

Inspection report

June 2005

# Supporting People Programme

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council**

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# Summary

## Introduction to the Supporting People programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services, which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing-related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering authorities.
- 4 Bracknell Forest Borough Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with Bracknell Forest Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Thames Valley Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 Bracknell Forest Borough Council was inspected early in the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

## Background

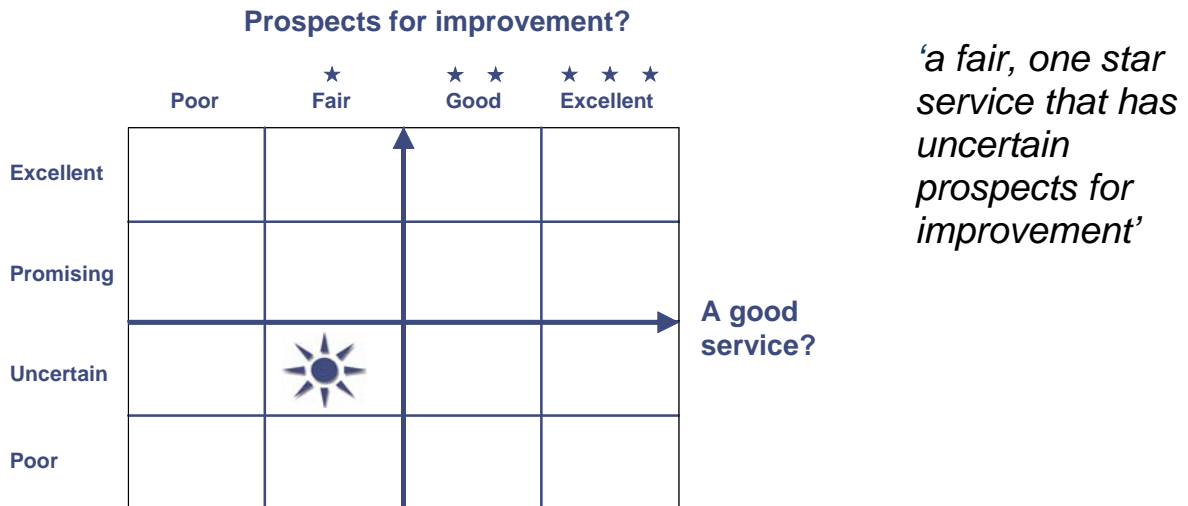
- 6 Bracknell Forest is situated in the south east of England, The population of the Borough is increasing and in mid 2003 it stood at 110,100 of which 9.44 per cent are from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities. The population is relatively young, with 14.32 per cent of the population being over the age of 65, compared to 16.41 per cent nationally.
- 7 Bracknell Forest is one of the most affluent areas in England; ranking 320th out of 354 in the 2004 indices of multiple deprivation, with 0 per cent of the population living in the most deprived 10 per cent of wards nationally, although there are pockets of deprivation in some wards. Unemployment is 1.1 per cent, which is well below the national average of 4 per cent, and average gross weekly income per household, at £465 per week, is high.
- 8 The Council has a substantial Conservative majority. Of the 42 councillors, there are 34 Conservatives, six Labour, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent.
- 9 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the Council in 2004/05 was £2,178,320. In 2005/06 it is £2,070,981, a reduction of 4.93 per cent.
- 10 The Council also receives an administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. In 2004/05 it was £135,394, in 2005/06 the grant is £108,315, a cut of 20 per cent. In 2004 the Council was also awarded one-off grants of £31,000 to undertake reviews and £20,000 to establish a Home Improvement Agency (HIA).

- 11 There are 21 different providers and 33 contracted services providing support to 1,139 service users. This includes 850 units of sheltered housing and 331 units of floating support; there is also a newly established home improvement agency (HIA).
- 12 Excluding staff in schools, the Council employs 2,373 staff across all its services.

## Scoring the service

- 13 We have assessed Bracknell Forest Borough Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>: Bracknell Forest - Supporting People Programme**



### What works well

- 14 During our inspection we found the following positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date.
- ◆ Some new and improved services for vulnerable groups have been provided and some of the objectives in the shadow strategy have been met, for example there is more support for women fleeing domestic violence, for homeless young people and for people with drug and alcohol problems.
  - ◆ The five-year strategy was developed through consultation and has been completed, agreed by the commissioning body and submitted by the deadline of 31 March 2005 to ODPM.
  - ◆ There is effective management of the Supporting People grant. Financial accountability is strong within the Council and its expertise supports the Supporting People programme.
  - ◆ Some providers feel well informed and supported by the Supporting People team, payments are made correctly and they are being well briefed about the service review process.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

## Areas for improvement

- 15 We found a number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.
- ◆ Governance arrangements have been weak, there was a lack of clarity about the respective roles of each body and attendance by partners has not been consistent, as a result there has been insufficient guidance and scrutiny of the delivery of the programme.
  - ◆ Services focus heavily on traditional, accommodation-based, as opposed to floating support services. There are gaps in services for vulnerable minority groups which the Council recognises as an area that needs to be addressed.
  - ◆ The range and availability of literature on Supporting People is poor. The information is not comprehensive or attractive and versions of the literature in different formats are not available.
  - ◆ The lack of capacity within the Supporting People team has not been addressed until very recently and, as a result, several aspects of the shadow strategy have not been completed.
  - ◆ There is a lack of clarity around which services and tasks within services are eligible to be funded under Supporting People. Eligibility criteria have not been agreed and it is not clear how consistent judgements will be made through the service review process.
  - ◆ Service reviews did not start on time and at the time of the inspection no reviews had been completed and signed off by the commissioning body.
  - ◆ The Council have not robustly addressed value for money.
- 16 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for delivering further improvements although we found the following strengths.

## What works well

- ◆ Some weaknesses have been identified and recently addressed, for example:
  - ◆ governance arrangements have been reviewed and re-established;
  - ◆ the structure and capacity of the Supporting People team has been reviewed and additional capacity has been agreed; and
  - ◆ the Council, supported by an additional grant from ODPM has increased the capacity of the Supporting People team by appointing a consultant to complete all service reviews by the end of October 2005.
- ◆ Supporting People is recognised as having the potential to contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities, and will play a key role in the Council's modernisation of its sheltered housing service.
- ◆ Although there has been a lack of progress in implementing the programme, Supporting People is integrated within the Council's corporate agenda and there is a good level of understanding of Supporting People among key councillors.
- ◆ A review of the location of the Supporting People team has begun, to ensure it has appropriate management oversight and the resources to deliver the programme.
- ◆ The director of social services and housing, in conjunction with key partners and stakeholders, is leading a review of services for older people, the Supporting People service reviews will be an integral part of delivering the outcomes.

## Areas for improvement

- 17 There are however, a number of areas in which the Council needs to improve.
- ◆ Insufficient progress has been made on a number of objectives in the shadow strategy. For example, support for ex-offenders and an increase in floating support for older people.
  - ◆ The Council does not possess all the information it needs to reduce costs, reconfigure existing services and improve services in order to raise standards, ensuring that only eligible services are being funded and secure value for money.
  - ◆ Supporting People grant eligibility criteria have not been agreed and it is anticipated that as service reviews are completed some services, or parts of services, will be ineligible and these costs will have to be met by social services.
  - ◆ There are no effective joint commissioning arrangements being developed to address unmet need or create new services for excluded groups and little progress has been made in re-configuring legacy services.
  - ◆ Public information about how to access Supporting People services in Bracknell Forest is insufficient.
  - ◆ Some core elements that underpin the delivery of the programme have not been completed. For example eligibility criteria, accreditation processes, de-commissioning arrangements and fairer charging.
  - ◆ The five-year strategy is aspirational but is not based on comprehensive information about need. It has been developed without grant eligibility criteria or informed by some completed service reviews, as a result it is insufficiently robust to deliver significant improvements.
  - ◆ Detailed service and section plans for the delivery of the Supporting People programme have not been produced.
  - ◆ The Council has introduced an effective performance management framework, but this has not been fully embedded within the Supporting People team.

## Recommendations

- 18 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations and has agreed with the Council the timescales for achieving these.

### Strategic recommendations

- 19 Within 12 months of the publication of this report:
- ◆ ensure the Supporting People strategy addresses the needs of existing and potential service users, by implementing an integrated approach to service planning and delivery; and ensure the strategy is regularly reviewed with stakeholders and is underpinned by detailed improvement plans;
  - ◆ ensure the Supporting People team have the necessary resources and management arrangements in place to deliver the strategy, in particular to review the capacity of the team to ensure it has sufficient resources to manage the outcome of service reviews and deliver the five-year strategy;
  - ◆ work with all providers to promote a culture of value for money assessments prior to service reviews, to ensure they make efficiency savings to Supporting People funded services outside of the review process; and
  - ◆ implement a set of performance indicators for the Council's corporate management team and the Supporting People commissioning body, to ensure they are able to monitor the effective and efficient delivery of the Supporting People programme.

### Operational recommendations

- 20 In addition to the four strategic recommendations above, we consider that the Council also needs to address the following operational issues, within the timescales indicated below.

#### Service users

- ◆ Identify with providers and other stakeholders, the gaps in housing-related support services for vulnerable people and ensure a plan to meet those needs is developed over time. (Within nine months.)
- ◆ Ensure the commissioning body addresses issues of lack of provision for offenders and substance users, along with other less popular groups. (Within six months.)

#### Access and customer care

- ◆ Improved the information produced for users, providers and the general public on the Supporting People programme in Bracknell Forest, including more detailed information on fairer charging and products targeted at specific groups, for instance learning disability clients. (Within six months.)
- ◆ Improve the quality and accessibility of information on the Council's website and include information on the national Supporting People Knowledge website. (Within six months.)

## Governance

- ◆ Ensure that all stakeholders maintain their commitment and contribution to both the commissioning body and the core strategy development group to ensure key decisions are owned by all partners and services for all vulnerable people are improved. (Within six months.)
- ◆ With the members of the providers' forum, agree an action plan to ensure the development of the group and its outcomes. (Within twelve months.)

## Delivery

- ◆ The role of probation in reviews should be clarified and appropriate resources allocated to this. (Within three months.)
- ◆ The monitoring of the take up of Supporting People services, by diverse communities should be undertaken, to ensure appropriate access. (Within six months.)

21 We would like to thank the staff of Bracknell Forest Borough Council, in particular Vincent Badu, Carol Peake and Julie Saucedo, who made us, welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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**Dates of inspection: 31 March, 4 to 8 April 2005**

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# Report

## Context

- 22 This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission (the Commission) following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

## The locality

- 23 Bracknell Forest is located in central Berkshire, approximately 30 miles west of central London, between the M3 and M4 motorways. Covering an area of 10,937 hectares (27,024 acres) the Borough includes the six parishes of Bracknell Town, Binfield, Crowthorne, Sandhurst, Warfield and Winkfield.
- 24 The population of the Borough is increasing; in 2003 it was 110,100 and by 2010 it is estimated it will have increased by 15,800. Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities make up 9.4 per cent of the population. The population is relatively young, with 65.2 per cent being of working age and only 13.0 per cent of people being over the age of 65 years old, compared to 18.4 per cent nationally.
- 25 Major employers are within the financial, business and IT service industries, and warehousing sectors; employment levels are high at 85 per cent compared to a national figure of 79 per cent. The Council serves an affluent community with none of the Council's wards being in the most deprived 10 per cent nationally. Life expectancy is higher than average and teenage pregnancy, although high is falling.
- 26 A substantial Conservative majority leads the Council; there are 42 councillors, including Conservative (34), Labour (6), Liberal Democrat (1) and Independents (1).
- 27 The Council adopted a cabinet and leader model of decision-making in May 2002. The Bracknell Forest partnership is the Local strategic Partnership (LSP) for the Borough and its work is underpinned by thematic partnerships that reflect the priorities in the community plan.
- 28 The Council's net budget for 2004/05 was £104 million with a capital programme of £11.6 million. Excluding education, the Council employs approximately 3,200 fulltime equivalent staff across four departments.
- 29 The Council's vision is 'to make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive; living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment'. This is supported by 15 medium-term objectives and 98 key actions.
- 30 The Council was assessed as a 'good' authority by the Audit Commission under the comprehensive performance assessment in December 2004 and in 2004 the social services department scored one star, on a scale from zero star to three stars, (three star being the highest), by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), previously known as the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI).

## The service

- 31 The Council acts as the administering local authority for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in the Bracknell Forest area.
- 32 The vision for the service is 'to work in partnership to improve the lives of vulnerable people in Bracknell Forest by enabling more independent living in the community and promoting social inclusion. This will be achieved by ensuring a choice of housing support services, which are well planned, preventative and of high quality'.
- 33 The programme is designed to meet the housing-related support needs of vulnerable people including homeless people, people with learning disabilities and mental health problems, older people with support needs and offenders.
- 34 The Supporting People team is located in the social services and housing department, reporting to the assistant director of strategy, commissioning and resources who is the accountable officer.
- 35 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the Council in 2004/05 was £2,178,320. In 2005/06 it is £2,070,981, a reduction of 4.93 per cent.
- 36 In addition, in 2004/05 the Council received an administration grant of £135,394; in 2005/06 it is £108,315, a cut of 20 per cent, to fulfil its role as the administering authority.

## Supporting People – housing-related support services in Bracknell Forest

### Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

- 37 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the 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: proposes the strategic direction, agrees service review procedures and timetables and identifies the work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
  - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees the strategic direction, ensures compliance with grant conditions, considers the 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.
- 38 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each PCT) and the area probation service. In two-tier council areas, each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote, although the administering local authority has a veto where it can demonstrate it faces a financial risk to the administering local authority.

## How good is the service?

### Governance

- 39 Governance of the programme has not been consistently effective. Although the Council made a good start and some aspects have been soundly managed, capacity problems during 2004 led to a lack of progress and as a result the programme has not been fully delivered. There have been some new services but existing services have not been reconfigured to meet the needs of vulnerable people.
- 40 Supporting People has risen on the Council's corporate agenda and awareness of and commitment to the programme is developing across the Council. Supporting People issues are integrated within a range of corporate strategies, such as the community plan and housing agendas and there is a clear understanding of the contribution that Supporting People can make to the Council's strategic objectives.
- 41 The accountable officer is accountable to the director of social services and housing for the delivery of key Supporting People objectives and reports on Supporting People are regularly presented to both the social services and housing department, the corporate management team and to councillors via the social care and the health scrutiny committee.

### Commissioning body

- 42 The commissioning body is part of the Health and Social Care Partnership Board (H&SCPB), which is a sub-group of the LSP and is chaired on a rotational basis, by the Council and the PCT. It originally delegated its decision-making authority to the Joint Strategy and Commissioning Group (JSCG) but this decision has been reversed. The assistant director of social services and the PCT director of nursing and clinical services chair the JSCG. The voting members of the commissioning body are the representatives of the PCT, probation and the Council. A range of managers, including the safer communities manager also sit on the commissioning body.
- 43 The effectiveness of the commissioning body has been weak until recently, with a lack of understanding as to its role and responsibilities. Attendance by partners, particularly probation, has been inconsistent during the last year due to capacity issues and having to prioritise attendance at a number of Supporting People programme events in neighbouring authorities. Following additional guidance in November 2004, a review of the governance arrangements took place; as a result, the H&SCPB will re-assume the commissioning body role and the JSCG will retain the role of the core strategy group.
- 44 At the time of the inspection, no service reviews had been presented to the commissioning body; as a consequence the commissioning body has not had to make any key decisions on the future strategic relevance of specific services.
- 45 It has however, agreed the overall direction of the programme in the five-year strategy and priorities are now clear; reports on finance and budget monitoring are presented and there is an understanding of the contribution that Supporting People can make to the delivery of the joint objectives of both the Council and its partner agencies.

### Core strategy group

- 46 The core strategy group was established in 2000 and consists of the 15 members including the accountable officer, the lead officer for Supporting People, the team manager and senior commissioning and strategy managers from social care, housing, probation and the PCT. Providers are represented and staff with responsibility for housing, IT and finance also attend. There is no representation of users and the DAAT is represented at an inappropriate level.
- 47 The core strategy group has not been consistently attended by probation. This has meant a lack of input into the core strategy group's work with ex-offenders. Although business has focused on appropriate areas of strategic and high level operational matters, for example the development of the five-year strategy, financial planning, needs assessment, and the prioritisation of service reviews, the management of the implementation of the Supporting People programme has suffered. For example, significant areas of the shadow strategy have not been completed and have had to be deferred to the first year of the five-year strategy. The programme has suffered from delays in implementation and is not at the stage of delivery that it should be.
- 48 The review of the JCGS has led to new business arrangements for the strategic development of the service and a review of the involvement of users and carers to ensure they can make an effective contribution. Arrangements covering frequency of meetings, attendees, and reporting are being revised and inclusive fora will be held on a regular basis.

### Accountable officer

- 49 The accountable officer is an assistant director in the social services and housing department. As the lead officer for strategy, commissioning and resources, he is directly responsible to the director of social services and housing.
- 50 The accountable officer has a good understanding of the role of Supporting People and promotes this corporately and with partners. He has ensured the programme's strategic relevance is recognised across the Council and that links are drawn between Supporting People and relevant strategies. He is supported in this role by a lead officer for Supporting People.

### Member involvement

- 51 The councillor with responsibility for Supporting People is the portfolio holder of Social and Health Care Services and Housing. He has a sound knowledge of Supporting People and sits on the Local Government Association (LGA) sub-group for Supporting People.
- 52 Despite the level of knowledge about Supporting People among councillors and their determination to support vulnerable people and address the modernisation of social care and housing, the Supporting People programme has not been delivered effectively.
- 53 Although councillors are proud of the achievements that have been made in introducing some additional support for homeless and vulnerable young people. Despite initial resistance by local residents, they are aware that there is a great deal more to be done and that they will have to take some difficult decisions regarding services for less popular client groups in the near future.

## Delivery arrangements

### The Supporting People team

- 54 The capacity of the team to deliver the programme has been variable. In addition to the accountable officer, there is a lead Supporting People officer who has been able to provide support since her appointment in August 2004. However, she has other responsibilities that also need her attention.
- 55 After a good start in 2002, staff changes and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in the Supporting People team led to problems of consistency and capacity in 2003 and 2004, which the Council did not fully address.
- 56 The full complement of the team is a team manager, a Supporting People officer, a Supporting People assistant and a part-time team administrator. One assistant post had been kept unfilled until a review of the team's capacity could be undertaken. As a result of the staffing issues elsewhere some actions to improve the effectiveness of reporting and management arrangements did not take place. For example, the decision to re-locate the team within the sustainable communities section was not implemented as the management post, to which the Supporting People team would report, was unfilled.
- 57 The team manager has a relevant public sector background and has developed a positive relationship with providers. Many providers singled her out as being accessible and helpful, ensuring they were informed of key decisions and developments in the programme.
- 58 Colleagues within social care and housing provide specialist support to the team on finance, IT and contracting. This support has helped to increase the capacity of the team in these areas.
- 59 In 2005 the Supporting People team were successful in securing an additional, one-off grant from the ODPM of £31,000 to undertake service reviews. This grant is being used to employ a consultant, to work alongside a member of the team, to complete all the service reviews by the end of October 2005.
- 60 Providers are satisfied with the level of support from the team; they feel well informed about the role of Supporting People and the proposals for the review process. They have been aware of the lack of capacity within the team and appreciate the fact that despite difficulties the team has always been open and accessible to them.
- 61 Other positive areas noted by providers included sound administrative systems, efficient contracting and payment processes, having a named contact and a commitment by the Council to consult them on the five-year strategy.
- 62 The team has developed good links and communication channels with other planning, commissioning and working groups. For example the team manager and lead officer have established links with the adult services commissioning group and partnerships boards on mental health, physical disabilities, and teenage pregnancy and to specialist supported housing subgroups including the Drug Action Team (DAAT) and the Young People's Accommodation Group. The location of the supporting people team within social care and health is beginning to help social care staff understand the relevance of Supporting People to their work.

### Five-year strategy

- 63 In 2003, the Council's shadow strategy was rated as 'fair' by the ODPM who commented that the strategy did 'not feel representative of genuine partnership'; and recommended that the Council 'looked ahead to the longer-term issues associated with development and implementation'. However, the development and implementation of the programme remain issues that have not been fully addressed by the Council in the intervening period.
- 64 The needs analysis of 2003 brought together some information from the Housing Needs Survey and other local sources and identified a range of vulnerable groups who were not provided with adequate, or in some areas, any, housing support provision. Service priorities were for people with learning disabilities, single homeless people with support needs, people with drug and alcohol problems and refugees.
- 65 The five-year strategy has been submitted to ODPM in time to meet the 31 March deadline. It has been based on the shadow strategy, incorporates some of the lessons learned and includes consultation with housing and support providers, health and social care professionals, criminal justice agencies and service users.
- 66 However, the strategy lacks detail and senior managers accept it as a document that will need to be kept under review as further information on need becomes available.
- 67 The five-year strategy identifies several of the gaps in services and the priorities of partner agencies including:
- ◆ improving access to Supporting People for a range of vulnerable groups, including young people, ex-offenders, former substance mis-users and homeless people over the age of 25;
  - ◆ ensuring efficient and effective use of continuing supported housing services, by ensuring that move-on accommodation is available to people who are ready to live more independently;
  - ◆ enhancing the quality of life for older people, by reviewing sheltered and other supported housing for this group, alongside all the other services provided to them, with a view to offering greater choice in both housing and support;
  - ◆ helping vulnerable people to remain in their own homes, by continuing and expanding the Home Improvement Agency;
  - ◆ supporting independent living, by offering alternatives to residential care for people with learning disabilities;
  - ◆ improving the mental health of the community, through gaining a better understanding of the requirements for housing-related support and ensuring that joint commissioning provides services that are sufficiently flexible to meet short-term, longer-term and fluctuating needs;

- ◆ promoting community safety, by continuing to fund refuge provision for women escaping domestic violence, ensuring that ex-offenders get access to supported housing and support services and setting out clear expectations regarding anti-social behaviour;
- ◆ promoting community cohesion, by providing access to support services for black and minority ethnic communities, as well as other groups that suffer social exclusion; and
- ◆ preventing homelessness, by supporting people who are at risk of losing their homes and ensuring fair access to social housing for vulnerable and excluded groups.

- 68 The strategy also states that one of its highest priorities is to ensure that all vulnerable members of the community can potentially benefit from Supporting People. It intends researching how it can, in conjunction with neighbouring authorities meet the needs of hard to reach groups such as gypsies, travellers and offenders.
- 69 However, because the needs analysis was not sufficiently comprehensive and has not identified the needs of some of the most vulnerable groups, there are gaps in the plans to comprehensively meet the needs of all vulnerable people. Some partners see the strategy as aspirational and in need of more detailed information on how it will be implemented, rather than a strategy that now describes how it can be delivered.
- 70 Providers and some users have been consulted on the Supporting People vision and their comments led to several changes but insufficient time was allowed for stakeholders to view the final version before it was approved, this has led to some stakeholders feeling less involved than they would have liked.
- 71 A summary of the five-year strategy was endorsed by councillors, the Council's executive and the executive boards of Bracknell Forest PCT and Thames Valley probation service, before it was submitted to the ODPM.
- 72 Partners have also been informed about the content of the final version of the strategy as it has been presented to both the core strategy group and the commissioning body and endorsed by the LSP. It is not clear whether the commissioning body recognise their role in ensuring the strategy is delivered and there is no forward programme for the body that links with key milestones in the strategy. Given their previous poor performance in undertaking their roles, we have concerns about the ability of these bodies to scrutinise and robustly challenge the strategy to ensure it will deliver a comprehensive programme.

## Financial management

- 73 Financial accounting is sound at officer level. Financial reports are regularly made to both the core strategy group and the commissioning body. The budget statements enable managers, the commissioning body and core strategy group to understand and monitor expenditure. Although financial reports rightly cover income and expenditure they lack analysis to facilitate robust scrutiny. For example unit costs across client groups and level of support are not presented. This has been recognised and more detailed reports are being developed
- 74 There are financial management skills within the Supporting People team. The lead officer has appropriate financial experience and is responsible for both the grant and the administrative budget. IT systems are largely in place and at the time of the inspection these were being upgraded to enable electronic payments to be made to service providers.

- 75 No contracts have been signed with services that existed before the introduction of Supporting People on 1 April 2003 or with three of the new services.
- 76 Payments to providers are made on time and are accurate. However, some providers told us that they found it difficult to reconcile the payment they received with the information contained in the separate reconciliation letter.
- 77 The Berkshire regional cross-authority Supporting People group have developed a steady state contract that is being customised for use in Bracknell Forest. This will ensure that providers with services in more than one local authority area have consistent contract terms.
- 78 A 'Fairer Charging' policy for Supporting People has not been revised since it was originally produced and does not reflect the Council's recent charging policy for adults. Relatively few people, other than those who automatically qualify for a Supporting People subsidy, are accessing services. However, the Supporting People Team does receive regular and timely notification of tenancy changes and the Council's performance on financial assessments has improved.
- 79 Although the Council manages the grant well in accountancy terms it has not driven the savings in the budget. The savings of £255,658, made in 2003 to 2004 were the result of a delayed start to a service, not through management of the grant.

#### **Service reviews**

- 80 Supporting People administering local authorities are required by the ODPM to review all their contracted services by March 2006. The ODPM has provided detailed guidance and tools for the delivery of these service reviews including a quality assessment framework and accreditation process. Services should be assessed against locally agreed grant eligibility criteria. The strategic relevance of the service provided and the value for money it represents must influence the outcome of the service review. The judgements made and the recommended outcomes should be reported to the commissioning body.
- 81 The service review programme has not been managed effectively. The reviews did not start in line with the timescale specified by ODPM, and the current timetable is behind schedule. At the time of the inspection no reviews had been signed off by the commissioning body although four had been completed, apart from accreditation, which cannot be completed, as the Council have not agreed the process. Ten further reviews had been started and the remaining 45 are planned to be completed by a consultant by October 2005.
- 82 The delay in completing reviews makes it difficult to evidence the impact of service reviews on value for money and outcomes for service users. In addition, the absence of eligibility criteria, which the Council plans to complete in June 2005, means that when the reviews are completed they will have to be re-visited to finalise them.
- 83 The Council has been successful in securing, from the ODPM, one-off funding of £31,000 to undertake the reviews and have appointed an experienced consultant to work alongside staff in the team do so.
- 84 The Council has developed a fully costed review programme, based on the agreed priorities for the reviews. This allows for challenges and unexpected delays. The original timetable aimed to deliver the reviews by April 2006 but this timescale has been shortened to complete them all by October 2005, thereby ensuring that unforeseen problems do not create further delay.

- 85 The Council has not agreed a process for decommissioning services and the review programme is not linked to financial modelling in the strategy. For example, where schemes will need to be remodelled or decommissioned to meet the strategy, there are no references to bridging funding to support the closure of one service and the opening of another. This means there are no contingency plans to ensure vulnerable people are still supported in the event that a service has to be de-commissioned. In addition, it is estimated that approximately £100,000 will need to be returned to the social services budget as it is thought that this amount of care is currently being incorrectly provided through Supporting People funding.
- 86 The order in which service reviews will be carried out was agreed by the core strategy group, following a risk-based analysis. It prioritised those schemes that presented the highest risk due to high cost, where there were concerns about their eligibility or where volunteers were used. It was planned from the outset that all services would be reviewed in person rather than by a desk top process.
- 87 A methodology has been developed for service reviews. It includes briefings for providers so they are aware of the process and the timescales – briefings of the first 12 services have already taken place and notices will be sent to the next tranche of providers in due course. There is, within the review process an opportunity for providers to challenge the decisions made by the review.

#### **Value for money**

- 88 Value for money has not been satisfactorily addressed and is a weakness in the delivery of the programme. As no service reviews have been completed, the commissioning body and core strategy group have not tackled the issue of high or low costs or increased value for money. Work to identify whether the costs and quality represent value for money has commenced but is still in its early stages.
- 89 Some benchmarking exercises are underway regionally to measure value for money. The consultant who has been employed to undertake the reviews will compare costs with the Council for whom he developed the review methodology and with regional and national comparators.
- 90 In terms of cost, Bracknell Forest has a mixed picture. Although Supporting People costs per head of population are low, at £0.37p per head compared to £0.52 per head in the South East and £0.70 per head in England; unit costs are significantly higher than for the region and England as a whole. For example costs per unit including community alarms and sheltered housing, the costs are £132.37 in Bracknell Forest, £71.78 in the South East region and £76.37 in England as a whole. Services for people with learning disabilities and homeless young people are the highest cost services when compared with the region and England as a whole and these discrepancies are not yet fully understood.
- 91 A reduction of £1,532 in the cost of services for people with drug problems have been achieved and are kept under review via the Supporting People programme and the DAAT treatment plan but the cost of these services were not high to start with.
- 92 The allocation of the grant does not match the needs of the Borough as set out in the five-year strategy. A high proportion is being spent on services for people with learning disabilities, women fleeing domestic violence and on accommodation-based services. Compared with other authorities, there are very low levels of floating support for most service users groups.

- 93 Instead of providing relatively low cost floating support, expensive accommodation-based services are the norm and several of these are now full, due to a lack of move on accommodation and some inaccurate assessments. Providers and members of the supporting people team recognise this means that some services that are intended to support people to live more independently are currently supporting people who have been ready to live independently for some time. This also means some higher cost services are being used inappropriately and some people are receiving inappropriate levels of support. Providers were aware that eligibility criteria have not been produced and they are not being encouraged to routinely address value for money issues ahead of their service reviews.
- 94 The data appendix at the end of this report provides further information and illustrates the variations in cost and provision of services in Bracknell Forest, against the regional and national averages.
- 95 However, the Council has taken action on some services for people with learning disabilities. It identified that some of its own services did not meet appropriate standards and is in the process of re-providing them in advance of the reviews. The re-provision is focused on ensuring people receive appropriate levels of care and support from a range of agencies to maintain independence.
- 96 There is some beneficial engagement with other administering authorities. The Supporting People team are participants in the Berkshire cross-authority group. This group has developed the steady state contract but is still at the very early stages of jointly commissioning services.

### User involvement

- 97 The Council is beginning to address user involvement; it has developed a Joint Public Involvement Strategy with partners from the statutory and voluntary sector and has involved service users in contributing to the development of generic services.
- 98 The Supporting People team have made use of some consultation groups that were in existence prior to the introduction of the programme. For example, the Learning Disability Panel and have made use of the comments received from older people at the Voice of Experience and Commissioning Conference. However, this involvement has been at a late stage, despite the comments of the ODPM about the need to increase user involvement in the shadow strategy. Not all user groups participated in developing the five-year strategy or were consulted effectively on its final draft and the involvement of traditionally hard to reach groups in shaping specific services has been weak.

*'In particular our recruitment and capacity issues had an effect on our ability to develop consultation and communication strategies. These have been identified as key priorities for the way ahead.'* extract from Bracknell Forest Borough Council: Supporting People inspection self-assessment document.

- 99 User involvement in service reviews has been built into the service review process but as no reviews have been completed these views have not as yet had an impact on services. Providers have been encouraged to involve services users and carers in reviews of their individual support plans and people we spoke to during the inspection were satisfied that they had been involved in developing their support plans and were clear they could comment on the service they received. There is a limited amount of advocacy services to support people who wish to complain or challenge decisions.

## Partnership arrangements

- 100 One of the Council's strengths is its multi-agency partnerships and its links to the LSP via a range of themed sub-groups. However, while this corporate and departmental approach to partnerships has clearly influenced strategy it is not yet having a positive impact on outcomes that can be attributed to new housing-related support services funded through Supporting People. For example although Supporting People funds 75 per cent of the cost of a floating support worker for people with drug and alcohol problems with the remaining funding being provided by the DAAT, this was a legacy service established before Supporting People began.
- 101 Links with probation and health services have been created through the commissioning body and core strategy group. However, although probation was fully involved in shaping the shadow strategy they have not had a representative at the appropriate level of seniority or attended on a consistent basis. This is largely due to insufficient capacity within the team and the demands of having to support nine Supporting People programmes in the Thames Valley Probation Area; as a result, there is insufficient input from probation despite their commitment to the programme.
- 102 There is evidence of effective practice within social services and housing with both areas supporting aspects of Supporting People and developing their related strategies alongside each other. The location of the team and the size of the department enable frequent and flexible contact at a strategic and operational level. The housing service has also developed services which act to sustain tenancies, for example, the tenancy services officer ensures people have access to the right benefits – this is an effective way of ensuring that the quality of life of tenants is enhanced and rent arrears are actively prevented. However, this support is not accessible to people who are not council tenants which would have been possible had the service been captured during the implementation phase and funded within the Supporting People programme.
- 103 Through MAPPA there are good links at an operational level between probation, police and the housing department in relation to tackling offenders' housing needs while also managing any risk to the public. There is an example of good practice in the protocol for information exchange between agencies and the MAPPA nomination (referral) form specifically addresses housing-related needs.
- 104 The Council has established an inclusive forum. Although in practice this is a providers' forum as service users, their carers and advocates are not involved. While some providers acknowledge the need for them to take control, more work will be needed to build capacity within the group before it is ready to develop in this way and become more than an information sharing meeting.
- 105 Some positive arrangements for liaison with individual providers are in place and as has been stated earlier, providers have valued the accessibility of the team; they would however welcome more notice of meetings so they could arrange their shifts, in order to attend.

## Access and customer care

- 106 Access to written information about services is poor. The range of leaflets is limited and do not tell the reader how to obtain translated versions or Braille and audio tape formats. The Council has produced an electronic directory of services and this is available on the Council's website. However, there is little Supporting People information at offices and none in the main Council offices. Services provided under the Supporting People programme are not included in the Council's 'Better Care – Higher Standards' publication which although a sound declaration of standards and service principles for the PCT and the Council, it is a general statement of principles.
- 107 There is no information about Bracknell Forest's services on the ODPM Supporting People Knowledge website.
- 108 Mystery shopping exercises were carried out in both office hours and out-of-hours. Our calls were answered promptly and courteously but during our enquiry as to support for a woman fleeing domestic violence we were advised to contact the police for a list of safe places, this is not a satisfactory response and indicates a lack of awareness among staff outside the Supporting People team. The information and advice given to us in response to our enquiry about support for someone with a learning disability was however, accurate and appropriate.

## Diversity

- 109 The Council's CPA assessment highlighted the need for the Council to address the needs of all diverse communities and this was accepted as a priority area for development. Although the diversity agenda is developing there is recognition that there is more work to do to understand and meet the needs of BME communities in particular.
- 110 A Corporate Strategy for Promoting Community Cohesion 2004/05 to 2006/07 details the Council's approach to diversity. The document has been developed through consultation forums and workshops, and it clearly states the Council's approach. The strategy stresses a commitment to ongoing collecting and monitoring of data relating to diversity of need across the different geographical and interest groups of the Borough.
- 111 Only 18.6 per cent of the Council's principal public access points are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. The Council has plans to address compliance to 21.42 per cent in 2004/05 and to 23.8 per cent in 2005/06, although this target is being revised in the light of budget decisions. Compliance is linked to the large scale redevelopment of the town centre.
- 112 In March 2004 the Council met level 1 of the Equality and Diversity Standard for local government and has an unchallenging target to achieve 67 per cent towards level 2 in 2004/05. As a result of the increasing corporate focus on diversity, there is a corresponding focus noted in the Supporting People programme and across the Council. For example, the DAAT completed a diversity audit last year. There were very few BME users represented and the service has become increasingly aware of an increase in Eastern European and Black African service users, mainly isolated, individual communities. No formal diversity monitoring is undertaken of offenders involved in Supporting People. A needs analysis in relation to BME groups, including gypsies and travellers, is planned, through the Council's cross-authority links.

113 The needs of some minority groups are being addressed through partnership working. The work between the social care and health directorate and the PCT has facilitated engagement with mental health service users and people misusing alcohol and drugs - many of whom have or have been homeless. The lead Supporting People officer has established links with the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT), the adult joint commissioning group and the mental health local implementation team (LIT).

#### **Outcomes for service users**

114 Some new services have been provided and include:

- ◆ two domestic violence refuges;
- ◆ additional advice and information for people with drug and alcohol problems which enables people to remain in the Borough close to support systems;
- ◆ residential provision for young people scheme to address homelessness and difficulties in retaining tenancies;
- ◆ some extra care schemes for frail older people;
- ◆ improved services for some people in sheltered housing;
- ◆ individual solutions to offender accommodation issues have been found through MAPPA 'if the person has a strong history with the local authority'; and
- ◆ there have been improvements in the out-of-hours access to services.

115 However, there are some significant gaps, which have been identified but not yet addressed by strategic commissioning decisions made through the Supporting People programme.

116 The level of service in some areas is insufficient and for some groups of people there is no provision at all; services are predominantly traditional, accommodation-based services and there is a lack of move on accommodation, which means that people are not being made more independent, and some services are blocked.

117 Exclusion criteria in some services mean that people are unable to access the support they need. For example, referral criteria exclude those service users with a history of violence or sexual offences and those with drug or alcohol problems. This situation is being addressed and greater flexibility and assessing people on an individual basis is becoming more evident.

118 Some services may not be eligible for Supporting People funding particularly those that aim to provide minimum support for people who are already semi-independent and where the philosophy is that the service is providing a home for life.

119 As a result, there are very limited outcomes for minority client groups such as people from BME communities, gypsies and travellers, people with HIV and AIDS and for those less popular groups of people such as offenders and substance mis-users. This is recognised in the five-year strategy, which identifies these as priority groups.

- 120 There is a high level of provision for people with learning disabilities due to the levels inherited from Berkshire as part of local government reorganisation. This has had an impact on the level of provision for other vulnerable groups, particularly the growing number of older people. The Council was successful in its bid to ODPM for resources to establish a Home Improvement Agency, but at the time of the inspection only two people were receiving the service despite it having been set up for several months. There is a high percentage of privately owned housing and the Council recognises this is a service that needs to be more extensively promoted.

## Summary

- 121 Overall, we judge that Bracknell Forest Borough Council is delivering a fair, one-star service in its administration, planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. We have highlighted the following areas in making our judgement.
- 122 Despite capacity problems during 2004 the following elements of programme are being delivered well.
- ◆ Effective governance arrangements are now in place and partners are beginning to demonstrate a greater commitment to the programme.
  - ◆ Financial systems and management of the grant is sound and payments to providers are made in a timely and accurate manner.
  - ◆ There are examples of some new and adapted support services being provided to young homeless people, women fleeing domestic violence and people with drug and alcohol problems.
  - ◆ The five-year strategy was completed on time and was developed through effective work with partners and some consultation with users.
- 123 However:
- ◆ there is an insufficient level of service for some people, a lack of choice and move on accommodation and an absence of service for some client groups. Services continue to be accommodation-based with low levels of floating support;
  - ◆ at the time of the inspection, eligibility criteria had not been agreed and no service reviews had been completed or presented to the commissioning body. The outcome of the delays in carrying out these essential tasks means that there is no evidence of service reconfiguration or de-commissioning decisions being taken;
  - ◆ value for money has not been robustly addressed and some services continue to be high cost. Diversity, user involvement and consultation have not been thoroughly addressed;
  - ◆ governance arrangements have been weak and a lack of effective scrutiny of performance has allowed implementation to slip without being addressed. No local performance indicators had been agreed for the commissioning body; and
  - ◆ it is evident that senior managers, some councillors and increasingly, partners have an understanding of the part Supporting People can play in delivering their joint agenda of supporting vulnerable people. They have not however, used this understanding to ensure that work is commissioned to meet the needs of all vulnerable people.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

124 In reaching our judgement we look at three key areas.

- ◆ What is the evidence of service improvement?
- ◆ How good are the current improvement plans?
- ◆ Will improvements be delivered?

## What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 125 The Council as a whole has a good track record of delivering change and improvement. The most recent Audit Commission CPA report of December 2004 states that the Council 'has an excellent corporate capacity to improve'. The report identifies extremely effective managerial and political leadership – highlighting the Council and key partners share a common purpose. The Council is also recognised for strong alignment of corporate, service and financial planning to ensure it directs resources to priority areas.
- 126 The Council has a corporate track record of improvement. It has used recommendations from previous inspection and peer reviews to improve services. For example the Council volunteered for two LGIP Peer Reviews facilitated by IDEa in 1998 and 2002. It has also acted on the recommendations of previous inspections. There have been improvements in housing repairs and maintenance, with improved performance indicators and the balance of reactive to planned maintenance. In addition, the Council's in-house contractor was awarded building and construction team of the year. The Council used the outcomes of these reviews to focus its improvement planning.
- 127 Between 2002 and 2004 the Council continued to improve and its CPA Improvement Plan for 2004/05 was achieved ahead of schedule and in 2004 the Council was rated as 'good'. The Council's annual audit letter is a positive commentary on the Council's performance in the last year. It recognises the Council has made significant improvements in several areas over the last 12 months, making the Council one of the 'top ten' improvers in the country since 2002. The Audit Commission's relationship manager identified six main areas where performance and achievement needs to improve further as part of the Council's ongoing drive for service excellence. Each of these is already part of the Council's own improvement agenda and, with other major local priorities, is included in the Council's CPA Improvement Plan and forthcoming Departmental Service Plans.
- 128 CSCI has also noted improvements in the last two years, these include developing and increasing the effectiveness of the scrutiny role by councillors, and a dramatic improvement in the education of looked after children. They also report an overall sense of direction focus and energy in delivering the Government's modernisation programme. Significant improvements in partnership working have also been identified and a willingness to consider changing the balance from in-house to independent providers is cited as evidence of a changing culture.
- 129 This improvement in performance has included a significant change in culture and the development of a robust performance management framework for the Council. This is a major achievement and demonstrates an ability of the Council to tackle problems and influence performance in a strong and positive way.

- 130 Despite progress on improving the performance of the Council as a whole, improvements in the implementation of the Supporting People programme have been less consistent. Although some new services have been provided and some existing services have been improved or extended; significant service gaps remain, a high number of the key objectives of the shadow strategy have not been completed, service reviews have not been presented, value for money has not been fully addressed and as a result, the Council has not developed new services or reconfigured existing services to ensure the services reflect the needs it has identified.

**How good are the current improvement plans?**

- 131 Current improvement plans are weak as they are limited to the five-year strategy, which is an aspirational, rather than a detailed plan to improve services. In its preparation, the Council undertook a risk assessment of the programme to identify key risks and the actions to reduce risks, but the areas of risk were largely based on the impact of the grant being reduced rather than failings by the Council and its partners.
- 132 At the time of the inspection a performance management plan for Supporting People was being drawn up and we were given a copy but it lacked targets, milestones and dates. We are of the view that by integrating Supporting People so fully within social services and housing performance it has not been possible to identify the performance of Supporting People as a discreet area.
- 133 There have been some attempts to look at practice elsewhere but few examples of this learning being translated into practice in Bracknell Forest. There has been some benchmarking but this has not improved value for money.
- 134 Ownership of the Supporting People programme by the local strategic partnership (LSP) is evidenced and links to relevant strategies, such as the community cohesion strategy, have been made. This ensures that Supporting People is integrated into the Council and its partner's agendas at a strategic level.
- 135 The Council failed to deliver some of the key areas of the shadow strategy that would have helped in the preparation of its five-year strategy. Due to recruitment and capacity issues the Council had difficulty developing consultation and communication strategies with hard to reach groups. These have been identified as key priorities for the way ahead to ensure the Council achieves customer-focused services.
- 136 The extent of consultation in developing the five-year strategy has been mixed. Providers and partners we spoke to said while they had an opportunity to comment, the timescales were extremely tight. Some service users have been involved in the development of the strategy by members of the Supporting People team attending meetings with specific client groups and by drawing on a number of public consultation events through the Community Cohesion strategy but as no Supporting People service reviews have been completed the outcome of these could not be included.
- 137 The five-year strategy will enable the Council to make a start on the next stage of delivering the programme but because of delays in implementing the programme up until now several aspects that should have already been addressed will form the basis of the first year's work including gaps in consultation and in understanding the needs of all its communities.

- 138 The five-year strategy should be delivered through an over-arching annual plan and a Supporting People service plan, which aligns the operational and strategic tasks, required to deliver the strategic objectives. The five-year strategy is accompanied by a brief annual plan but this is not supported by a detailed service plan, which identifies milestones, resources and responsibilities for delivery. As a result it is unclear how the plan will be delivered and whether the commissioning board has ensured there are sufficient resources in place to undertake the five-year programme.
- 139 The Council does not have a clear approach to achieve savings over the five-year term of the strategy. Although there is an underspend at present, this is due to a service closure and the late opening of pipeline schemes. The five-year strategy states it will make a 30 per cent saving in the programme by 2010, largely through service changes, closures of non-priority services and obtaining better value for money through new contracts but there are no focused plans detailing how it intends to achieve this.
- 140 Previous plans were not effectively produced, managed or maintained and the implementation of the programme has not been monitored by the JCSG or the H&SCP. For example, while progress on implementing the Supporting People programme is contained in the Social Services and Housing Quarterly Operations report it does not identify any progress against targets or milestones within the shadow strategy. This means it is unclear how progress in achieving the shadow strategy is monitored and reported within the ALA.
- 141 There are a number of corporate plans, strategies and targets to which the Supporting People programme contributes. These include the Council's corporate development of the user involvement and consultation strategies which address issues of diversity

#### **Will improvements be delivered?**

- 142 The Council and its partners face a considerable challenge in delivering significant improvements to the Supporting People programme due to previous delays in addressing weaknesses and it is uncertain that the work that needs to be undertaken by a relatively small team will be completed in the near future.
- 143 The Council has expressed a commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable people and appears to recognise the contribution that Supporting People can make in delivering several of its key objectives. However, to date there is little evidence of improvements having been delivered through the programme and without more effective implementation this is unlikely to be achieved.
- 144 There are several intentions and plans to make changes that will deliver improvements but these are as yet unproven, they include:
- ◆ the Council plans to review the structure of its social services and housing department during the early summer of 2005 and is proposing to re-locate the Supporting People team within its sustainable communities section under a senior manager who will be appointed. This will ensure more support and increase management capacity to address operational aspects;
  - ◆ probation's contribution to the commissioning body is expected to be more regular as internal re-organisation (splitting responsibility for East and West Berkshire) will release some senior manager capacity although it is not clear how current meeting clashes will be handled; and
  - ◆ the newly appointed housing casework manager will represent probation on the core strategy group, increasing the capacity to influence improvements. This appointment is expected to release time for the housing needs and partnership manager to focus on strategic input.

- 145 There is evidence that partners are developing an understanding of the importance and strategic relevance of Supporting People and they have demonstrated an increasing level of scrutiny and interrogation of information, for example the five-year strategy produced a range of critical comments during the consultation phase and these were used to improve the content.
- 146 The needs of some minority groups have been addressed through effective partnership working between the social care and health directorate and the PCT. This has facilitated engagement with traditionally hard to engage groups of people for example mental health service users and people misusing alcohol and drugs.
- 147 There has been a corporate commitment to supplement resources in specific areas of the programme, for example in IT, finance and contracting. During our inspection additional capacity had been created in the Supporting People team by upgrading the Supporting People assistant post to that of Supporting People officer and adding a half-time project officer post.
- 148 The strategic review of services for older people led by the director of social services and housing is on track and will result in the Council's strategic plan for the commissioning, with partners, of services for older people in all aspects of service including Supporting People.
- 149 The planned offender resettlement strategy, to integrate offender accommodation issues relating to approved premises and Supporting People, is a positive step in ensuring that offenders housing needs and any public protection concerns are addressed in a holistic way.
- 150 The quality of partnership working will be increased when floating support worker is relocated in the new Advice, Information and Counselling centre that opens at the end of April 2005.
- 151 Although there are both corporate and directorate systems in place to monitor performance, Supporting People has been seen as making a contribution to the delivery of other performance indicators rather than as a separate area with its own aspects that needed to be monitored. Without a detailed annual plan underpinned by a Supporting People section plan the commissioning body, core strategy development group and the Council's managers will not be able to identify slippage, lack of progress or gaps in performance, nor to monitor key outcomes for vulnerable people. Financial information needs to be tighter. Clearer information needs to be presented to the commissioning board that helps it to manage the transition/change programme for Supporting People.
- 152 Performance management arrangements within the Supporting People team have benefited from the Council's improved performance management system but areas of weakness remain. Although individual supervision is provided and individual interviews have been undertaken, staff performance development plans are used to assess the individual training and development needs of individuals, rather than as a way of linking individual performance to delivering the Council's objectives.

## Summary

- 153 We have judged the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme at Bracknell Forest to be 'uncertain'. Although the Council has a track record of delivering improvement and can demonstrate a range of improvements in its overall performance these are not evident within Supporting People.
- 154 A number of steps have been taken to address weaknesses identified just before the inspection. Governance has been strengthened, capacity has been increased, the service review programme has been resourced and commenced and indicate the Council's commitment to delivering the programme. However, these measures have only recently been applied and improved outcomes cannot yet be evidenced.
- 155 Other areas of weakness that cannot be resolved as quickly remain, including gaps in the plans to meet the needs of diverse minority groups; the lack of floating support and move on accommodation and comprehensive action plans at appropriate levels, to ensure implementation of the programme.

## Appendices

The purpose of an inspection is to make two judgements. The first is how good is the service being inspected? The second is what are the prospects for improvement? We carried out a range of activities to enable us to reach our judgements.

### Documents reviewed

Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the Council provided for us. This list is not exhaustive, but key documents included:

- ◆ service review timetable;
- ◆ Supporting People Shadow Strategy;
- ◆ five-year strategy;
- ◆ best value performance plan;
- ◆ community plan;
- ◆ user leaflets relating to Supporting People and newsletters;
- ◆ Valuing People;
- ◆ Better Care - Higher Standards;
- ◆ contracts;
- ◆ minutes of the commissioning body meetings;
- ◆ Terms of Reference for the commissioning body;
- ◆ Annual Audit Letter 2002/03;
- ◆ housing and homelessness strategies;
- ◆ consultation strategy; and
- ◆ financial reports and ODPM data.

### Reality checks undertaken

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. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included the following.

#### Provider groups

- ◆ We visited a range of services provided as part of the Supporting People grant.

#### Focus groups

- ◆ Service users.
- ◆ Supporting people team members.
- ◆ Commissioners.
- ◆ Providers from a range of services.

## Demographic information

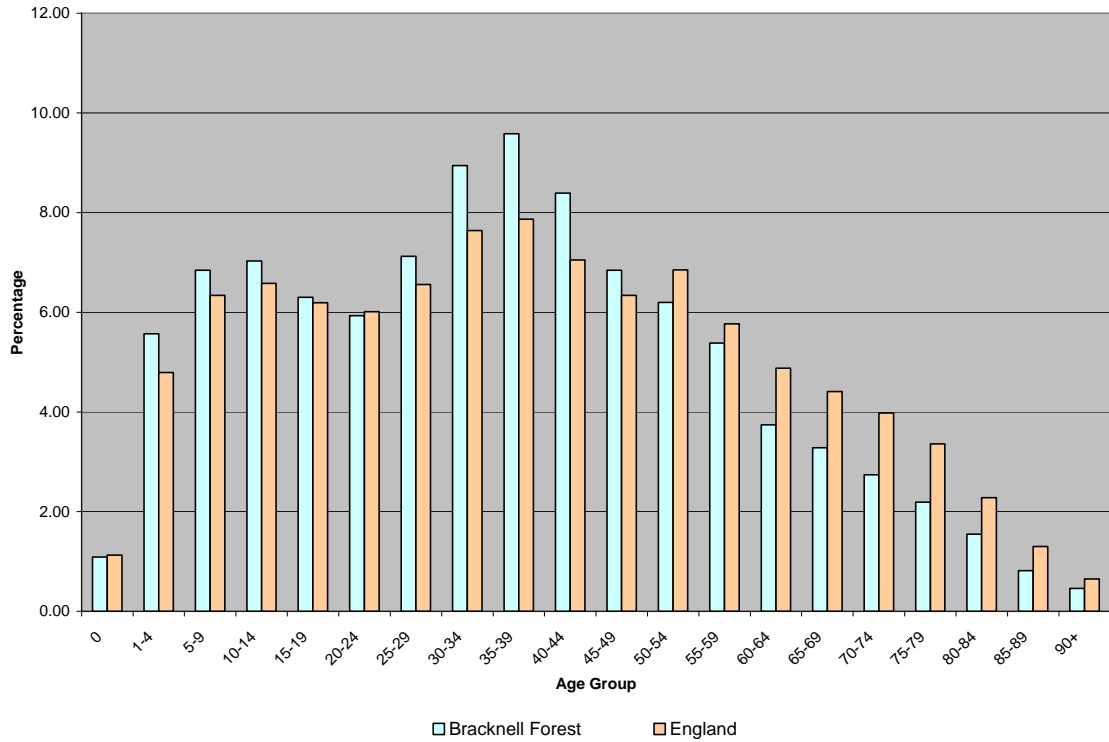
This section includes demographic information relevant to Supporting People, comparing the Council with the rest of England.

Measure	Bracknell Forest	England
Population (mid-2002)	109,600	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2002)	14.32	16.41
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2002)	9.44	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	1.3	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>2</sup>	320	-

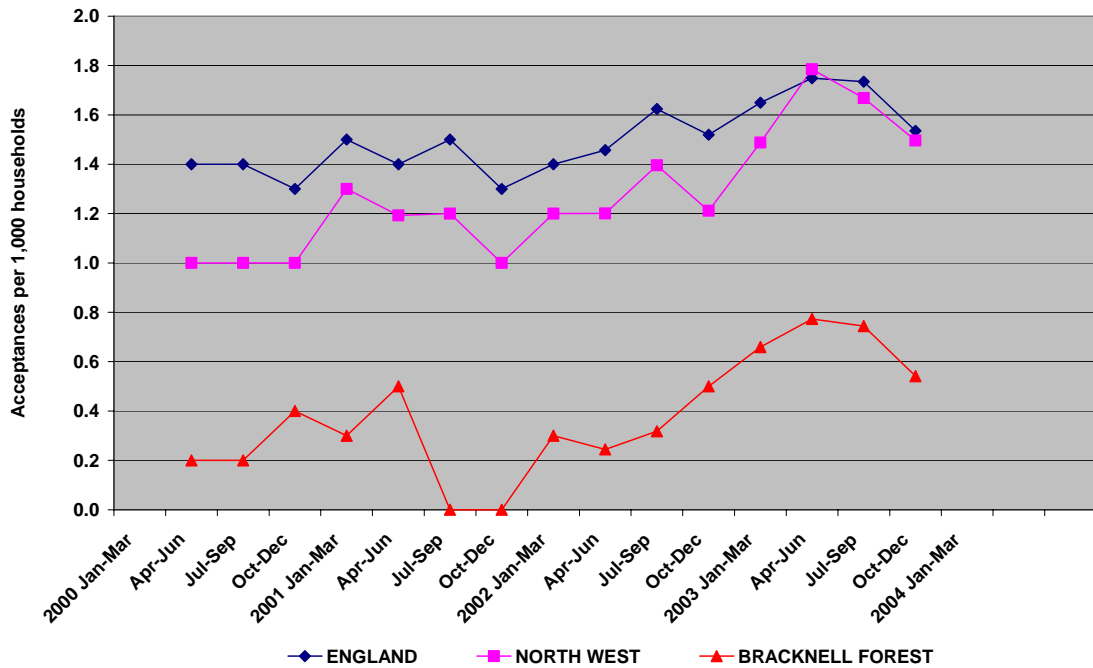
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<sup>2</sup> Deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



Households accepted as homeless between 1999 and 2003 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



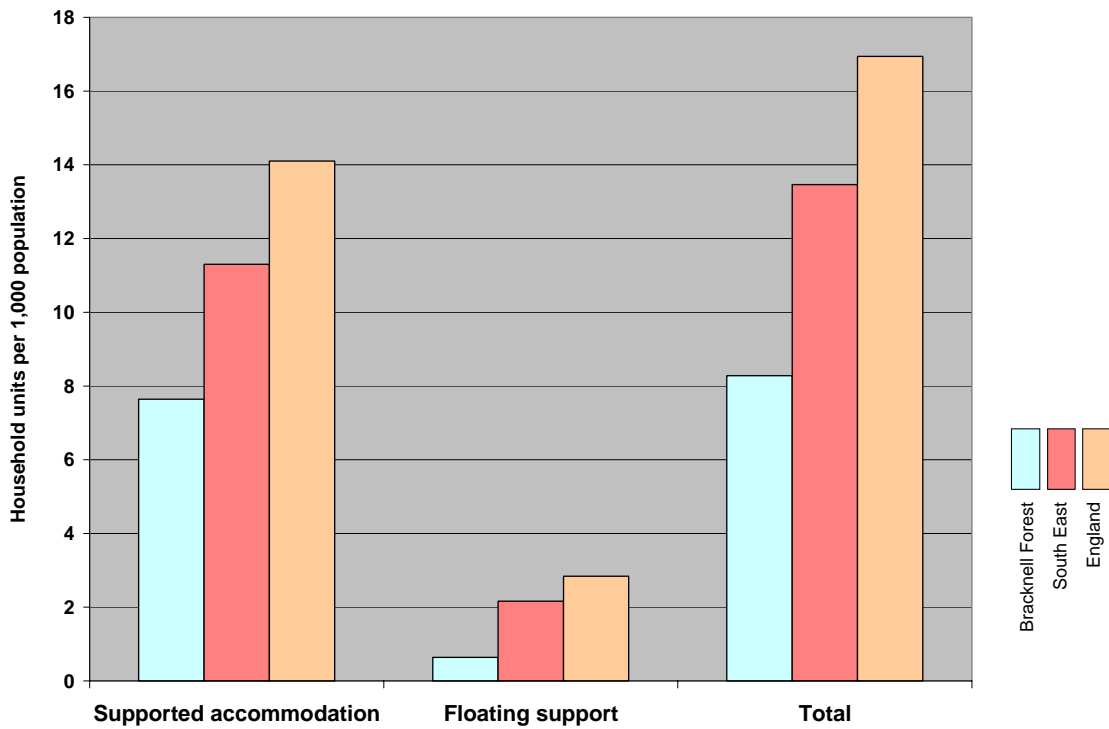
## Performance information

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.

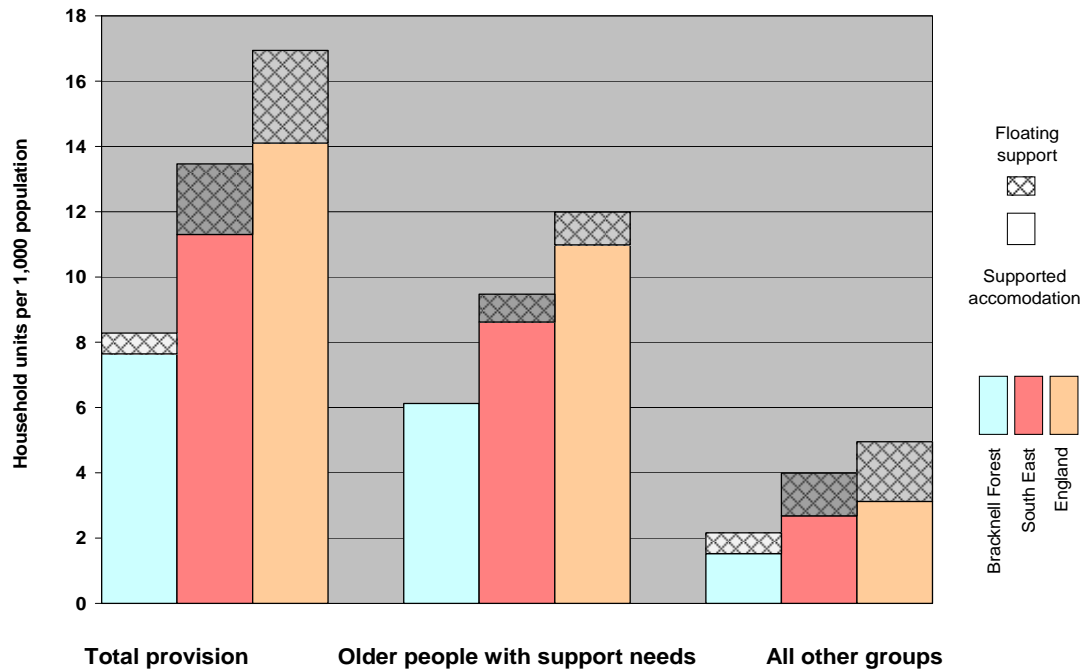
### Supporting People data

**Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>3</sup>**

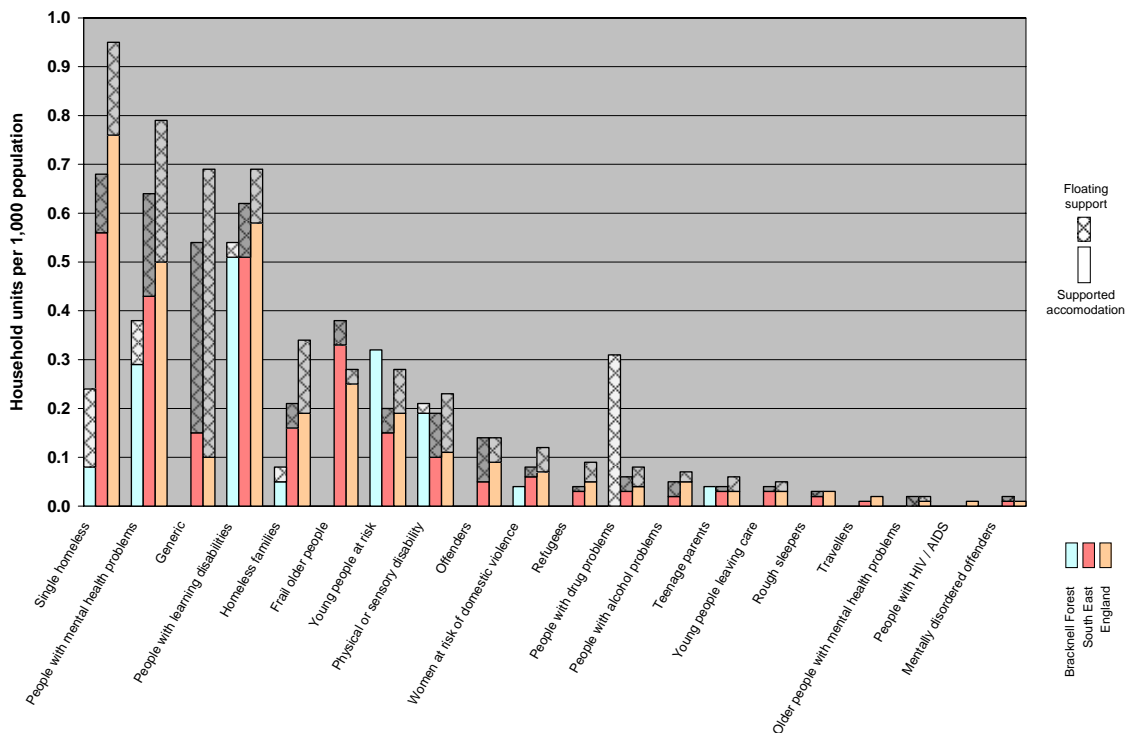


<sup>3</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>4</sup>**



**Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04**

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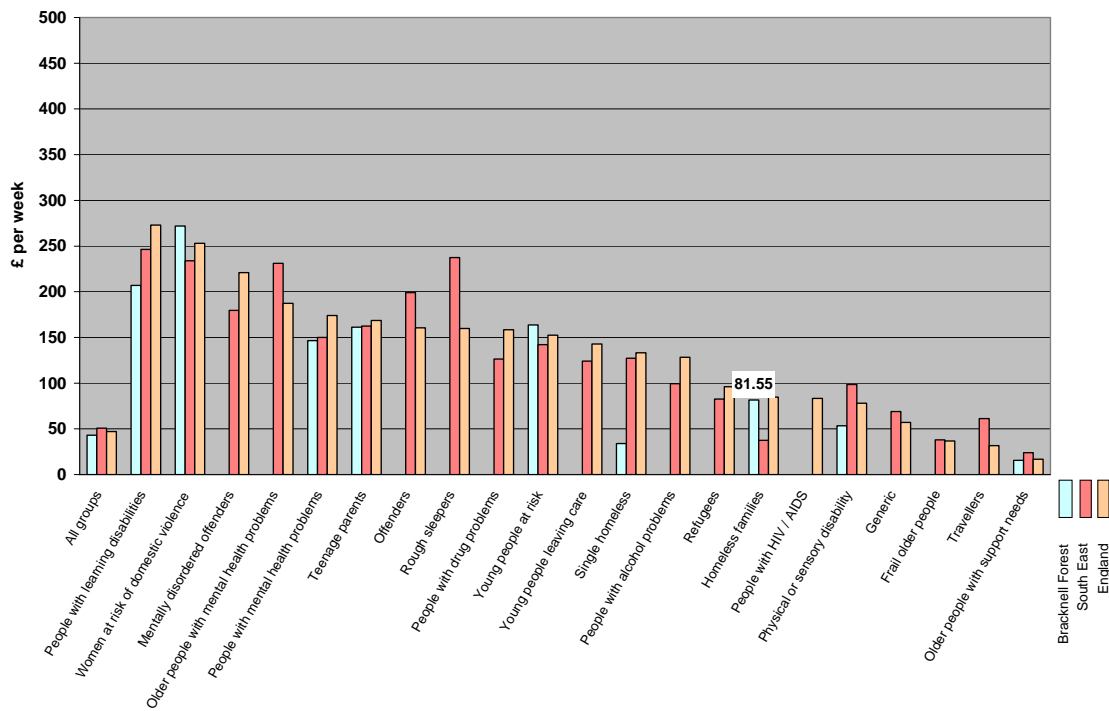
	<b>Final Supporting People grant 2003/04</b>	<b>Pipeline allocation June 2003</b>	<b>Administration grant 2003/04</b>
Bracknell Forest	£ 2,097,330	£ 206,599	£ 168,477.78

**Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)**

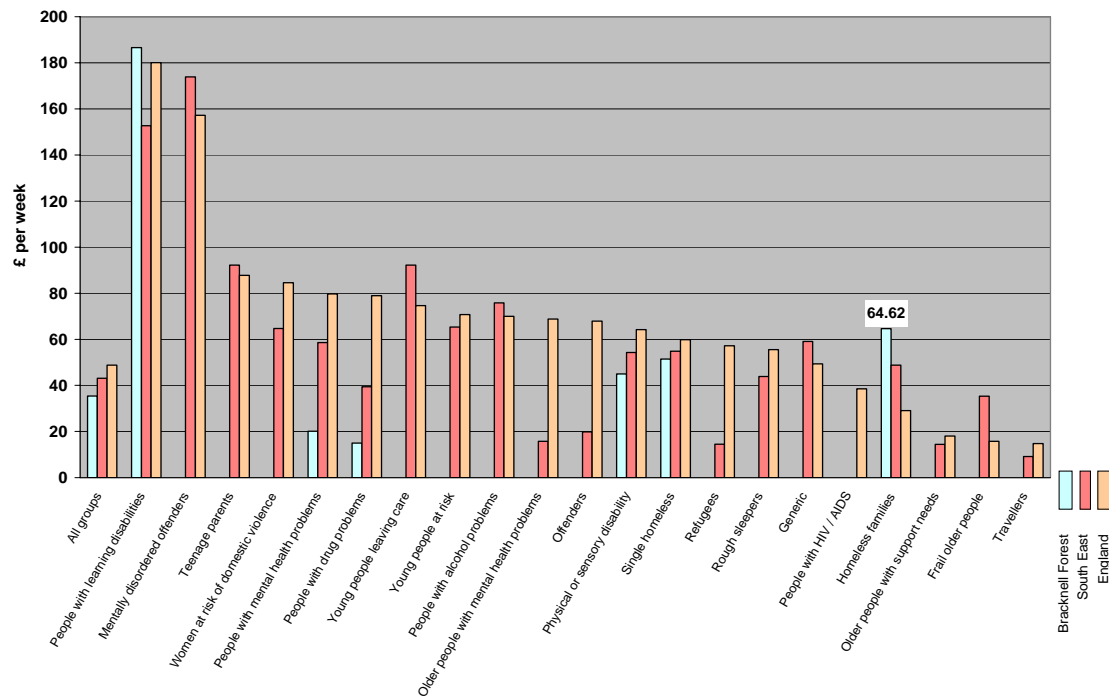
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	<b>Per head of population</b>	<b>Per unit</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing</b>
Bracknell Forest	£ 0.37	£ 31.54	£ 43.52	£ 132.37
South East	£ 0.52	£ 24.94	£ 32.26	£ 71.78
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) <sup>6</sup>**

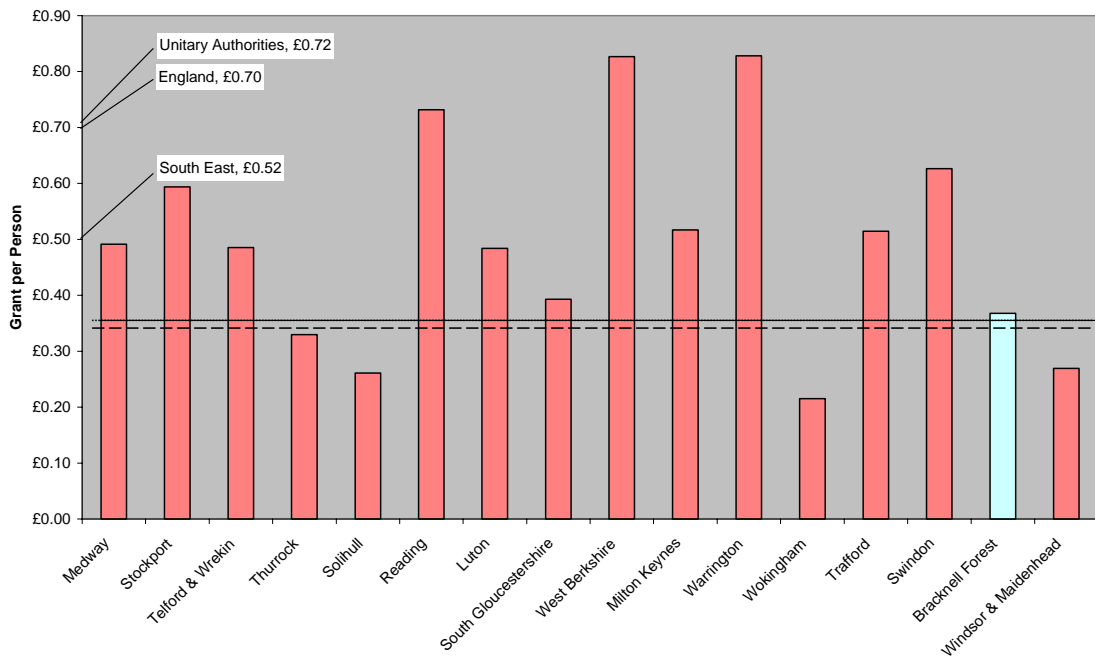


**Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)**

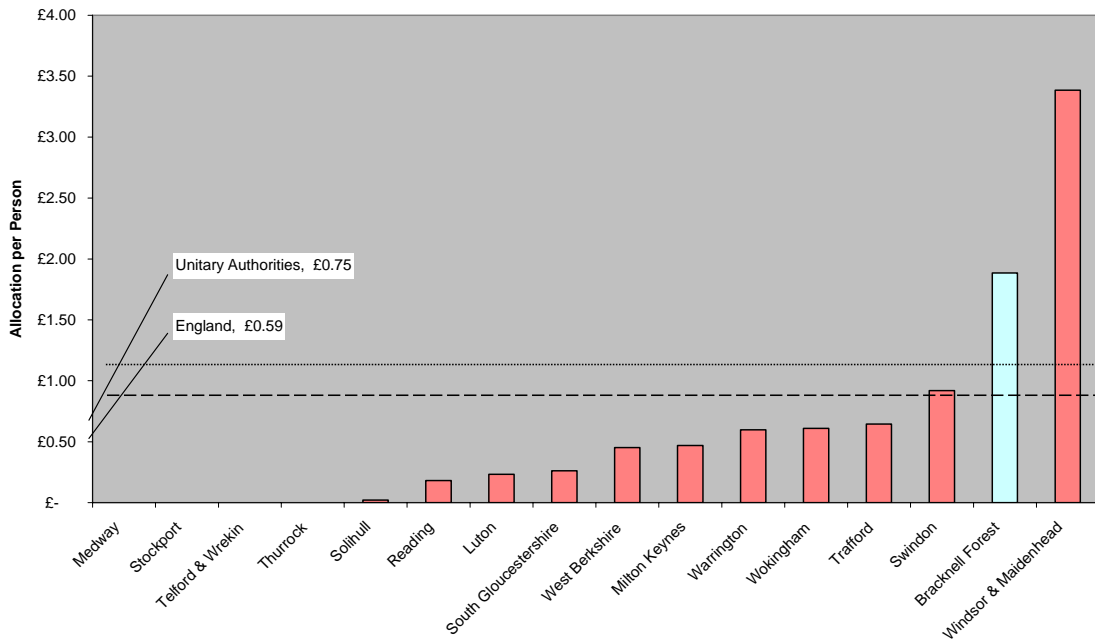


<sup>6</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>7</sup>, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)**



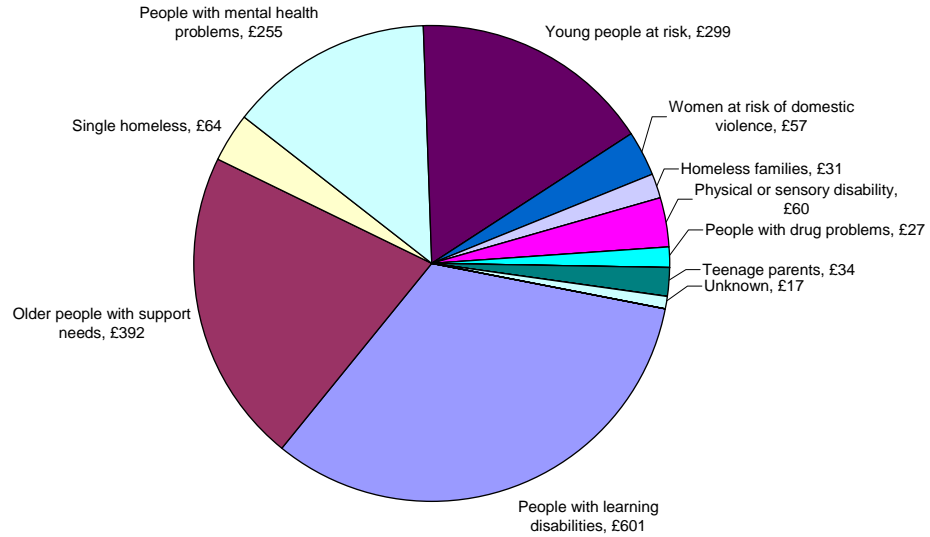
**Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils**



<sup>7</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

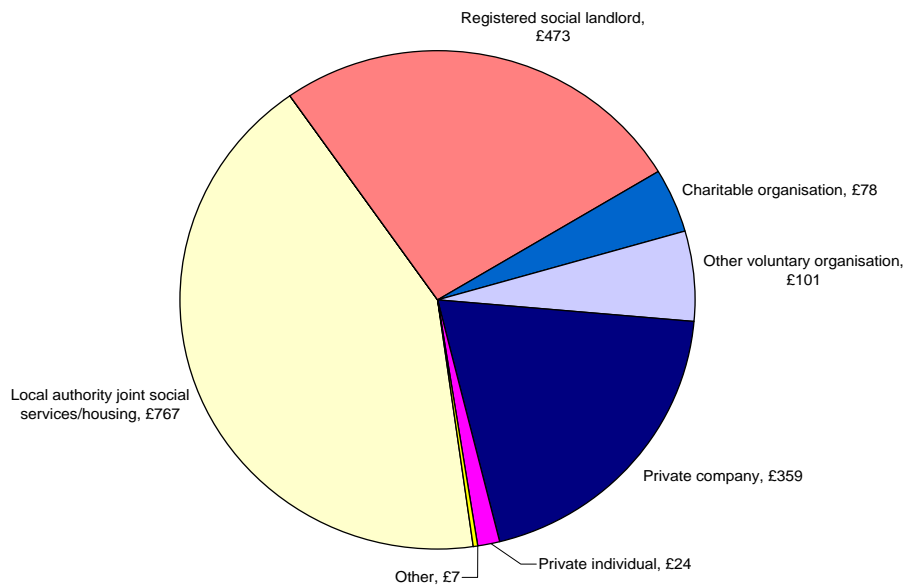
**Share of spending between user groups (£000s)**

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**Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)**

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### Social Services star ratings November 2004

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	Some	Uncertain	★ (2)
Children's Services	Most	Promising	

### Social services performance indicators

#### Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

Bracknell Forest	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	<p>Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40)</p> <p>Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33)</p> <p>Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)</p>
Above average (★★★)	<p>Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26)</p> <p>Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within three weeks (D38)</p> <p>Admissions of adults aged 18 to 64 to residential or nursing care (C27)</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32)</p>
Average (★★)	<p>Percentage change in previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5)</p> <p>Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)</p> <p>New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43)</p>
Below average (★)	<p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)</p>
Significantly below average (●)	<p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)</p> <p>Delayed discharges for older people (D41)</p>

## Best value performance indicators

### Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/03 compared with unitary councils

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

Bracknell Forest	
Within the best 25 per cent	<p>Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a)</p> <p>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a)</p>
Average	<p>The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2)</p> <p>Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a)</p> <p>Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)</p>
Within the worst 25 per cent	<p>Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63)</p> <p>Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b)</p>

## Supporting People – Housing-related support services

'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services that 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 probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.

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 support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service. Negotiation and consultation is also required with 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 programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a local strategic context. For example:

- ◆ support services for people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities whose needs have previously not been met in an appropriate or timely manner;
- ◆ support services for vulnerable older people who wish to live independently, including those in sheltered housing;
- ◆ temporary hostel accommodation – including probation hostels and those providing support for women fleeing domestic violence;
- ◆ support services for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties;
- ◆ floating support to a range of vulnerable people including young people leaving care; and
- ◆ home improvement agency services whose work includes providing practical support to older owner occupiers to enable them to live independently.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local Authorities would 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](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)