'availability' has been constant at 100 per cent for the last four years (target 100 per cent);
 - SPI 'utilisation' has improved from 96 per cent in 2004/05 to 97 per cent in 2006/07 (target 97 per cent); and
 - SPI 'throughput' has been consistent at 99 per cent since 2004 (target 97 per cent), and 160 per cent since 2004 (target 150 per cent) for short term services.
 - Floating Support services: SPI 'utilisation' has increased from 92 per cent in 2004/05 to 108 per cent in 2006/07, against a target of 100 per cent.
- 172 Several KPIs do not show consistent improvement over three years, including:
- short term accommodation 'availability' has fluctuated between 93 per cent and 95 per cent over the last four years (target 95 per cent);
 - short term accommodation 'utilisation' has fluctuated between 81 and 96 per cent over the last four years (target 95 per cent);

- floating support 'throughput' has remained consistent at 134 per cent on average since 2004 (target 150 per cent); and
 - the number of people who moved on, and the support provider did not know where to, increased from 224 in 2004/05 to 328 in 2006/07.
- 173** The ALA demonstrates a positive track record improving VFM since the programme began. Significant savings of £280,000 have been achieved since 2004. Projected savings for this year, 2007/08, amount to a further £241,000. At the same time close working with providers has encouraged improvements in quality of services and 'more for the same' improvements supporting more vulnerable service users. Service and contract reviews have placed a strong focus on improving VFM. This has been demonstrated through decommissioning and reconfiguration of services as described throughout this report. Savings are achieved while improving the quality of services for users.
- 174** The ALA has not comprehensively addressed key weaknesses identified in a self assessment against the Supporting People key line of enquiry (KLOE) in January and November 2006. Several key issues were still in place at the time of this inspection. The ALA has not developed a move on strategy and has been slow to develop performance reporting, the equality impact assessment is delayed and behind target, and elected member involvement in the programme has not yet developed. There was also some slippage in delivering the annual plan, such as developing assisted technology services for the BME community. The team has lacked the capacity to address all identified weaknesses. More realistic, prioritised and resourced action plans would help ensure priorities are delivered on time.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 175** There are more drivers for improvement than barriers. There is a clear vision and leadership. The Council is committed to continuous improvement and learns from the feedback of service users, providers and other organisations. The organisation is self aware and improvement plans are in place to address most areas for improvement identified before and during this inspection. The performance management framework is generally effective. Financial and risk management is effective. Improvement plans are comprehensive but lack some measurable outcomes and some targets are unrealistic, leading to slippage. Some weaknesses remain with performance reporting. Efficiency targets have not been set for programme administration.

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- 176 The ALA clearly sets out what it wants to achieve and the Supporting People vision aspires to make a real difference to the most vulnerable. Its aims and priorities are challenging and are clearly laid out in the annual service plan, which annually updates the five-year strategy. Aims are well integrated reflecting national and local priorities within the LSP, LAA and Community Plan. Moving to a joint vision of the programme within the revised LAA will ensure services are well understood and will improve the profile of the programme. A 'thread' ensures that team and individual targets are linked to overarching LAA and corporate objectives. The commitment to improving VFM is strong. Supporting People priorities are clear to staff, service users, partners, providers and stakeholders.
- 177 The Supporting People team work closely with the Council, and key partners, in helping to deliver the housing strategy and local strategic objectives. CB members play a leading role with wider strategies including the LSP. The Supporting People team proactively ensure key messages are understood by providers and partners. The strong provider forum enables providers to help shape future plans and priorities.
- 178 The Supporting People annual plan is comprehensive and provides a robust basis for annual service improvement. The annual planning review updates needs and priorities, reviews performance, identifies some outcomes and risks and ensures that the five-year strategy is continually updated to reflect the current situation. Progress implementing the annual plan is regularly monitored and managed by the CB. The framework ensures that individual teams contribute to the delivery of the organisation's core aims.
- 179 Supporting People leadership is visible, accessible and effective. The Supporting People programme manager, and other staff, are well regarded by partners and providers. The CB chair is the director of adult social services and effectively directs the programme. The ALA tackles key problems and takes difficult decisions, such as decommissioning poor or ineligible services. Staff and providers perceive senior managers as willing to listen. This develops mutual understanding and respect. The new council portfolio holder demonstrates a keen interest and is starting to influence the programme, such as prioritising more extra care housing. Partners work closely to achieve shared priorities.
- 180 Performance monitoring of the Supporting People programme is robust and performance management is generally effective. Comprehensive data is collected from provider returns; the frequency depending on a risk assessment. Service improvements are closely monitored through the quality assessment framework (QAF) scores, service and contract review action plans, outcome milestones and local performance indicators. The Supporting People team ensure poor performance and areas of concern are followed up with providers. Action and exception reports ensure that the CB are kept informed.
- 181 An improved programme monitoring report was presented to the CB in October 2007. This includes a wide range of key information including budget expenditure, performance indicators and exception report, progress with contract reviews, an outcomes report, complaints and risk assessment. The next report will be improved to include a highlight enabling the CB to focus on key issues.

- 182** Financial management is effective. Staff are supported by corporate staff regarding budget setting, monitoring and control. Financial performance information is well integrated and timely with appropriate reports presented to budget holders, CB and scrutiny panel. Overspending is identified and addressed at an early stage. The Supporting People team receive monthly financial reports showing expenditure against budget for the programme and administration costs. Reports are thorough and provide more detailed breakdown by provider, and for client groups, such as those with learning disabilities where costs are higher. This helps identify areas of concern and high spend to target efficiency savings.
- 183** Sound arrangements are in place to manage risks to the programme. A range of risk assessment is undertaken, including financial risk, contract risk, provider continuity risk and risk assessment of users. As mentioned previously contracts are reviewed in relation to a risk matrix. Risk assessments inform team, departmental and corporate plans. Action identified for 2007/08 for the team included a review of protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) arrangements, including training for providers. Supporting People staff meet regularly with corporate staff to enhance their capacity to manage risks. Effective risk management helps protect the programme and service users.
- 184** A VFM culture is embedded throughout the Supporting People programme's contract management. However, similar robust assessments are not applied to administration costs. This ensures all parts of the programme play a part in improving efficiency.
- 185** The Council make difficult decisions to achieve efficiencies and VFM across all services. A report to the Council's executive board during inspection considered significant changes to the adult social care services, transforming the department towards an enabling function, rather than provision. The success of the existing Supporting People programme is seen as in line with this development. Proposals will give an increased focus on VFM, more choice in some areas of service provision for vulnerable people and greater synergy between the Supporting People team and adult social care.
- 186** The ALA is a learning organisation. It regularly benchmarks with many other organisations to learn and apply good practice. Effective cross authority working has used benchmarking to improve many procedures as mentioned previously. It uses feedback from service users to continually improve services. It used information from complaints to work with partners and providers to improve access arrangements to a foyer. It has learned from others to:
- develop the contract review risk assessment matrix;
 - adopt a retraction planning model helping to identify £500,000 of ineligible activity; and
 - develop the customer complaints policy.

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- 187** The ALA has learned from others to improve administrative support. The team has been able to improve the capacity of the IT system and develop user manuals. There are plans to develop critical friend audits of Supporting People processes to help check quality assurance. Joint learning enables staff to share and develop ideas more efficiently.
- 188** The Council demonstrates a commitment to diversity achieving level three of the equalities standard. However, the Supporting People programme lacks a robust strategic approach to diversity. It has not completed an equality impact assessment, although the one for adult social care now incorporates more actions relating to Supporting People. The Supporting People team has recently commissioned corporate support to undertake its own impact assessment. A clear strategic approach encourages a culture that values diversity.
- 189** There are other weaknesses. Supporting People objectives are not clearly laid out in key partners' strategies, such as the probation strategy. This is needed to ensure that partners' plans and objectives help deliver Supporting People objectives.
- 190** Service users and providers are not fully involved in developing objectives, new policies and strategies. This is improving through the newly established service user panel. The ALA intends to involve providers more through its review of the Strategic Development Group and CB. Positively, customer feedback is used to develop plans and strategies, users are generally consulted on proposals but are not fully involved in drafting and developing them. Unless service users are fully involved, users' needs may not be balanced with organisational objectives.
- 191** Improvement plans are generally SMART⁷ but lack some clear measurable outcomes. Some outcomes are vague such as 'improve the range and quality of services for older people in the borough'. Slippage achieving some targets indicates that plans are challenging but unrealistic. The 2007 work plan does not estimate the resources required to deliver actions, nor is it specific who will undertake relevant action. The 2007 service user plan does not thoroughly review the previous year's outcomes. However, the team were able to easily provide this information, and were quick to alter plans to reflect issues raised during this inspection. Identifying resources, individual responsibility and setting realistic targets help ensure that priorities will be delivered and success measured.
- 192** Supporting People performance reporting within the Council is not fully effective. The Council has effective arrangements in place to stretch and monitor performance through its performance agreement. However, Supporting People performance is not integrated. Performance reporting is restricted to the CB and information is not routinely given to departmental management teams and the adult social care scrutiny panel. Joint targets have not been agreed with partners that are monitored and reported to the CB. Achievements and areas of weak performance are not routinely identified to help inform broader council and partner planning decisions.

⁷ SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and timebound

- 193** Performance management by the CB is satisfactory but not yet fully effective. The PI report does not include targets and comparison with top performers. Performance with fairer charging is not reported. Reports are too detailed to the CB, and do not highlight key areas to be addressed and recognised. Detailed information is not first considered by the Strategic Development Group. A highlight report will be provided in future. Timely and succinct information helps ensure effective control of programme delivery.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 194** Drivers for improvement outweigh barriers. The team has the appropriate skills and accesses corporate support. Relationships with providers, partners and stakeholders are strong and increase the capacity to develop services. Staff appraisal and training ensures staff are equipped to improve the programme. It effectively secures external funding for service development. The CB is generally effective in directing improvement but does not maximise governance capacity by involving providers and users in an effective strategic development group. It lacks a medium term financial plan and procurement strategy. It cannot demonstrate that all parts of the programme reflect the diversity of the local community.
- 195** The ALA has the appropriate skills to deliver programme improvements. Staff are professional, enthusiastic and highly committed. The CB has most of the skills necessary to direct and deliver the Supporting People programme effectively. It effectively delivers programme improvements based on priorities, including developing a robust Supporting People strategy, new provision, service reviews / eligibility and retraction plans. The meeting we observed was well attended and chaired, with staff professionally presenting thorough and helpful reports. Some questions were challenging, for example regarding performance.
- 196** The Supporting People team readily accesses corporate support. It receives significant help within the adult social services department; including financial, commissioning and administrative support. Services are generally well supported by ICT systems. Joint social care and Supporting People assessments have been undertaken during contract reviews of learning disability schemes. Quality assurance schemes for care services and the QAF for Supporting People have been used together as joint assessments. This improves learning, reduces the burden on providers and increases the capacity of the team.
- 197** The Council is increasing its capacity through developing joint management arrangements with the PCT. Joint funding of key positions will give additional capacity and will encourage joint working, particularly joint commissioning. This change has not yet impacted on the Supporting People team. The Council's innovative plans to integrate services in a small authority will increase its capacity to enable service users to achieve and maintain independence.
- 198** The ALA makes good use of resources through some effective partnerships. The relationship with providers, stakeholders and partners is strong, as reported throughout this report. Providers feel engaged in the Supporting People programme and its development. This promotes joined up working and integrated services for users.

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- 199** The Council demonstrates a commitment to improving community engagement. It has accepted the recommendations of a recent peer review for more effective consultation, building on communication. Corporate support and existing links will enhance the capacity of the Supporting People team to engage comprehensively with groups and individual service users.
- 200** The ALA has suitable staff supervision and performance appraisal processes. All staff have annual appraisals and six monthly reviews, with monthly one to one supervision. Training and development needs are identified annually and refreshed during monthly one to one meetings. The Supporting People team hold weekly team meetings and staff are encouraged to contribute at annual service planning meetings. Individual targets are linked to broader Supporting People and corporate targets. Staff are recognised as a key part of the organisation and understand how they contribute to organisational objectives.
- 201** Communication is effective. Staff and providers are well informed through regular newsletters, the intranet, briefings, team meetings, provider forums and conferences. The Supporting People team receive a range of training to enhance their performance. The team has attended bespoke training on value for money, risk assessment and procurement. Training ensures the value of the programme is understood and is delivered in a prudent and robust manner.
- 202** The Council was awarded investors in people recognition in 2004. The Supporting People team were praised in the individual feedback to social services. The report acknowledges a strong culture of providing opportunities for development, good feedback on managerial effectiveness, a strong culture of empowerment of staff and dedicated budgets for staff. Staff are recognised as a key element of organisational and programme developments.
- 203** The ALA effectively secures additional funding from a range of sources to finance service development. Individual examples are given throughout this report. In total The ALA has secured an additional £69 million external funding since 2004. Funders include: the housing market renewal fund, housing corporation, English partnerships, housing investment programme and home office. The ALA has also made effective use of recycling Supporting People grant funding from decommissioned schemes to fund new schemes. Expertise securing internal and external funding maximises the resources available to fund strategic priorities.
- 204** There are some barriers restricting further improvement. There are some capacity problems within the Supporting People team and adult social services department. This has contributed to slippage in plans. The Council recognises this, and is confident that the proposed restructuring of social care services will address key issues.

- 205** The CB focuses too much on operational management of the programme. The lack of clarity over respective roles with the SDG has restricted the capacity of the CB. This is reflected in slippage meeting some Supporting People targets. It has not directed the improvement of service user involvement, diversity and governance to the same high standard as with other elements of the programme. Governance structures do not include provider and service user representation at SDG or the CB. The Council confirmed during inspection that it would reconsider the role of the providers' forum and their involvement in the governance structure. This approach will assist providers to build capacity of the team and to plan for future services.
- 206** There are some other weaknesses with CB meetings. Membership has been inconsistent. Not all members contributed at the meeting we attended, with some only contributing in their own area of expertise. Members demonstrated a mixed level of skills and understanding of key issues. There is no ongoing training programme to meet individual and board needs. The CB is not yet using all the skills and abilities of members to effectively govern the Supporting People programme.
- 207** The ALA does not have a robust medium term financial plan for Supporting People and lacks a robust procurement strategy. The Supporting People team has not done any modelling or scenario planning to identify the potential impact of reduced Supporting People grant funding. Existing financial plans simply take into account a potential three per cent reduction in Supporting People funding. Without a detailed financial plan the ALA does not know how it can fund service development to meet all identified priorities in the five-year strategy.
- 208** The ALA does not routinely collect and analyse data to ensure that the CB, staff, providers' staff and service users are representative of the broader community they serve. Without fair representation, and ensuring there is fair and equal access to all services for all sections of the community, it is harder for the ALA to demonstrate its commitment to diversity.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

This section includes demographic information relevant to Supporting People, comparing the Council and with England.

Table 1

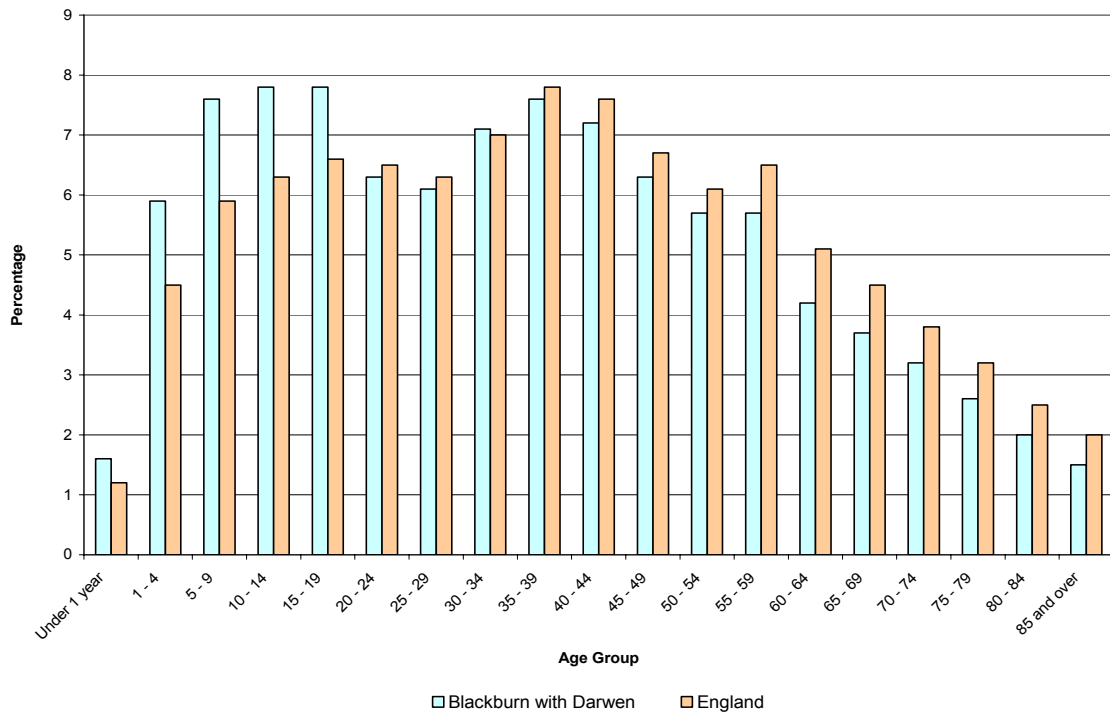
Measure	Blackburn with Darwen	England
Population (mid-2005) ⁸	140,200	50,431,700
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2005)	13.0	16.0
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	22.1	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁹	2.8	2.3
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ¹⁰	20	-

⁸ Source: midyear population estimates (2005)

⁹ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (June 2007)

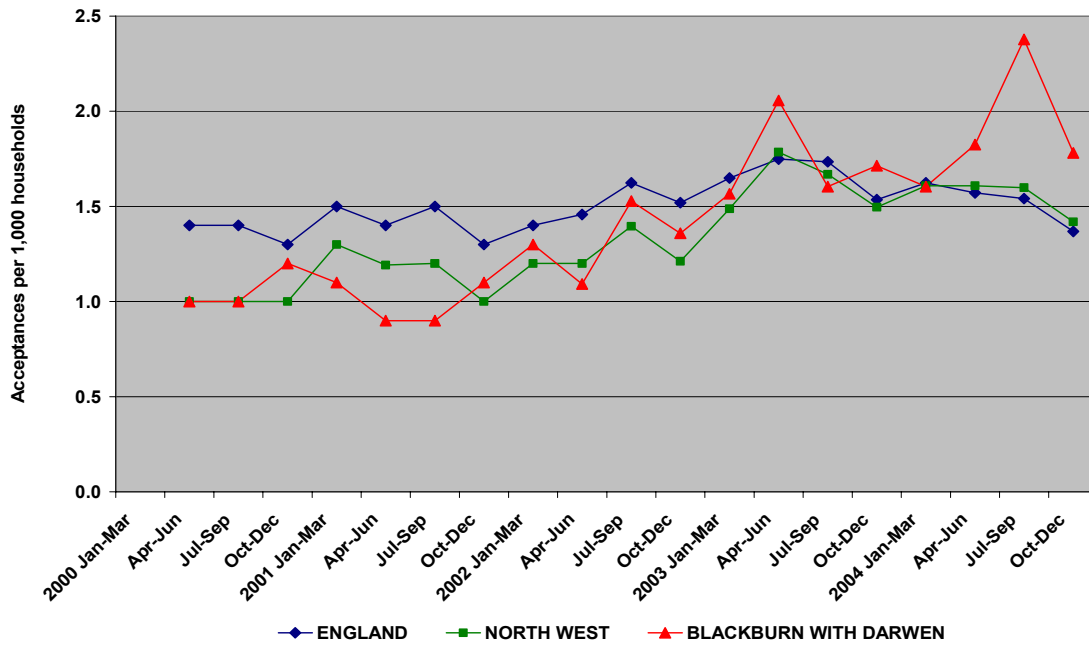
¹⁰ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Figure 1 Percentage of the population¹¹ in each age group compared with England



¹¹ Source: midyear population estimates (2005)

Figure 2 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



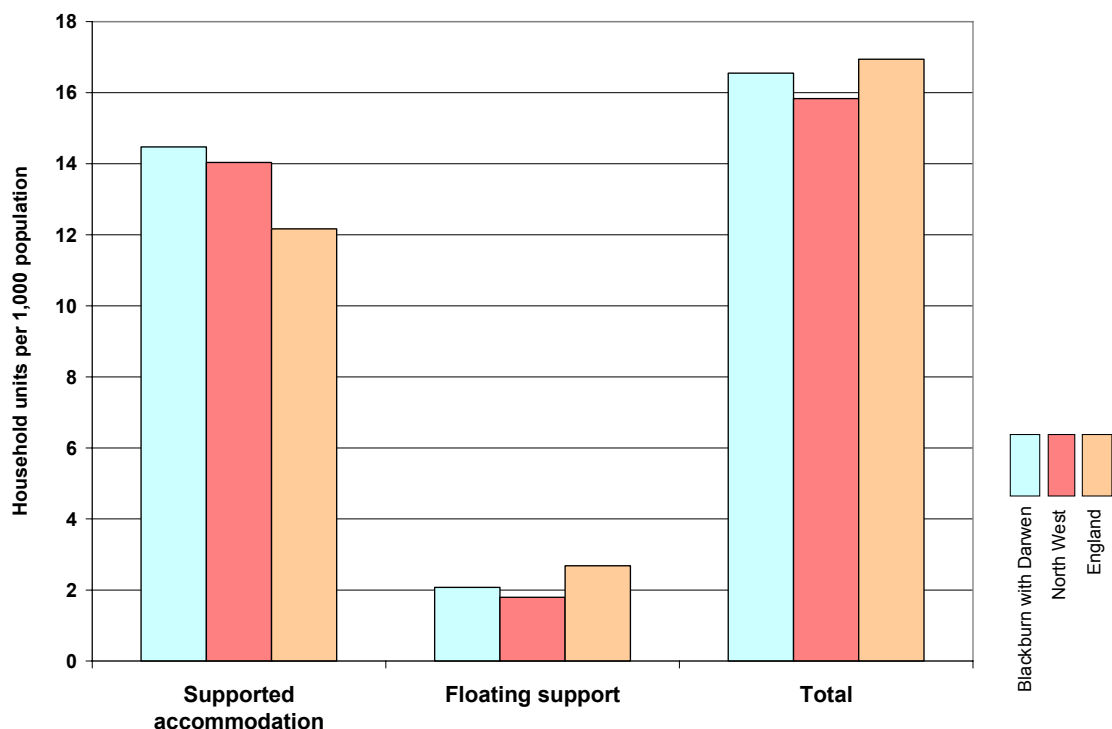
Performance information

This section highlights strong and weak areas of the Council's performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People. We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:

- data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores;
- star ratings for social services;
- Performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services; and
- relevant best value performance indicators.

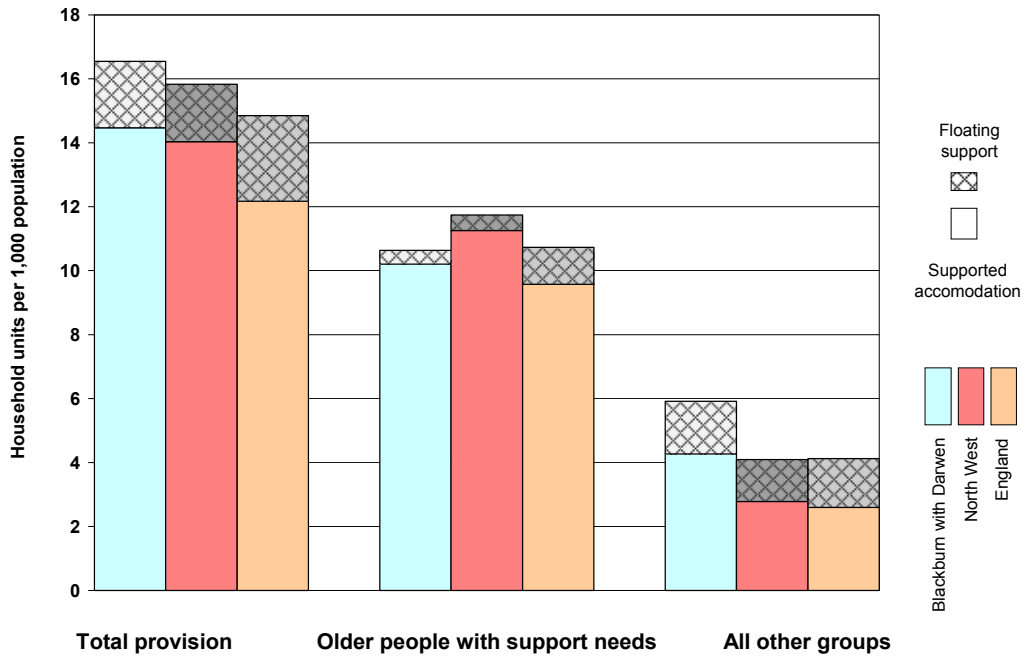
Supporting People data

Figure 3 Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹²



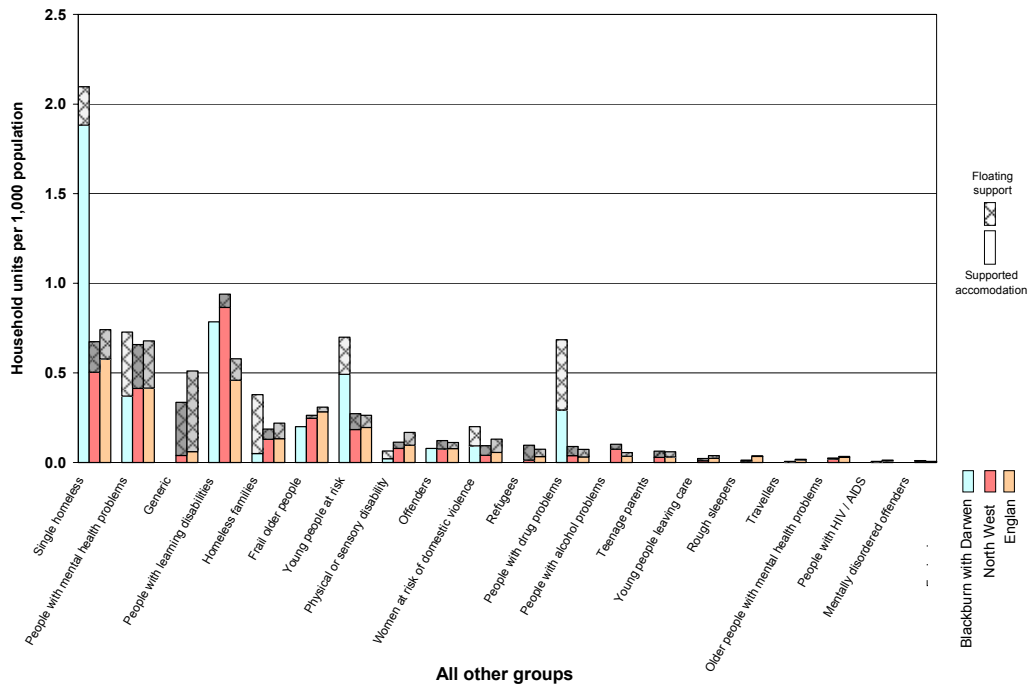
¹² Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹³



¹³ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 5 Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁴



¹⁴ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Table 2 Funding for Supporting People¹⁵

Blackburn with Darwen	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Final Supporting People grant	£ 6,111,846	£ 6,006,158	£ 6,031,664
Administration grant	£ 158,954	£ 158,954	£ 158,954

Table 3 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹⁶

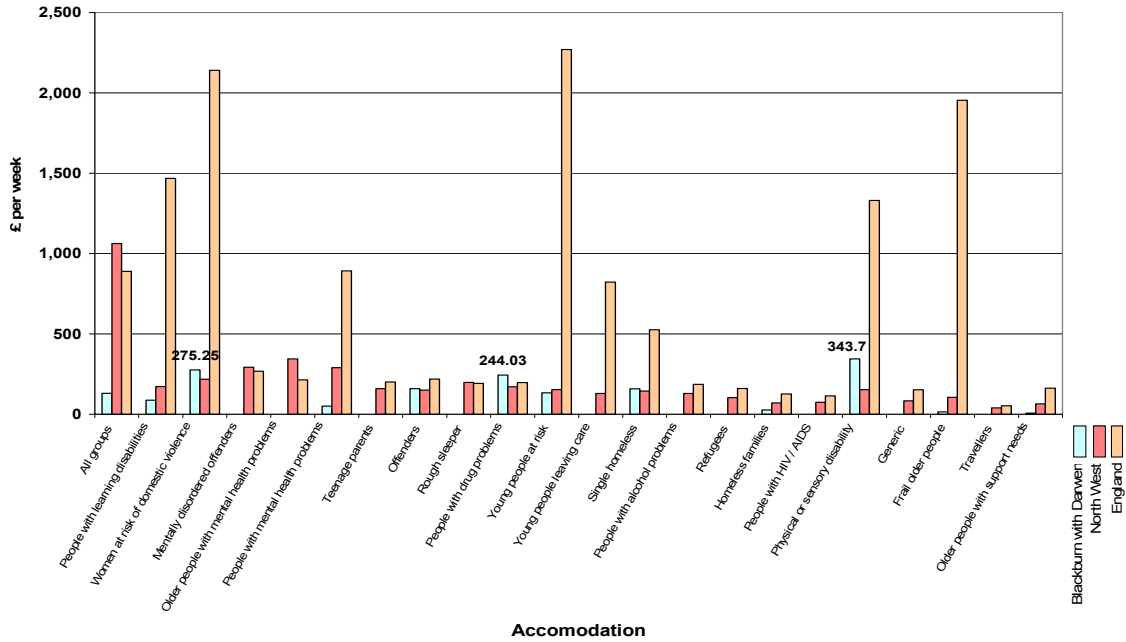
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Blackburn with Darwen	£ 0.91	£ 34.31	£ 34.31	£ 54.74
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

'The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. ODPM will be able to provide updated data when it becomes available and this will then be used.'

¹⁵ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

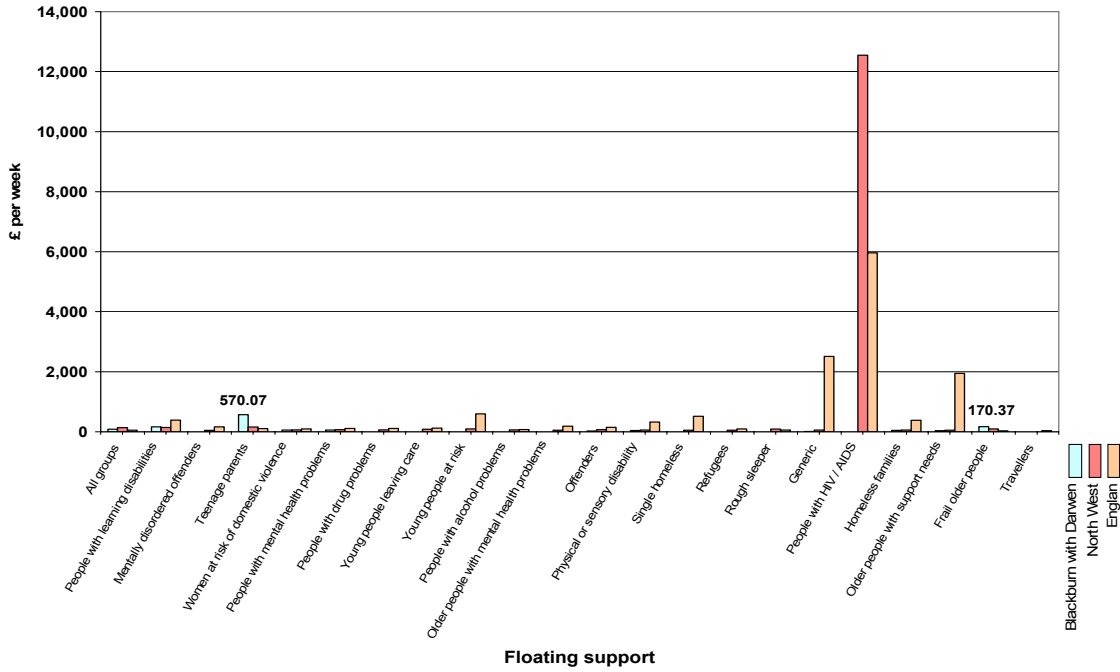
¹⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Figure 6 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁷



¹⁷ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 7 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁸



¹⁸ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 8 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁹, all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)

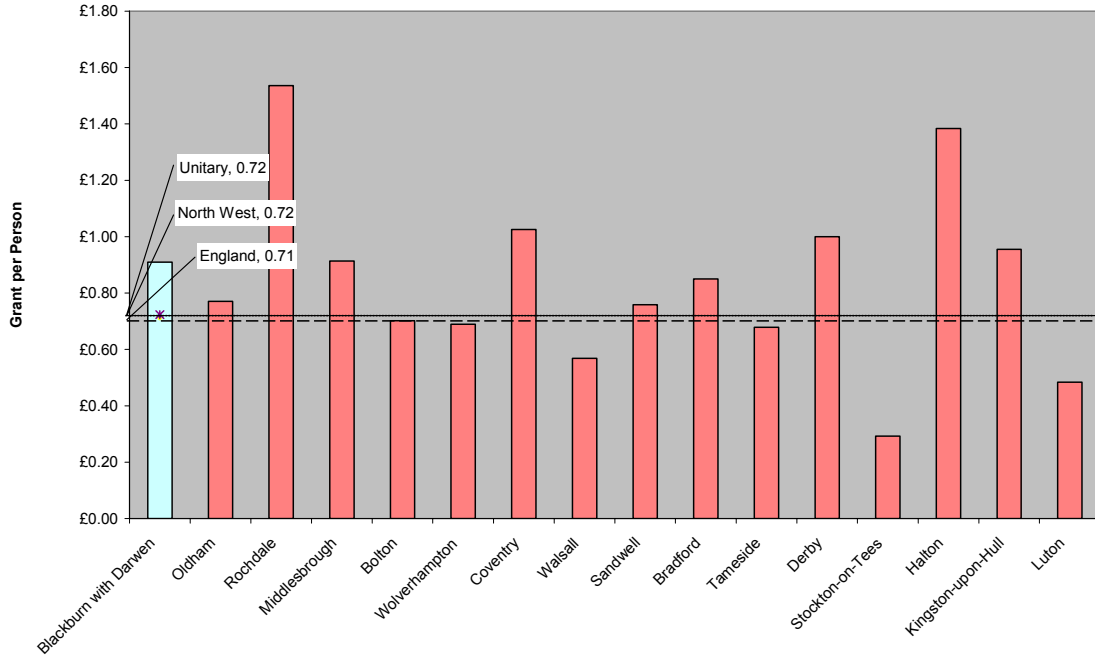
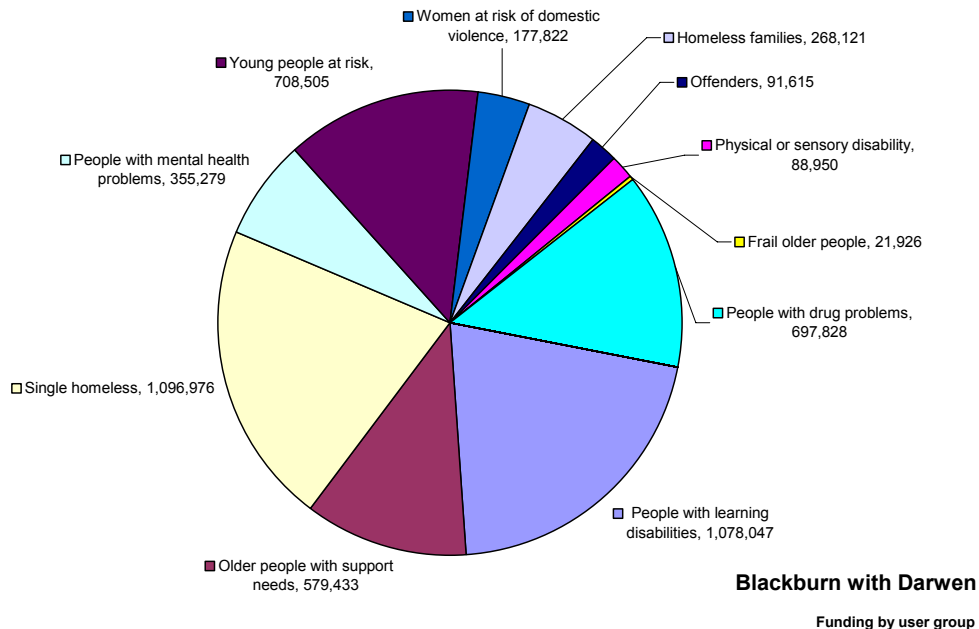


Figure 9 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)²⁰



¹⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

²⁰ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 10 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)²¹

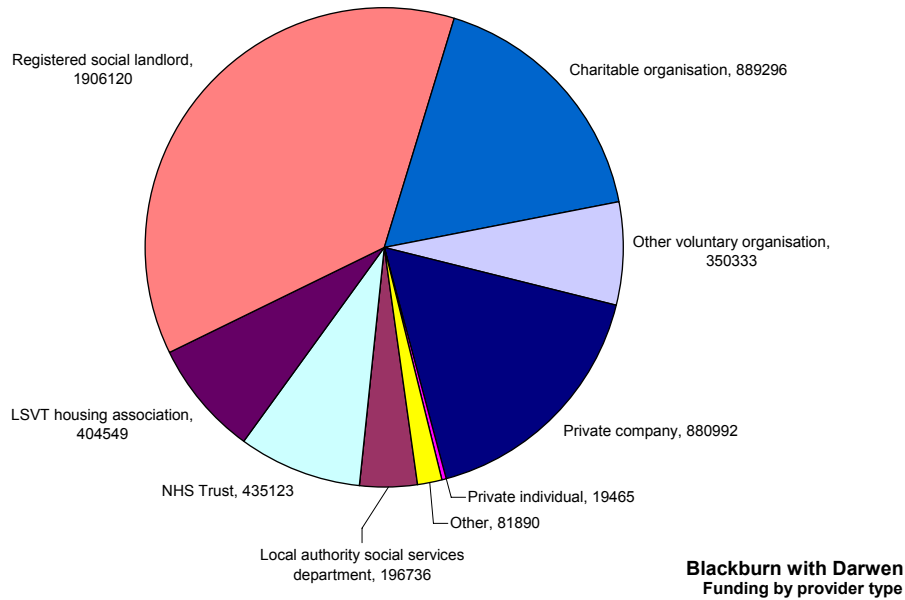


Table 4 Social Services star ratings November 2006

The table below shows the Social Services Inspectorate ratings of the Council’s performance.

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults’ Services	Most	Excellent	☆☆☆ (0)
Children’s Services	Adequate	Good	

²¹ Source: CLG, 2005/06. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social services performance indicators

Table 5 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2005/06

The table below shows how the Council's social services performed on indicators relevant to Supporting People.

Blackburn with Darwen	
Significantly above average (•••••)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Delayed transfers of care (D41)
Above average (••••)	Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Average (•••)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40)
Below average (••)	Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Significantly below average (•)	

Best value performance indicators

Table 6 Performance on relevant indicators in 2005/06 compared with unitary councils

The table below shows how the Council performed on best value performance indicators relevant to Supporting People.

Blackburn with Darwen	
Within the best 25 per cent	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2) Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a) Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a) Domestic violence refuge places (BV225)
Average	Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b)
Within the worst 25 per cent	

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - visits to supported housing schemes, talking with service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to assess information available for service users;
 - a questionnaire survey to providers of housing-related support services;
 - a focus group of service providers;
 - a focus group of service users;
 - a focus group of carers and advocates;
 - interviews with Supporting People lead officers and support staff;
 - interviews with the Council's portfolio holder for adult services and the opposition portfolio holder;
 - meetings with commissioning managers;
 - meetings with representatives of the Probation service and the Primary Care Trust;
 - file checks including service reviews and complaint files; and
 - observation of a CB meeting.

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources'. (Seeing is Believing)

'Speed Dating' - event to raise provider awareness of services

- 1 Providers felt that better awareness of each others services would improve signposting customers to appropriate services. A 'speed dating' event of all agencies shared information and increased awareness about providers and services. Improved understanding has increased the number of referrals between providers. This particularly helps service users with dual diagnosis of support needs.

Living support plans

- 2 Development of 'living support plans' has been used at the providers' forum to promote good practice. Living support plans helpfully tracks users' progress to independence. They includes pictures, poetry and art, for those users who find this a more accessible record of their progress.

Risk based contract monitoring

- 3 Best use is made of resources prioritising contract reviews according to risk. A detailed risk assessment of each scheme covers financial risk, contract risk, provider continuity risk and risk assessment of users. The ALA also closely monitors trends in KPIs for each scheme. This informs the level of contract review and performance monitoring arrangements. Reviews are full, partial or light touch. A risk matrix determines the frequency and type of performance management. This could be quarterly, six monthly or annual. Contract monitoring focuses on the right things. It is open, transparent and risk based, with low risk contracts being visited less frequently. Improvement planning and support helps ensure that weaker services improve.

Joint working

- 4 Effective joint working with children's services is helping integration between services. Joint contract reviews are carried out with children's services and joint quality assurance scheme reviews for domiciliary and residential care provision. The DAAT was closely involved doing joint visits during service reviews of relevant providers.

Interactive directory of services on the website

- 5 The website directory of services enables service users, and potential users, to filter information suitable for their needs. Information is available by service type, provider and service name. It also contains links to other organisations.