

Supporting People Inspection Report

January 2006



# Supporting People Inspection

**Bristol City Council**

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

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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 and national 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](http://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 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 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](http://www.spkweb.org.uk).

## Summary

- 1 Bristol City Council is a unitary authority in the south-west of England. The population is 390,000, of which 8.2 per cent are from ethnic groupings other than white British.
- 2 The Council is led by a minority administration of Liberal Democrats and uses the leader and cabinet model of governance. There are a total of 70 elected members of which the Liberal Democrats hold 32 seats, Labour 27 and the Conservatives 11.
- 3 The Council has a revenue budget of £441.2 million for 2005/06. It employs approximately 8,400 full-time equivalent staff across all services, excluding those funded through individual school budgets.
- 4 Bristol City Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with two primary care trusts - Bristol North and Bristol South and West - together with the Avon and Somerset Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2005/06 is £28,722,815. The Council also receives £262,719 in administration grant towards its role as the administering authority.
- 6 Bristol City Council was inspected midway through 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.

## Scoring the service

- 7 We have assessed Bristol City Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Table 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**

		Prospects for improvement?				
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	
Prospects for improvement?	Excellent					
	Promising		☀			<b>A good service?</b> 'a fair service that has promising prospects for improvement'
	Uncertain					
	Poor					
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	
			★	★★	★★★	

### Audit Commission

- 8 We have given the Council's Supporting People programme a 'fair', one-star rating because of the following.
- New services were developed to meet need, for example very sheltered housing, services for refugees and for women at risk of domestic violence.
  - Services funded through the Supporting People programme cater for a wide range of diverse groups, and the programme has achieved some positive outcomes for service users.
  - A comprehensive five-year strategy, delivered on time, clearly indicates which areas are priorities and which are not.
  - Benchmarking is well-developed and has given the Council a good understanding of how its costs compare.
  - Early, individual reviews were of high-quality and some savings achieved.
  - Grant management and payment processes to providers are robust.

<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.

- 9 However, we found a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include the following.
- Service users are not sufficiently engaged in the strategic direction of the programme.
  - Accessible information for users and advocates is limited and signposting from frontline staff is inconsistent. As such, potential users may have difficulty in gaining access to the services or information they need.
  - The influence of probation and health partners on service planning and delivery is marginal.
  - Strategic thinking between social services and supporting people is not yet fully joined up.
  - Communication with providers, particularly over the change in service review methodology, has not been fully effective.
  - Some high cost services have still to be reviewed.
  - The degree to which the programme achieves value for money cannot be assessed until the sector reviews are complete.
- 10 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement because of the following.
- There is clarity over what are, and are not, priority areas for future funding.
  - Additional officer posts have been added to ensure that the sector reviews will be completed on time.
  - The sector reviews will deliver a wealth of information to help the Council achieve value for money.
  - The Council responds positively to inspection and learns from its own experience and that of others.
  - The track record in project management for Supporting People is patchy but recognised weaknesses are being addressed.
- 11 However, we identified the following weaknesses in relation to the prospects for improvement.
- Performance management of the programme is not yet effective.
  - Partner strategies both within and outside the Council are not yet fully aligned.

## 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 costs<sup>2</sup> 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 makes a general recommendation that the Council shares the findings of this report with governing groups, customers, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team also makes the following specific recommendations.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Improve the performance management of the programme by:*

- developing, with partners, a new, clearly articulated and jointly agreed vision for the programme that expresses clear and compelling ambition for the future;*
- using outcomes, rather than process to measure the effectiveness of the team;*
- implementing robust project management practices to ensure that the sector reviews and other complex projects are designed and delivered on time and to the required standard;*
- aligning tasks within the work programme directly with key objectives in the five-year strategy and the corporate plan;*
- ensuring that the relative priorities of tasks within and between plans are clear;*
- establishing appropriate local key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of programme delivery; and*
- developing mechanisms to ensure that key issues, and exceptions not covered by key performance indicators, are reported to the Supporting People governing groups and to the Council as administering authority.*

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a vision of success is one of the keys to successful change and will focus activity on what the Commissioning Body wants to achieve;
- it will better focus activity on what is most important;
- the use of outcome measures and locally agreed performance indicators will be better indicators of effectiveness for those to whom they are reported; and
- improved project management techniques will significantly increase the likelihood of success in the delivery of complex projects.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Conduct a review of the current resources available to effectively deliver the Supporting People programme by:*

- *evaluating the current skills and capacity of the existing team and senior managers involved in the programme;*
- *exploring with key partners as to whether additional financial or other resources might be made available; and*
- *developing a clear plan to address the issue.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- it would maximise the Council's ability to effectively deliver the programme.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This review should be undertaken by February 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R3 Improve the accessibility of services and information for potential users by:*

- *addressing weaknesses in identified service access points, such as libraries;*
- *ensuring that frontline staff at all housing and social services area offices are trained to give advice and signpost customers in relation to Supporting People;*
- *improving the quality and consistency of leaflets and information;*
- *updating the Better Care Higher Standards Charter to include Supporting People; and*
- *adding a specific area to the website that is tailored around the needs of users.*

## 10 Supporting People Inspection | Recommendations

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- ease and consistency of access for service users to good information in appropriate formats.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2006.

### ***Recommendation***

*R4 Strengthen service user involvement across the Supporting People programme by:*

- *developing a structured approach to involving service users in strategic development of services to ensure that their views are fully reflected;*
- *taking advantage of the service user involvement mechanisms employed by service providers as a vehicle for consultation and feedback;*
- *ensuring that the sector reviews are influenced by service users; and*
- *maximising the user engagement potential of the service development groups and those of carers, advocates and voluntary organisations.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the views of service users will be fully reflected in the provision and development of strategically relevant services; and
- service user good practice can be gathered, evaluated and utilised to develop mechanisms for future engagement.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2006.

**Recommendation**

*R5 Revisit the sector review approach by:*

- *reviewing the various stages of the sector review process to ensure robust and defensible decisions are possible based upon the outcomes;*
- *improving the transparency of service validation by communicating clearly to providers the criteria set for validation; and*
- *providing a system to allow independent moderation and quality assurance of the new process employed, particularly for the city council's own services.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- providers will be reassured of equal treatment;
- decision making on services to be commissioned or enhanced will be based on rigorous evaluation;
- it will minimise the risk of appeal and provide more robust defence to any that do arise; and
- action planning for providers will be better tailored.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by January 2006.

**Recommendation**

*R6 Enhance communication with providers by developing a communication strategy which ensures that:*

- *providers have influence over how communication can be best achieved;*
- *communications are timely, clear and focused, done in an appropriate style and format to reach the right audience; and*
- *providers excluded from the two existing provider groups are given a formal network within which to engage with the team and each other.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- providers will be better informed as to what is most critical; and
- it will promote the achievement of shared understanding and maximise the effectiveness of actions taken in response.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2006

- 13 We would like to thank the staff of Bristol City Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 19 to 23 September 2005.

Mandy Day, Martin Symonds, Tamsin Stirling – Inspectors, Audit Commission

Debbie Hay – Service User Inspection Adviser

Julie Fox – Inspector, HM Inspectorate of Probation

Charles Cope – Inspector, Commission for Social Care Inspection

**Regional contact details**

Audit Commission

3-6 Blenheim Court

Lustleigh Close

Matford Business Park

Exeter

EX2 8PW

Tel: 01392 315600

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 14 The city of Bristol is located in the south-west of England and is one of the eight 'core cities' seen by central government as the country's largest economic centres outside of London.
- 15 The 2001 population census quotes the population of Bristol as 383,700, however, this figure was contested and the figure finally agreed by ONS<sup>3</sup> for Bristol is the 2001 mid-year figure of 390,000, due to under reporting in three wards. For similar reasons, the official ethnicity statistic of 8.2 per cent from groups other than white British may be an under-representation since there is some evidence that a significant number of ethnic minority households did not take part in the census.
- 16 Bristol has a relatively young population with 40 per cent under the age of 30 years. Fifteen per cent of the population are over 65 – marginally below the national average of 16 per cent.
- 17 Bristol is a city of contrasts. Unemployment is close to the national average at 4.9 per cent (4.8 per cent England) and there are some very affluent areas. However, the 2004 index of deprivation indicates that 41 of Bristol's super output areas<sup>4</sup> fall in the worst 10 per cent nationally in terms of multiple deprivation.
- 18 These levels of deprivation have meant that the Council has been able to access a number of substantial funding sources, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Deal for Communities and also funding from Europe.
- 19 As the major urban centre of this region, large numbers of services (including support services) have historically concentrated themselves in Bristol to serve the surrounding areas. This has included long-stay psychiatric hospitals which have now closed in line with the drive towards more community-based provision. In line with accepted modern practice, there is an increasing move away from the use of residential care for people with learning difficulties and older people.

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<sup>3</sup> The Office of National Statistics

<sup>4</sup> Super output areas have replaced the use of wards in making up the indices of deprivation. They are smaller than a ward but bigger than an electoral district and are a useful way of highlighting pockets of deprivation amidst average wealth.

## The Council

- 20 Bristol City Council is a unitary authority which has been led by a minority administration of Liberal Democrats since May 2005. There are 70 seats of which the Liberal Democrats hold 32, Labour 27 and the Conservatives 11. Labour held power for many years until May 2003, since when there has been no overall political control. The model of governance used is the leader and cabinet system.
- 21 The Council's revenue budget for 2005/06 is £441.2 million, which includes £126.6 million for social services and health and £38.2 million for neighbourhoods and housing. The Council is a major employer in the area with 8,396 employees, excluding schools.
- 22 The Council's vision for Bristol City is:
- 'the regional capital of the south-west and a successful European city; a vibrant city, where everyone can thrive economically, culturally and socially; a safe city that promotes health, learning and sustainable development; a diverse and accessible city that values all of its people and communities'*.
- 23 This vision is underpinned by seven priorities which are set out in the Council's corporate plan for 2004 to 2007:
- children – improving educational experiences, standards and attainment, and the life chances of Bristol's children;
  - transport – making it easier and safer for people to get around the city;
  - development – increasing Bristol's economic prosperity;
  - regeneration – sharing the benefits of Bristol's prosperity over the whole city;
  - health – improving the health of people in Bristol and reducing inequalities in health;
  - cleanliness – improving the look and cleanliness of our streets and neighbourhoods; and
  - community safety – reducing crime and the fear of crime across the city.
- 24 Supporting People can make a clear contribution to the health and community safety priorities.

## How good is the programme?

### What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 25 Bristol City Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA), for the Supporting People programme in the area.
- 26 The vision of the Supporting People five-year strategy is:
- ‘to commission services to support people to live in their own homes in Bristol’.*
- 27 Five key objectives are expressed in the strategy.
- To ensure existing housing-related support services are maintained within budget and that all are included in a review timetable. All services are to complement and contribute to Bristol City Council’s wider corporate objectives.
  - To develop flexible support services to sustain and develop people’s abilities to live in their own homes across all forms of tenure.
  - To provide housing related support and advice services which promote independence and choice for all vulnerable adults.
  - To integrate the Supporting People programme into the existing strategic and planning framework to reduce levels of social exclusion, poverty, institutionalisation, rent arrears, evictions and homelessness.
  - To develop a sustainable consultation and participation system with service users, providers and other commissioners in order to develop strategic services and monitor performance.
- 28 The Council has set out strategic priorities for Supporting People service funding in the five-year strategy, these are grouped as follows.
- Group 1 – (learning difficulties, drug and alcohol, refugees, women at risk of domestic abuse, ex-offenders) level of need under-funded. The proportion of funding is to be increased or protected from reduction.
  - Group 2 – (young people/care leavers, homelessness, teenage parents, HIV/AIDS). The funding is assessed as broadly in line with need and is to be protected or reductions minimised.
  - Group 3 – (mental health, older people, physical and sensory impairment) - assessed as proportionately over-funded against need. Savings are to be identified and channelled to activities in Group 1 services.
  - Group 4 – (generic services) highlights areas of activity for which there is yet insufficient information to determine success or otherwise of the services provided.

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

29 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:

- governance;
- delivery arrangements;
- service reviews;
- value for money;
- user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

### Governance

30 The effectiveness of governance and leadership of the programme is adequate. Appropriate governing structures have been established for Supporting People in Bristol, with all partners represented. There is growing awareness of the programme among elected members and interest from the Scrutiny Commission. The level of engagement from probation has been a concern and service development groups, the main consultative bodies for the programme, vary in their effectiveness. Accountability could be improved by formalising arrangements to manage conflicts of interests.

31 The ODPM 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 development group – 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; and
- Supporting People team – delivers the local programme.

32 In December 2000, Bristol City Council formed a Supporting People group to oversee the implementation of the programme. This group evolved into the core strategy development group in accordance with ODPM guidance.

- 33 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services and the area probation service. Each named representative has one vote with the administering local authority having a right of veto where a demonstrable financial risk can be shown.
- 34 In Bristol, the commissioning body was put in place with effect from December 2002. It meets quarterly and is chaired by the Director of Neighbourhood and Housing Services. Clear terms of reference have been set out and a memorandum of understanding governs the relationship between the Commissioning Body and the Council. Voting arrangements comply with ODPM guidance. Sound advice to the Commissioning body on matters of financial probity is achieved by use of corporate finance staff who prepare and present all financial reports. This ensures that such advice is given by professionals who are independent of the team.
- 35 The Council has ensured that all partners are represented at the Commissioning Body. Health representation has been strong and consistent, provided by a senior officer of North Bristol PCT, representing both partner PCTs. Housing has also been consistently represented. However, the effectiveness of leadership provided by the body has been compromised from time to time by changes in the individuals attending for probation and social services. Newcomers have needed periods of time to assimilate the role.
- 36 The Avon and Somerset Probation Area have been unclear for some time about the nature of their representation on Supporting People and the role and accountability of probation personnel. Personnel have changed on several occasions although, since October 2004, a confirmed commissioning body representative has been assigned to Bristol. This officer also represents the Probation service in two other administering authorities in Somerset and thus has strong regional links.
- 37 More effective representation from social services, both at the commissioning body and the core strategy development group, has been in place since the summer of 2005. This happened as a result of significant changes in the senior management team of social services in the previous six months.
- 38 The effectiveness of leadership by the commissioning body is adequate. It has set the direction for the programme in the strategy, it reviews grant spending reports and makes decisions on the outcomes of service reviews. It has devolved monitoring of the delivery of the programme to the core strategy development group. In itself this is not a cause for criticism, but the commissioning body does not always demonstrate the retention of overall control. For example, minutes show actions remaining outstanding from one meeting to the next without obvious criticism. In another example minutes dated January 2005 involving a request for advice on potential cuts in funding, indicates that no clear direction was given.

## 18 Supporting People Inspection | How good is the programme?

- 39 The Head of Strategic Housing is the Accountable Officer for Supporting People and views the role as providing cohesion between the team and the governance structures to enable delivery of the programme. The Accountable Officer also chairs the housing strategy executive group, (the housing services subgroup of Bristol Partnership) - a positive means to ensure that the influence and voice of Supporting People reaches the local strategic partnership.
- 40 The core strategy development group meets monthly and is chaired by the Accountable Officer. Membership consists of strategists and practitioners drawn from the Council and its partners. Two long-standing provider forums are each represented by a provider.
- 41 Members of the core strategy development group who represent wider groups or organisations feed back to, and share information with, those groups. For example, the Head of Community Safety feeds back to the Safer Bristol Partnership and the PCT member relays information to both PCT chief executives and to field staff via newsletter articles. In this way, key messages are communicated and understood and any issues arising are brought back to the group for discussion.
- 42 Accountability in respect of the core strategy development group and the commissioning body is weakened by a lack of formal protocols to guarantee fairness and transparency in matters where conflicts of interest might arise. The Council is both commissioner and provider of services and external provider representatives are also present at these meetings. Matters of commercial sensitivity such as costs of provision are discussed from which there is the potential for financial and business advantage to be derived.
- 43 The effectiveness of the core strategy development group has improved over the last 12 months as a result of improved continuity in membership and attendance, although both health and probation attendance has been patchy. In the last nine months, the health sector has addressed this and is now consistently represented by a senior commissioning manager from Bristol South and West PCT, on behalf of both primary care trusts. Attendance from probation remains irregular. Inconsistent representation by the probation service at the core strategy development group and, until recently, the commissioning body could reduce influence in Supporting People matters on behalf of offenders.
- 44 The core strategy development group is supported by a number of service development groups (SDGs). These client specific groups have been used in developing strategy, gaining feedback on service delivery and for Supporting People consultation generally. Where possible, existing groups were used, avoiding the need for new groups simply for Supporting People. One example is the mental health local implementation team (MHLIT). Others had to be developed to fill gaps, for example that representing criminal justice interests.

- 45 SDGs vary greatly in their effectiveness and there are inconsistent links between these groups and the governance framework. For example, the way SDG discussions should feed the core strategy development group agenda are unclear. Some SDGs deliver good value while others struggle with their purpose, or exhibit tension in changing from the pure advocacy role previously undertaken. Some are long-standing and have provider, commissioner and user representation for example the MHLIT. Others have barely started and representation is very limited, for example, the SDG for refugees and asylum seekers. The effectiveness or otherwise of these consultative bodies will directly impact upon the robustness of the sector review outcomes. (More detail about the sector reviews will be found in the 'service review' section of this report).
- 46 The portfolio holder for Supporting People is also the portfolio holder for housing and adult social services, which helps to co-ordinate thinking across common client groups. He is regularly briefed in respect of Supporting People matters.
- 47 Although there is growing awareness of Supporting People among councillors this is not yet universal. Members of the Commissioning Body brief councillors on decisions with wider impact. The Scrutiny Commission review of Supporting People during the winter of 2004 helped raise awareness among councillors, as did the consultations concerning the five-year strategy (as a result of which several councillors found out about Supporting People projects based in their wards of which they had not previously been aware). The anticipation of potential cuts in the Supporting People budget helped to raise the profile of the programme, by forcing a sharp focus on priorities and choices to be made.

### **Delivery arrangements**

- 48 It is a weakness that Supporting People suffers from insufficiently close alignment of strategic objectives with partners both internal and external to the Council. The small size of the Supporting People team has limited their capacity. The absence of steady state contracts is a source of uncertainty and instability for providers. Good operational relationships between the team and service providers are beginning to be marred by communication practices that are not fully effective. However, the five-year strategy was successfully delivered on time, following consultation and robust needs analysis. Grant financial management and payment processes are effective and there are a number of positive outcomes deriving from cross-authority and regional joint work.

- 49 The Supporting People team is located within the strategic services division of the neighbourhood and housing services directorate. The team consists of eight whole time equivalent staff - a manager, three review officers, a strategy and policy officer, an information officer and two administrators. Members of the team have a range of skills and expertise, having come from a number of relevant service backgrounds, including housing benefit, homelessness and the supported housing sector. The team is very small by comparison to that of other administering authorities with a similar range of provision and budget. Setting this in context, of the core cities, Bristol City Council received the second lowest administration grant as a percentage of the main grant, at 0.9 per cent. This also compares unfavourably with neighbouring authorities whose percentages range from 2.3 per cent to 4.4 per cent.
- 50 The capacity of the team is insufficient to carry out the volume of work required and until this was highlighted by inspectors, steps taken by the Council to address this had been inadequate. There is evidence that workloads have often been excessive, with resultant slippage, for example, in the service reviews and the ability of the team to pursue other activities such as improving user involvement at the strategic level, has been limited. Specialist knowledge and expertise has been drawn from other sections of the Council, for example, finance, policy and equalities but these measures are not sufficient to ensure or sustain the robust delivery of the programme.
- 51 Capacity limitation has been a matter for discussion at both the commissioning body and the core strategy development group on a number of occasions. The administration grant has not been augmented with a contribution from the general fund. This grant was never designed to cover overall costs, but to be seen as pump-priming and as a means to use the programme to ease other areas of activity. The Council has not maximised the opportunities thus afforded or recognised the value that the programme adds to other departmental agendas, despite its stated view of Supporting People as a delivery vehicle for other corporate strategies. Since the inspection team were on-site, the Council has accepted this and increased the number of staff in the team.
- 52 An opportunity was missed to increase resources within the Supporting People team, when the business case was prepared to justify additional review officers. Although a bid to ODPM for additional funding of £32,000 was successful, the administration grant was reduced to such an extent that the net effect was a loss. With hindsight, a parallel bid could have been made internally at the same point in time for funding within the Council's medium-term plan, however, by the time the grant position became clear, the bidding cycle had passed.

- 53** A jointly commissioned<sup>5</sup>, three-year service level agreement with the home improvement agency is the only example where what amounts to a steady state contract has been issued. The commissioning, procurement and contracting framework has been agreed by the governing groups and the draft steady state contract, having been through a number of consultations, is expected to be adopted by the core strategy development group in November 2005. There are ongoing discussions with two neighbouring authorities with respect to using the same contract, which would be beneficial to providers working across the authorities in the achievement of a consistent approach.
- 54** Service providers in the city are uncertain about their future funding and their ability to plan or resource their services effectively is limited by the Council's hesitation in the issue of steady state contracts. A number have undergone individual service reviews, and are providing services in line with the Council's stated priorities, but steady state contracting is being held up, awaiting the sector review commissioning strategies currently under development. (See service reviews.) The Council took a decision not to re-contract until these were complete, thus passing on the uncertainty imposed on the Council by ODPM rather than intervening to achieve stability for providers of core and priority services. In the national context, however, this degree of caution is understandable and not uncommon among administering authorities.
- 55** The Supporting People team produced and submitted a succinct and well written five-year strategy to ODPM by the target date of 31 March 2005. This strategy clearly sets out the relative priorities of different client groups in respect of future funding, with the exception of travellers. It was developed with input from a range of individuals and organisations, including voluntary and private sector providers, statutory agencies, service users and organisations representing service users.
- 56** The Council has fundamentally sound data upon which it based its assessment of needs. A three-part approach was taken to needs assessment. This included a comparison of provision and costs with three comparator groups of local authorities, a survey of unmet needs from service providers and consultation with the specialist service development groups on unmet needs and gaps in provision. This approach has provided a picture of key gaps in provision without being wholly reliant on any one measure. The Council expects the review process to further augment current information on housing and support needs in the city.
- 57** While needs research was carried out for the shadow and five-year strategies, Bristol City Council recognise there are still some gaps to fill. For example, the Avon and Somerset probation services is not yet clear about offender accommodation needs and the type of accommodation suitable for different types of offenders. Social services have not yet produced their overall strategies for the majority of service user groups and this has made it difficult to re-profile housing related support services in line with modernisation guidelines for care. These weaknesses could call into question some strategic relevance decisions that have already been made for Supporting People, which may need to be revised in the light of further emerging needs analyses from these partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Jointly commissioned SLA between Social Services, Neighbourhood and Housing Services, Supporting People and the two primary care trusts.

## 22 Supporting People Inspection | How good is the programme?

- 58 It is positive that grant eligibility and strategic relevance criteria approved by the commissioning body in October 2004 were published in the newsletter for providers and are available on the website.
- 59 Robust arrangements are in place for financial management and monitoring of the grant and the system for payments to providers is effective. Delays are infrequent but when they do occur, accurate back payments are made.
- 60 The impact of probation and health partners on service delivery is poor. The health sector is reluctant to participate in joint funding arrangements as a result of adverse budgetary circumstances. Supporting People is now the main source of funding for housing support for offenders, yet the probation area has been slow to recognise the opportunities that the programme offers and to accord it a commensurate level of priority or engagement at practitioner level. The depth of relationship needed to function in partnership is unlikely to be sustained by one manager working across the whole Avon and Somerset probation area.
- 61 Relationships between members of the Supporting People team and providers are positive at operational level. Providers described the team as approachable and responsive to ad hoc queries. Bristol City Council was supportive of providers during the time of transitional housing benefit, encouraging and helping them to develop and expand services.
- 62 Provider satisfaction with Bristol's overall management of the Supporting People programme is mixed. We undertook a postal survey of Bristol's providers to assess satisfaction over a range of issues. Some elements scored very highly, for example:
- advice and support available from the Council (94 per cent);
  - approach to determination of strategic relevance (93 per cent);
  - the councils grant eligibility criteria (91 per cent); and
  - provision of information for users and applicants (91 per cent).
- 63 The lowest satisfaction ratings were for:
- arrangements for accessing move on accommodation (29 per cent); and
  - processes and arrangements for service reviews (42 per cent) – satisfaction with service reviews was higher amongst those who received an earlier, individual review, but is reducing.
- 64 The impact of both these issues will be described later in this report.

- 65** Proactive communication with providers is not fully effective and the Council is sacrificing quality for volume. A great deal of information is issued by the Supporting People team - email is used extensively and quarterly newsletters produced for providers. A formal protocol is in place, governing what information must be shared and for what purpose. Members of the Supporting People team attend both existing provider forums to make presentations and to report issues of relevance. However, providers felt overloaded with information from which it was difficult to quickly identify the most urgent and important elements. One example given was that information on important issues had sometimes been included in newsletters rather than being addressed specifically to providers and had not, therefore, received the urgent attention that may have been warranted. Forum members pointed to some priorities in the five-year strategy over which they could not recollect having been consulted, for example, the need for more floating support services. Effective communication is essential for the achievement of shared understanding and maximises the effectiveness of actions taken in response.
- 66** Seventeen small, private sector providers (representing 2 per cent of service users) are not engaging with the provider forums. The Bristol Supported Housing Forum pre-dates Supporting People and the team have no influence over their terms of reference. Private sector providers are excluded from BSHF and while the Council has met them individually, it has provided no alternative formal structure to enable them to network with the team and between themselves. This may mean that opportunities for joint working, rationalisation and co-operation are being missed.
- 67** Bristol City Council is an active participant in the West of England cross-authority group<sup>6</sup> and of the south-west regional implementation group. Experience and learning have been shared between the four participants of the former and there are a number of tangible outcomes from the work. For example, there is sound understanding of cross-authority movement within the four authorities and also in and out of the cross-authority area. Work is in progress on a cross-authority agreement for joint working on reviews and accreditation, as a result of which joint funding has been agreed for a coordinator post. All these activities make a positive contribution to the consistency and quality of regional provision.
- 68** Internally, delivery of the Supporting People programme has been hindered in the past through poor inter-departmental relationships, although blockages are now being addressed. Until early 2005 the strategic level relationship between Housing and Social Services was poor – the latter was considered to be disengaged from the Supporting People process and from corporate activity more generally. Following some staff departures and new appointments at senior officer level within SS, working arrangements are improving but there is still more to do to join up strategic thinking between Supporting People and social services. A recent example is that Supporting People was referred to in a social services document dated July 2005 and entitled 'joint strategic directions for adults' - but only in the context of reducing grant money. The value of the programme to objectives for this client group were missed.

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<sup>6</sup> Following the dissolution of Avon, Bristol - together with the surrounding counties of Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset became the West of England sub-region.

- 69 Good links exist between community safety, the drug action and Supporting People teams. The strategy for drugs includes Supporting People issues and targets and exploration of a single assessment process is taking place. As a result the issues are more joined up in recognising what is often a multiplicity of client needs which can be tackled together rather than separately and are in this way likely to be more effective.
- 70 Some mismatches remain in the joining up of plans and sharing of priorities with other partners. There is little evidence of shared targets between Supporting People and probation resulting in a low priority given by Avon and Somerset for this work and a lack of strategic thinking in terms of how these agendas (Supporting People and reducing crime) are strongly linked.

### **Service reviews**

- 71 A programme of thorough and effective individual reviews was completed for about one-third of Bristol's services. Work on the five-year strategy highlighted that the methodology employed could not deliver the robust information needed in order to reshape the market within emerging cost constraints. As a result, Bristol changed to a more strategic cross sector approach in early 2005 which, while primarily desktop based, will enable the Council to better compare service provision and assess value for money. A high-volume of information has been collected but awaits full evaluation and it is too early to assess the effectiveness of related changes to the way users are consulted. Communication about the change in methodology was not well-handled leaving some providers anxious as to whether they will receive equitable treatment.
- 72 The Council's approach to service reviews has changed over the three-year period allowed for completion. Following a start in autumn 2003, the Council embarked upon a very detailed and individual review process involving every single service. A service review/accreditation process manual was issued to providers on CD-rom and these procedures were largely followed by the officers.
- 73 Though time consuming, the methodology was effective and approximately one-third of all services were reviewed in this way. A number of services were reconfigured and improved as a result of individual attention and action planning, and cash savings totalling £1,187,712 were made. Two services were decommissioned and alternative provision made for users. The review officers were able to add particular value to small providers by helping them to improve the robustness of processes and policies. Providers felt supported and positive relationships were developed as a result. Users were thoroughly consulted as an intrinsic part of the qualitative assessment.

- 74 The individual review approach was less satisfactory in two areas.
- In some cases there were excessive delays in the provision of review reports, leaving providers limited scope to respond to issues raised. Timely written outcomes of any outstanding individual reviews are important if these are to be effective as an improvement planning tool.
  - There has been a lack of opportunities for earlier individual service reviews to be reassessed. For example, one provider, having undergone a very early review and having worked closely with the team to improve quality, has been told that there is currently no capacity within the Supporting People team to do a re-assessment against the quality assessment framework. This materially affects the provider's development plans.
- 75 Towards the end of 2004, as clarity of thinking developed around the five-year strategy the Council realised that the approach taken was insufficiently strategic and was not going to deliver the required outcomes and savings. The December 2004 funding announcement from ODPM meant that that service cuts would be required – simple efficiency savings made through the review process would not reduce spending sufficiently. In February 2005, the Council announced to providers that they were instead introducing 'sector reviews'. In addition to accelerating the process, the intention was to allow the Council to review each client group as a whole to ensure clarity on supply, need, costs and service outcomes. Full individual service reviews were only to be completed where they had already commenced. All providers were included in the sector approach; effectively therefore, the whole review process was started again.
- 76 The sector review methodology involves a detailed desktop exercise analysing the response by providers to a questionnaire for each of their services. The timetable has been risk assessed to prioritise the client groups where savings need to be made and some valuable information is emerging. Analysis work to date is highlighting sectors where there is little variance in the costs of similar provision, and those where the variance is marked. Other themes emerging relate to gaps in service provision, areas where services are not matching expectations and where services are being delivered in markedly different ways for the same client group, for example homeless families. Outcome monitoring is a key part of the sector review questionnaire. Providers were asked to describe the outcome measures they currently collect and early indications are that these vary in nature and robustness.
- 77 The sector review approach is fit for purpose and will:
- enable comparisons to be made between different provision within the same sector;
  - develop a vision for each sector, utilising an expert advisory group of providers, commissioners, users and user representatives;
  - enable detailed efficiency judgements to be made on the basis of comparisons of service level, intensity and cost; and
  - result in the production of a commissioning strategy for each sector.

- 78 The sector review methodology will result in the assimilation of a great deal of rich data, but a number of providers have indicated their inability to give full and accurate answers to certain elements of the questionnaire, calling into question the quality and veracity of some of the information received. Data is being checked and challenged by the Council where obvious inconsistencies are spotted but it is still possible that others could emerge later on.
- 79 The new approach will lead to 60 per cent of services having desktop reviews based upon the questionnaire response, approximately 10 per cent of which are expected to receive validation visits. This accords with ODPM guidance, which does not prescribe the validation of each and every service.
- 80 Service user involvement as part of the sector approach is at an early stage and its impact and effectiveness cannot yet be evidenced. The nature and intensity of user involvement is variable depending upon the proposed future of the service. Where decommissioning is planned on grounds of strategic relevance, the affected users are individually consulted as part of an exit strategy. Where new or reconfigured services are proposed, existing and potential users are being asked to suggest what a newly created service would look like, rather than to dwell upon existing provision. One example, in the case of teenage parents, recently involved users on the service development group who were successfully consulted in a forum environment. However, we indicated earlier that the effectiveness of some service development groups as consultative bodies is questionable. Other means of engaging users include postal or telephone questionnaires.
- 81 The Council has not adequately addressed the following:
- the need to determine transparent assessment criteria for which services will warrant validation visits and to inform providers of this;
  - the need to carefully manage the transition between methodologies – as a result of which providers have lost confidence in the review process and perceive it as flawed or unfair given that not all providers will now have the opportunity to individually demonstrate the quality of their services; and
  - the provision of a system to allow independent moderation or quality assurance of the new process employed, particularly for the City Council's own services.
- 82 It is positive that each sector review has a high-level manager as sponsor, whose role is to ensure that the review is robust in all respects by drawing in other relevant experts to the 'review advisory groups' (RAGs). These are temporary project groups whose role is to contribute to the sector analysis and help develop the commissioning visions. Some of the RAGs have started meeting but it is too early to comment on their effectiveness.

- 83 The change in methodology has made it harder to assess progress against the service review timetable. Of individual reviews, 64 have been agreed by the commissioning body, 22 of which are work in progress. This leaves 172 outstanding. Although some high-cost services were targeted for an early review along with new services and unknown providers, other higher-cost services remain to be assessed as part of the sector approach.
- 84 A work programme, dated 16 April 2005, was put in place for the sector reviews, giving timescales and dates for completion of stages. Against this, progress has slipped by approximately one month.
- 85 The cross-authority group has recently developed a joint appeals process. The appeals panel will comprise nominated representatives from all four authorities and the authority against which the appeal is being made will not be part of the decision making process. This is a positive process that has been agreed by the four commissioning bodies.

### **Value for money**

- 86 The Council has a well-developed understanding of how its costs compare with other administering authorities and has identified the outliers. Some effective challenges have been made to high cost services and savings made as result. However, the Council will not be able to assess the extent to which Supporting People expenditure is achieving value for money, until completion of the review programme. As such, the degree to which value for money considerations are currently integrated into service delivery is limited.

### **How do costs compare?**

- 87 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £28,722,815 for 2005/06. This was the tenth highest allocation in the country but, nevertheless, represented a reduction of 5.6 per cent on the 2004/05 allocation. The administration grant for the year of £262,719 was 20 per cent lower than the previous year.
- 88 Figures produced by the ODPM in 2003/04 (see appendices) indicate that Bristol had above average unit costs of Supporting People per head of population. Supporting People grant per head of population in Bristol, per week at that time was £1.55, compared with an average £0.73 across the south-west region and £0.70 averaged across all English councils.
- 89 The Bristol Supporting People team has done its own, more up-to-date benchmarking and have concluded that comparison with the other core cities has most relevance although they are aware of regional comparisons. The most recent exercise was carried out in 2005/06 comparing, by category of provision, the Council's costs with those of the other core cities, the Care Standards Commission Inspectorate comparator group and England. From this, it emerges that the average weekly cost of provision per head of population for Bristol is £1.53 compared to the core cities average of £1.36. This is still some 12 per cent higher, but the differential is much smaller than the ODPM figures and high costs per capita may be consequence of high needs, rather than the costs themselves being intrinsically high.

- 90 Provision compared with the core cities for those areas of Bristol's budget consumption in excess of 1 per cent, shows.

**Table 2 Client provision where budget consumption > 1 per cent**

Category	Bristol	Core cities	Bristol	Core cities
	Percentage of budget		£ per week	
Frail elderly	9	3	60.24	23.50
Generic	7	5	44.57	43.56
Older people	11	11	12.33	7.04
Learning disabilities	13	22	226.61	309.79
Single homeless	18	19	135.55	139.72
Young people at risk	5	6	93.97	139.42
Homeless families	2	5	92.38	150.40
Offenders	2	3	174.24	122.11
Physical or sensory disability	4	1	108.97	30.09
Drug problems	4	1	111.59	145.54
Mental health	2	1.5	160.33	153.88
Refugees	1	2.9	86.48	99.90
Teenage parents	1	0.8	116.07	202.58
Domestic violence	2	3	220.61	221.63

*Source; Bristol City Council spreadsheet - 'Audit Commission Benchmarking'*

- 91 In the main, Bristol's allocation of resources by percentage is very similar to that of the other core cities.

- 92 Bristol has identified those client groups where cost and representation are at variance compared to similar cities, and are seeking to reshape these markets through the priorities set in their five-year strategy. Examples are as follows.
- The weekly costs of provision for older people, including frail elderly, which together account for 20 per cent of the budget, show a marked variance – with Bristol costs significantly higher. Another comparatively high-cost group is those with a physical or sensory disability. Both fall within the client groups identified by the Council as Group 3 priority – where it considers that the sector is proportionately over-funded and where it expects savings to be identified.
  - Other client sectors, notably homeless families and people with alcohol problems compare favourably on cost of provision with the core cities. These groups fall in priority Group 1 where funding is to be increased to better match demand.
- 93 The Council has developed hourly costing as a better assessment than weekly costs which cannot indicate the intensity and frequency of support. Common value for money indicators agreed with the South West RIG are collected, such as cost per hour to Supporting People and cost per hour of frontline staff time.

#### **How is value for money managed?**

- 94 Grant expenditure is monitored by senior managers and reported to the core strategy development group, commissioning body, directors and executive members. There were significant underspends on the main grant in both 2003/04 and 2004/05 for various reasons including contract terminations and delayed implementation of pipeline schemes. These underspends have been carried forward but the Council expects the picture to change to one of shortfall by 2006/07 reflecting ODPM notified reductions in grant. There was an overspend on the administration grant in 2004/05 due to unforeseen legal costs in respect of a provider appeal.
- 95 A voluntary cut of 2.2 per cent was taken by all providers in 2003/04 to assist the Council to make the required savings. Since that time, no inflation increases have been given to providers.
- 96 A draft procurement policy has been agreed by the core strategy development group and commissioning body, adopting the core cities approach. A value for money policy has also been agreed that outlines the measures by which cost effectiveness will be assessed from reviews as follows.

**Table 3**

Unit	Measure
£	Direct frontline staffing unit cost per hour
£	Cost per client per week
%	Variation from average client/group cost for Bristol per week (£)
%	Variation from average client/group cost for England per week (£)
%	Variation from average client/group cost for Core Cities per week (£)
%	Management/organisational overheads
x:x	Frontline staff to service user ratio

- 97** While the above represents a sound start, Bristol will be contracting in the local market. Regional and sub-regional comparisons have been disregarded in the above assessment and such local comparisons will be equally important, for example, in ensuring that provider's charging policies are not differential in neighbouring authorities.
- 98** The Council has made some effective challenges to high-cost services which were prioritised for early review. During a desktop examination of an individual service review selected at random, inspectors found that savings of £13,000 per annum had been made out of a total annual contract value of £98,000. In addition, arrangements were made with the provider to change the service in question from accommodation-based to floating support. This not only better met the needs of the users but enabled a greater number to be supported for the same cost, thus improving value for money.
- 99** There is also some evidence of the commissioning body challenging the inappropriate use of Supporting People funding. Legacy supported housing management grant has been withdrawn from registered care homes and an in-house service run by social services was, until reviewed, using Supporting People funds for social care purposes. Some savings have also been negotiated outside the service review process, whereby some providers voluntarily returned grant monies totalling £428,999.41 representing one-off savings made in 2003/04.
- 100** In the previous section, this report describes and explains Bristol's approach to service reviews which are the main vehicle used by administering authorities to deliver improved value for money. It is a weakness that not all high-cost services have yet been reviewed, and there remain a number of cases where it is likely that non-eligible services continue to be funded for the present. This is a particular concern given the need for the Council to be able to release money from services in order to be able to meet the priorities set out in the five-year strategy and is exacerbated by the fact that there is a significant deficit in local health budgets.

- 101** The sector reviews will enable the assessment of the value for money aspects of individual services and the setting of appropriate costing levels for agreed inputs matched against outcomes. To align with known grant rates, it is necessary for Bristol to reduce the Supporting People budget by up to £6 million over the period 2003/04 to 2007/08. There is an assumption on the part of the Council that approximately half of the sum can be realised through efficiency savings leaving the residue to be found from service cuts or reductions. These assumptions lack evidential support pending the completion of sector review analysis.
- 102** Overall, value for money is not yet being managed well. Bristol is gathering good information but the degree to which this has been processed and integrated into service delivery is limited. Impending budget reductions will demand exceptional competence and acuity in this respect.

### **Service user involvement**

- 103** A service user involvement policy is in place for Supporting People but success in involving users has been patchy and the Council recognises there is more to do to engage them in the programme. Users were consulted during individual reviews but their involvement in governance arrangements and in strategic direction has been limited.
- 104** The Council has enshrined its approach to Supporting People service user involvement in a written policy. It is clear that the policy seeks to reflect ODPM guidance in its application, for example, the need for service user involvement in service reviews is quoted and factors that might trigger more intensive scrutiny of this area are indicated.
- 105** There are a number of established user and advocacy consultation groups, for example the care forum, the disability equality forum, the women's forum and the health and social care partnership, which have been used to disseminate information about the programme and to gather feedback on the draft five-year strategy.
- 106** Key Supporting People issues have been debated and consulted on at client-based partnership boards and local implementation teams, some of which include user representation. In addition, the views of some client groups are connected into the process by the presence of service user and carer representatives on some of the service development groups (referred to under the 'governance' section of this report). This coverage is, however, by no means comprehensive.
- 107** Opportunities to link into the user involvement structures of providers are not being maximised. Projects visited by inspectors offered a variety of ways to involve users, both individually and in groups, to comment on and develop the services they received. An expectation is placed on providers to devolve Supporting People information to their users and we encountered one example where users had been made aware of the draft five-year strategy. This service provider, for victims of domestic violence, had discussed with users that part of the strategy affecting them. This, however, was the only example we found.

- 108 Inclusive forum type events have occasionally been staged by the Supporting People team but these have not proved to be successful in engaging users. The commissioning body, in January 2005, discussed plans to set up a standing consultation group of service users, however, such a group has not yet been developed.
- 109 There have been a few small but nevertheless valuable exercises in user involvement including the following.
- A one-off focus group with a small group of users comprising older people, people with a physical impairment and people with mental health needs. The group looked at what works well and what could be improved in the service they get from their providers. They identified the most important issues in service delivery to be accessibility, flexibility, good management and valuing service users.
  - Involvement of a service user on the recruitment panel for review officers.
  - A service user involved in design of leaflets for users.
- 110 A plain English customer panel was established 18 months ago as part of a major project to revamp all of the leaflets for the housing landlord service. Around 20 tenants and customers took part in the initial work and around 12 of these have formed a standing panel to look at emerging drafts of new leaflets, letters and other information. Most recently they have reviewed all correspondence relating to housing benefit. The Supporting People team have not yet used the services of this panel for Supporting People literature, but intend to do so in future.

### **Access to services and information**

- 111 Accessible information about Supporting People that is available for users and the general public is limited. A plain language leaflet and poster has recently been produced and word and pictures versions of Supporting People leaflets are currently under development. The quality of existing leaflets is variable, and although they are available in other formats and languages, not all have strap lines to indicate this. The quality of verbal information on Supporting People provided by frontline staff contacted by the inspection team was extremely variable.
- 112 Recently, a glossy and attractive summary of the five-year strategy written in simple language has been produced, and is clear about priority and non-priority needs and groups. A variety of different information leaflets containing contact numbers for the Supporting People team have been distributed to providers. Contact information for the team is also available on the Council's website and each provider has a named contact in the team. Informative newsletters are produced quarterly for providers and stakeholders.

- 113** Providers are expected by the Supporting People team to develop and supply information in appropriate formats for their users. While we did not view examples of this material, we did encounter service users who were aware of the information made available both by the provider and from Supporting People. This demonstrates that some providers, at least, are fulfilling these obligations.
- 114** The Council's central library has not been used as an access point for information about Supporting People. Staff at the library were pleasant and helpful, but only when the words 'supporting people' were used were they able to establish that information was available on the Bristol City Council website. No leaflets or printed material was available. This represents a missed opportunity to communicate with those who might not commonly access council offices or know the terminology. Leaflets were present from neighbourhood and housing services in respect of the availability of online repairs but this good practice is not being shared within the department. A Supporting People funded provider also had a leaflet in the library.
- 115** The Supporting People complaints policy is comprehensive and clear, aimed at providers, and outlining the process service users must follow. It is designed to inform providers how to guide their clients in complaining and how the Supporting People team fits into the overall process. It indicates that it is inappropriate for complaints, in cases where the provider and project manager/owner are one and the same, to be managed by the provider.
- 116** There is no user version of the complaints policy to help users understand where their provider's policy fits into the overall process, how it is possible to escalate the complaint to the Supporting People team and where to go to with queries.
- 117** The Council has produced a simple directory of Supporting People services giving contact details, by client group, for housing related support services available in the area. This is available on the Council's website, has been distributed to the Council's area offices and to service providers.
- 118** The Council also has a comprehensive homelessness service directory which includes a section on housing with support. Housing options packs are also available for some client groups – young people, people with mental health support needs, women and people dealing with substance misuse. These packs contain more detail concerning individual housing with support projects including the nature of services provided, facilities and referral procedures. The packs are accessible via the Council's website with clear signposting from the Supporting People pages.
- 119** The Supporting People area of the Council's website was underdeveloped at the time of the inspection but the layout has since been revised. There are some useful webpages for providers with links to policies, workbook guidance, terms of reference for the governing groups, newsletters and fact sheets all of which can be downloaded. Since the review, the site now publicises minutes of relevant meetings such as those of the commissioning body and core strategy development group. Out-of-date documents have been removed but there is still a lack of information on the site which is specifically aimed at service users.

- 120 In June 2000, it became a requirement for unitary councils and certain other public bodies to produce a local charter entitled '*Better Care: Higher Standards*', setting out how assistance is provided for anyone aged 18 or over in England having difficulties associated with old age, long-term illness or disability and for carers who support people in these circumstances. The charter sets out standards for services in health, housing and social services and indicates what to do if these expectations are not met. This is a key departmental document designed to empower users and give authorities a benchmark against which they can monitor performance based on the experience of users and carers. The Bristol '*Better Care: Higher Standards*' charter has not been revised since Supporting People was implemented and the most recent update, in 2001, makes only scant reference to the programme. This represents a lost opportunity to co-ordinate services, to encourage user engagement and to improve the accessibility of public services.
- 121 A charging policy for Supporting People has been in place since the start of the programme. In response to user feedback, Supporting People fairer charging application forms have been updated to make them simpler to use. A team, based within social services and health, performs the assessments although take-up has been limited. This may be due in part to the benefits take up campaign operated by the Council and Pensions Service, spearheaded by the Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service.
- 122 Since April 2005, the welfare rights service has operated a helpline for Supporting People service providers to seek benefits advice on behalf of their service users. The service has been much in demand; 12 Supporting People providers have agreed referral protocols and a further 8 are in progress. Frontline staff and managers have indicated that the service adds significant value to their support work. Providers are now, for the first time, able to help service users to access the full range of benefits, rather than simply chasing their housing benefit claims.
- 123 During the inspection, we tested how users might access Supporting People services by mystery shopping in a number of area housing and social services offices. The help and advice given at some offices was very good but this was not the case for all. This means that potential service users and enquirers are likely to receive an inconsistent service dependent on their point of contact with the council which will affect their ease of access to Supporting People services.
- 124 Provision of information in local housing offices has attracted more applicants for drug related services and advice on care availability and charging is available from Bristol Care Direct.

## Diversity

- 125 The Council's approach to diversity is a strength. A wide range of Supporting People services are in place catering for diverse groups of service users, which broadly reflect the population profile. Equalities issues take a high profile both corporately and within the Neighbourhood and Housing Services directorate. Work to gather information on the housing and support needs of gypsies and travellers, the one group with no Supporting People provision, is in progress.

- 126** The Council gives a high profile to addressing equalities issues in housing. There is a specialised policies and equalities team within the neighbourhood and housing services directorate and also a dedicated a race and housing officer. The corporate equalities and social inclusion team supports various corporate consultation forums representing minority groups, including a disability forum. A housing, race equality, group for Bristol is chaired and serviced by the Council and has wide representation from supported housing providers. This group has been engaged in Supporting People issues by means of a number of presentations made by Supporting People team members and also used for consultation purposes.
- 127** The Council takes appropriate steps to understand the housing support needs of different groups. A BME housing needs survey has recently been undertaken. The survey was undertaken by the University of Salford and involved a comprehensive study of 510 households. Early findings were reported in June 2005 although the final report is yet to be delivered. Among other issues, the survey has highlighted specific issues concerning the support needs of refugees and a lack of awareness of housing related support. Results of the survey will be fed into the sector review process and into the developing BME housing strategy and housing delivery plans.
- 128** It is a strength that supported housing services funded by SP broadly reflect the diverse population. Over 10,000 people in Bristol receive a support service and these services cover a wide variety of activities, across a range of different needs groups including services for rough sleepers, refugees and people living with AIDS/HIV.
- 129** The only client group for which there is no Supporting People funded service in Bristol is travellers; the Council has plans to address this with a Gypsies and Travellers survey but the five-year strategy is silent on this matter. Progress has been temporarily delayed as the Council awaits a formal definition of 'traveller', but the policy and equalities team is working with the Council's Gypsies and Travellers team and the Planning Section with the intention of carrying out a sub-regional study.
- 130** The Supporting People team is undertaking an equalities audit as part of the sector review programme. Details of user groups and ethnicity are collected from providers. Analysis of client record forms portrays a diverse range of user groups and, overall, a good representation of BME beneficiaries with approximately 20 per cent of new service users being from BME groups. However, further analysis shows a wide variance between different types of service. Of 251 client records relating to domestic violence 28 per cent were from BME groups, of 184 records for homeless families 51 per cent were from BME groups and of 63 with learning difficulties 5 per cent were from BME groups.
- 131** There is a range of mechanisms for engaging with hard-to-reach groups. The Housing Race Equality Group includes representation from the Race Equalities Council, Race Forum, Black Development Agency and Refugee Action. There is also a domestic abuse forum and the Council engages with other specialist groups such as the Missing Link DA service.

- 132 The Supporting People team takes appropriate steps to ensure that providers are fully aware of diversity issues. Members of the team regularly raise equalities issues with providers. There is a Supporting People inclusion group and training on diversity has been made available to providers.
- 133 Housing and support services are provided in a way which reflects the cultural needs of diverse groups. Across the city there is a very broad range of services supporting the needs of minority groups. These include the provision of a dedicated safe house for people from BME groups fleeing domestic violence. Multi-lingual workers are employed in all homeless hostels.
- 134 Work has been undertaken to increase understanding of the housing and support needs of BME older people. N&HS carried out an assessment of services in 2003/04 and this has been supplemented by the recent BME housing needs study. The Council recognises that, with the exception of the home improvement agency, BME elders generally lack information and advice about their housing options.
- 135 The Council is working to address the low take up of sheltered social housing by BME groups. An initial agreement to provide up to 20 per cent of accommodation in the development programme of 600 units of very sheltered housing for BME and other minority groups. To date, this has included the provision of accommodation for Chinese elders and provision for deaf people in another scheme.
- 136 The Council has an equalities policy and has raised awareness of diversity issues across all service areas through corporate diversity training. Level 2 of the equalities standard for local government has been achieved and the Council plans to reach level three by March 2006. A corporate equalities' working group is in place comprising officers from each department. Each officer is completing a portfolio of evidence against the standard and the Council is using the scrutiny function to assess it. An assessment made in March of 2005 concluded that approximately 70 per cent of the requirements of level 3 had been met, although it is recognised that there are still some challenging areas to deliver, for example an equal pay audit.

### **Outcomes for service users**

- 137 The Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes for a number of people in Bristol since its introduction in April 2003. The quality of services visited by inspectors was high, leading to greater independence for service users and the Council is taking steps to address the shortage of move on accommodation. The programme lacks a comprehensive set of outcome measures by which achievements can be assessed.
- 138 Bristol City Council has successfully expanded the range and number of support services available for vulnerable people, bridging some supply gaps that existed before implementation of the programme, for example an accommodation-based service for 43 single refugees and 55 units of floating support for women at risk of domestic violence.

- 139** During the inspection the team visited a range of different services. The quality of these services was high and users were very positive about the support they received. Service users were able to identify how projects have enabled them to make major changes in their lives, including achieving a greater degree of independence. Many reported growing levels of confidence and ability to make their own decisions about joining educational and other work-based, social or voluntary activities.
- 140** Examples found of good outcomes being achieved for services users are as follows.
- A successful partnership protocol is in place which places high-risk offenders in accommodation with support across Avon and Somerset. The target set is the placement of 12 such offenders each year and to date all referrals to Bristol City Council have been accepted, accommodated and supported.
  - Joint arrangements have been developed to fund and maintain various pipeline projects for young people at risk in recognition of the complex needs of this client group. This initiative has utilised not only Supporting People monies but also other funding sources including the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and a budget formerly used to provide bed and breakfast accommodation. Such co-operation has resulted in tangible and comprehensive resources for 12 young people.
  - Services for people with HIV/AIDS have adapted to reflect changes in clients needs. Ten years ago, a Bristol-based project provided only accommodation-based support. As treatment for HIV has developed and affected individuals are living longer, the focus of the service has moved from accommodation towards the support of people remaining in their own homes. Floating support has been increased as encouragement in the take-up of meaningful and therapeutic occupation such as swimming and tending allotments.
  - Two schemes, for refugees and for young people, employ former service users as support workers.
- 141** Where the quality of services has been called into question, the Council has intervened. One service was closed in response to concerns about the protection of vulnerable adults. Another large service for people with mental health problems was also closed, with the service users being reassessed and offered alternative arrangements.
- 142** Supporting People funding has been used to support the work of the city-wide home improvement agency (HIA), resulting in positive benefits for approximately 7,000 older and disabled people across all tenures during 2004/05. A comprehensive range of services is provided including major and minor repairs and adaptations, an urgent response team, move-on advice, handy person schemes and training for professionals.

- 143 A flexible and pragmatic approach has been taken to funding elements of the HIA work in order to maintain services, for example when neighbourhood renewal funding was stopped in Easton, Supporting People funding was secured to enable move-on advice to continue. Satisfaction surveys indicate strong benefits for users with 93 per cent of service users rating the service as good or very good and 82 per cent of respondents saying that work had enabled them to remain longer in their home. The care and repair service was recently awarded the Foundations Quality Mark.
- 144 Support planning is strongly in evidence within the services visited by the inspection team. In most projects service users are provided with clear support plans which have been agreed with them and which are reviewed on a regular basis. Staff in the projects could demonstrate how the use of the support plan enabled users to becoming more independent as time went on.
- 145 In other cases, however, users with care and support needs had care plans prepared by social services, which incorporated but did not isolate the housing related support elements. While for users a seamless service is a laudable aim, scheme managers were not involved in the preparation of these plans. This approach risks housing related support becoming subsumed within care needs and not readily identifiable for funding or outcome measurement purposes.
- 146 Lack of availability of move-on accommodation is a significant problem in Bristol for users of housing related support services and also has impact on potential service users. Services are becoming clogged with users who are ready for greater independence, while others in need await a place. The Council is well aware of this and was commended by the ODPM in a seminar as having good practice in move-on initiatives which include:
- a private rented sector bond scheme – initially funded by the Chamber of Commerce;
  - a rent guarantee and insurance-based scheme for private rented homes;
  - a landlords forum held annually and private landlords representatives on various groups;
  - the award of £300,000 by the Home Office for a drugs intervention programme rent deposit scheme;
  - a floating support co-ordinator funded by Supporting People who will come into post shortly reporting to the housing options and advice team;
  - a project manager working one day a week on move-on following up on good practice elsewhere;
  - increased numbers of section 106 units focused on provision for move-on and homelessness;
  - all main providers are signed up to eviction protocols from supported housing; and
  - good examples of move-on into the private sector from some projects.

- 147** The Bristol City Council priority move-on scheme provides 60 units of council accommodation per year. The Council is committed to increasing this to the regional housing strategy recommended level of 5 per cent which would be equivalent to 150 per year. Under the choice based lettings scheme currently being developed, move-on from supported housing will be a band 2 level priority which should increase the availability of general needs accommodation and achieve a higher level of move-on at this level of priority.
- 148** These initiatives, while valuable, are currently operating outside the ambit of an overall strategy, to which all partners and stakeholders are signed up. Such a strategy would enable the Council to more clearly evaluate the benefits of each activity and maximise the contributions of partners.
- 149** The Council has not yet developed a comprehensive set of outcome measures by which the achievements of the Supporting People programme can be assessed, although some client specific work has begun. One example of this relates to co-operation between the drug strategy team and the Supporting People team, where joint service performance indicators and outcome measures are under discussion. For most individual sectors, the outcome measures are expected to emerge from the sector review process.
- 150** It is intended that outcomes for users will form a key part of the Council's service specification which will be part of the steady state contracts. This will enable the Council to better manage the performance of individual services and to measure how they are contributing to the achievement of the Supporting People strategy objectives.
- 151** In addition to local debates, the Council is also working with the South West RIG to arrive at a meaningful set of outcome measures to be common across all authorities in the south-west.
- 152** Potential Supporting People service users fare a great deal less well in terms of outcomes. For example, the support needs of vulnerable travellers are not currently being met and in a number of projects, existing service users are staying too long due to a lack of appropriate move-on accommodation which negatively affects the vacancy rate. The creation of new services and opportunities for potential service users is largely dependant the Council's ability to release funds from existing services through work on service reviews and value for money.

## Summary

- 153** We have judged the Council's management of the Supporting People programme to be fair. There is a mix of performance within the programme although the Council's approach to diversity is a real strength.
- 154** The Council is managing the programme competently and has reasonable relationships with providers of support services. The team delivered their five-year strategy on time and to a good standard. Grant management and payment processes are effective.

- 155 Adequate governance arrangements have been established and the Council put in place a skilled and able team of officers to manage the programme, though their capacity to do all that is required of them has been limited and a recent increase should help in the future.
- 156 The Council has a good understanding of cost comparisons but value for money is not yet well managed or integrated into service delivery. The degree to which the Supporting People programme achieves value for money is not capable of being assessed until the data collection and analysis of the sector reviews are complete.
- 157 The Council has successfully extended the range of services being commissioned and there is evidence of positive outcomes being achieved for service users. A number of services have been developed or reconfigured to meet specific cultural, physical and religious needs of vulnerable people.
- 158 In contrast, access to information for users and advocates is poor, with not all potential access points utilised and inconsistent signposting and understanding of the programme evident from frontline staff. Service users are not having sufficient influence in the strategic direction of the programme and success to date in involving them has been patchy.
- 159 Early, individual service reviews were robust and thorough, with savings made and services improved in response. In early 2005, the approach to reviews was significantly changed to be more strategically focused and the Council is now gathering a wealth of valuable data to help them reshape the supported housing market. The new approach has changed how service users are consulted and it is too early to assess the impact of this, positive or negative. Communication with providers about the change in methodology has not been well-handled, raising fears about the potential for inequitable treatment.

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

### What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 160** Fundamental governance and management structures for Supporting People were put in place early and additional services successfully developed through pipeline and other funding. Early individual service reviews were of high-quality, achieved economies and drove service improvements. The neighbourhood and housing services directorate actively learns from inspection and from its own experience. Historic weaknesses in project management capability are being addressed but corporately, the track record in service performance is unremarkable.
- 161** There are a number of areas in which Bristol's Supporting People programme is able to demonstrate progress; ODPM implementation milestones were met for Supporting People with both the shadow and five-year strategies submitted on time:
- needs analyses have been updated over time and incorporated in strategy;
  - a number of schemes were developed using transitional housing benefit, pipeline and other funding including very sheltered housing, homelessness projects and provision for people with learning difficulties;
  - savings have been made from service reviews with some high-cost services successfully challenged; and
  - some poor services have been remodelled or decommissioned.
- 162** This report has described earlier a number of examples of improved outcomes for specific service users as a result of Supporting People, but there are other areas where the Council's intervention might also be recognised by service users as beneficial. The growth in floating support allowed far greater access to resettlement and prevention services than were previously available. Early reviews improved support planning for users and, in some cases, secured the introduction and improvement of user consultation practices and of complaints policies.
- 163** For potential users awaiting access to services that do not yet exist or which are already full, outcomes are uncertain. Opportunities for them depend on funds being released from lower priority services. Some economies have been achieved in services which have already been reviewed, but this is only the case for one-third and there are still some high cost services remaining outstanding.

## 42 Supporting People Inspection | What are the prospects for improvement to the programme?

- 164** The Supporting People team used the experience of a costly and resource intensive appeal and subsequent litigation surrounding the termination of a service, to improve the way it handles appeals by developing:
- a cross-authority appeals process that takes account of conflicts of interest. Only members of other Commissioning Bodies will sit on the appeals panel;
  - improved contract terms reflecting lessons learned from the legal challenge; and
  - more robust criteria for the accreditation of providers.
- 165** There is further evidence that Bristol City Council actively learns from others. Published inspection reports have been reviewed for Supporting People and the team has visited Manchester, which secured a three-star rating, to seek positive practice. Benchmarking is well underway, particularly with the core cities.
- 166** Membership of Supporting People partnership forums, for example the South West RIG, the West of England cross-authority group and the core cities group, has delivered some benefits. For example, a draft commissioning strategy was jointly developed as a result of partnership working on the core cities group.
- 167** The Commissioning Body has taken some difficult decisions. For example, some decisions on the relative priorities of different user groups as part of the five-year strategy, are unlikely to be universally popular. Two services have been closed and a decision was made to agree non pipeline funding for very sheltered housing against a background of anticipated cuts elsewhere in the programme.
- 168** The Council responds well to inspection. An example from this inspection was a prompt reaction to on-site feedback from inspectors that conflict of interest matters should be formalised. The Council included this as an agenda item at the meetings of both the commissioning body and core strategy development group in the week following the inspection. Both meetings agreed to put written policy in place. For this reason the inspection team has not felt it necessary to include this as a recommendation to this report.
- 169** Other examples include the following.
- Immediate steps taken to include the YOT within the core strategy development group in response to a criminal justice assessment undertaken in May 2005 which indicated that the YOT were not demonstrating involvement in the Supporting People strategy.
  - A clear improvement plan put in place to address weaknesses found in the landlord services inspection in December 2004. Although not all recommendations have been completed within the target times set out in the report, progress against the plan gives confidence that the issues will be addressed within a realistic timeframe.

- 170** The Council's track record of managing and delivery of significant projects in relation to Supporting People is mixed. Some complex projects have been delivered on time and to a high standard, for example, implementation of the payments system. However, others have not, for example, multiple timetable slippages in relation to individual service reviews and the sector review approach, described in an earlier chapter, is also slipping back.
- 171** Aware of some shortcomings around project management, the Council used the services of Audit Commission performance specialists in early 2005 to make an assessment of its capability. The report indicated that the Council had made slow progress in applying a structured approach to planning and delivery of its projects although the pace of improvement was gaining speed. In June 2005, as a response to the recommendations, the chief officers' group adopted an action plan developed by all senior managers. Since that time the neighbourhood and housing services directorate has taken steps to improve capacity in project management.
- The fortnightly Chief Executive's performance management and improvement group, of which the Director of Neighbourhood and Housing Services is a member, reviews progress on key corporate projects.
  - A Project Support Office has been established within neighbourhood and housing services.
  - A one-day Manager's Role in Projects course has been delivered to all senior managers including those responsible for Supporting People.
  - Project managers have been trained in PRINCE2 methodology including four key staff within the Supporting People team.
- 172** Any further slippage in data processing and analysis of the sector reviews could leave insufficient time available for project sponsors to develop the vision and identify the steps needed to move from current to future commissioning. At the time of our inspection, there was no robust timetabling or linking to future meeting dates and there is limited time until the deadline of 31 March 2006 to seek user views, prepare proposals and gain approval through the core strategy development group and commissioning body. However, this has since been addressed with a project plan and the sector review project is now subject to regular reviews with a traffic lighting system to identify potential concerns.
- 173** Corporately, the Council has been judged as 'fair' in the most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment. There have been improvements since 2002 in some services, but the service blocks for housing and adult social services have remained static; scoring two out of a possible four, where four is the highest possible assessment. The Council has not achieved a 'good' or 'excellent' rating in any of its recent service inspections.
- 174** Bristol City Council's Annual Audit Letter of 2004 highlighted no significant changes in service performance and indicated that the pace of change and improvement at the Council is neither meeting its own ambitions nor keeping pace with performance of other similar councils.

## How is performance managed?

- 175 Improvement planning for Supporting People is not yet fully effective. The current vision is not prophetic and although performance management is strong for individual officers, no local performance outcome measures have yet been developed for the programme. The contribution that Supporting People can make to corporate priorities, around health and homelessness, are clearly linked into work programmes but, alignment with objectives set in the five-year strategy is less overt. The value of Supporting People to the crime reduction agenda is absent from both the corporate and departmental plan. However, the directorate in which Supporting People is based is ahead of others in supporting the development of a performance culture within the Council and workplans for Supporting People are SMART.
- 176 The current vision<sup>7</sup> for the future of Supporting People in Bristol is unchallenging, in that it is already being met. One of the keys to successful change is to provide a compelling picture of future success, and the commissioning body has not been prophetic about what it seeks to achieve.
- 177 The commissioning body and the Council as administering authority are not yet able to clearly measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of Supporting People programme delivery. Reporting on Supporting People to senior councillors is insufficient. In the absence of national PIs, there is a need to develop appropriate local key performance indicators, identify key issues and decide on exceptions for reporting. These are expected to be developed as a result of the sector reviews.
- 178 A performance culture is developing within neighbourhood and housing services. In the last two years, robust frameworks have been put in place to manage service plans and individual performance. Council-wide, there is more to do to achieve consistent application and use of the system, but this directorate is seen as leading the way.
- 179 As an employer, Bristol City Council encourages training. Although in-house training continues, budget constraints in the current year will prevent Supporting People team members from attending service specific external courses, which will be disadvantageous in the event that such training becomes urgent.
- 180 Neighbourhood and housing services adhere to the corporate performance management development scheme (PMDS). Each member of staff has a formal review in October and this is refreshed after six months. Individual targets are set, which we found to be largely SMART among Supporting People team members. Members of the Supporting People team demonstrate a clear understanding of how their individual roles and targets contribute to service development and to higher level performance plans. Individual performance management consists of regular monthly one to one supervision sessions. A focus of the meeting between the Supporting People Manager and his line manager is the service delivery plan.

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<sup>7</sup> Supporting People vision; 'To commission services to support people to live in their own homes in Bristol'.

- 181** While neighbourhood and housing services is ahead of other directorates in the application of performance management for individuals, its generic performance plans lack focus on outcomes and the setting of challenging but realistic targets. As part of a hierarchy in place for business planning the strategic services department<sup>8</sup>, has a departmental service delivery plan. This plan clearly sets out the department's responsibility for corporate plan priorities relating to health and homelessness but makes no mention of any contribution to the crime reduction agenda.
- 182** Within strategic services work programmes are set for each section, each following a slightly different format. The Supporting People work programme comes closest to being SMART, in that it allocates responsibility, gives clear timescales for action and indicates the relative priority of each task. While the individual tasks clearly add value, it is not made obvious how each contributes to the achievement of the key objectives set within the five-year strategy and which are articulated early in this report under 'What has the programme aimed to achieve?' The service delivery plan for strategic services containing the work plan for Supporting People is a three year document containing a detailed action plan for delivery of the programme up to April 2006. Subsequent years contain the headlines but have yet to be fleshed out with detailed activity.
- 183** Performance reports against the work programme clearly indicate the outcome required, but actually only measure process. For example, a communications target to keep providers up-to-date on Supporting People is measured in terms of the number of published newsletters and seminars. Outcome measures are necessary in order that the work plan can clearly show how it assists in the delivery of key targets for housing, social services, health and probation. This clarity of shared purpose is currently missing.
- 184** The potential for Supporting People to contribute to the wider social, housing and health improvement agenda is not fully recognised in the Council's corporate plan. The programme has the potential to have a major impact on key priorities such as improving the health of people in Bristol and reducing crime and the fear of crime, yet reference to Supporting People funded services is limited to promotion of the health and independence of older people. The new draft corporate plan (2006 to 2009) which is currently out to consultation does not address this weakness.

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<sup>8</sup> Strategic Services Department includes Policy and Equalities, Development and Enabling, Very Sheltered Housing and Supporting People.

## Does the programme have the capacity to improve?

- 185 The Supporting People team has some ambitious and challenging work programmes to deliver, but has recently added resources and capacity to address these. Completion and analysis of the sector reviews will put the Council in a strong position to achieve value for money. Better corporate leadership is beginning to enhance the degree to which directorates support each others agendas, but full strategic alignment has yet to be achieved. The Council has resource constraints in the short and medium-term which limit its commitment to the programme.
- 186 Bristol City Council as a whole is subject to stronger leadership and strategic focus, a drive led by the Chief Executive appointment 20 months ago. Councillors have started to examine and question the links between the various strategies and plans and some departments are beginning to work more corporately to break down historical silo working. The Supporting People programme can provide some reinforcement to this by engaging the whole Council as a delivery vehicle for a number of departmental strategies, but the full effects of this have yet to be realised.
- 187 Set against the political history of the Council since 2003, commitment to the Supporting People priority client groups recommended by the Commissioning Body was a brave decision. A number of the priority groups are not those which receive universal sympathy and conversely 'popular' groups such as older people are lower down the order.
- 188 A serious overspend last year on the social services budget, combined with a corporate commitment to minimise council tax rises, has meant that all departments have to be realistic about resourcing and recruitment. The capacity of the Supporting People team had been augmented with skills and expertise from other sections but remained restricted at the time of our inspection. On presentation of the draft inspection report for the programme, the Council responded quickly by:
- allocating additional resources for Supporting People including three new posts to ensure that the sector and service reviews are completed on time and;
  - providing a training session on Supporting People for library staff.
- 189 The Commissioning Body has authorised an expected overspend on the Supporting People budget this year and the Council is to be asked to underwrite the sum concerned and to protect the existing staff resource within the team for 2006/07. This decision will be made by Cabinet in January 2006.

- 190** Some work around the area of risk management has slipped. The Council made a commitment to undertake an annual risk assessment of all providers covering financial and service delivery capacity, as part of a risks and emergency planning protocol. This aspiration was linked to the Council's initial approach to the review process and in the light of the move to sector reviews, the status of the work is unclear and the document is in need of review and updating in order to achieve a robust and responsive risk management approach. An alternative assurance method will be required to marry in with the sector approach.
- 191** IT systems are not being used to their full potential to support the management of the service. This problem manifests itself in a number of ways.
- The Supporting People software could generate performance indicator reports but is not currently used for this purpose.
  - Software support for the Supporting People database is not readily available. There is no service level agreement between the Supporting People team and corporate IT to establish the level of maintenance and development support that should be provided. The supporting people team finds it difficult to get support from the software provider and relies heavily on application support provided by an external consultant.
  - There is no integration with other related systems, such as housing benefit or social services, and plans to establish such integration have no firm timescales.
- 192** Once complete, analysis of the information from the sector reviews will enable the Council to establish the extent to which the programme is delivering value for money and, hence, to address areas of under performance. Some difficult decisions will arise in respect of cuts to the Supporting People programme but a firm basis for these will be provided by the full financial, quantitative and qualitative information to be delivered by the sector reviews. The commissioning body has yet to prepare a detailed rationale or set of criteria upon which they will base hard rationing decisions given the priorities that have been agreed.
- 193** A plan to develop a combined housing and support register has enormous potential to improve access to services but time and effort is needed to develop, with providers, a commonly owned vision around streamlined access to services. Without this, the project runs the risk of breaking the links between referrers, depersonalising access to support services and creating additional barriers for service users. The practical and financial implications of the initiative, such as longer void periods, also need careful consideration. This is a complex and ambitious project that will require the most robust project management in order to succeed.

## Summary

- 194 There is a fine balance of positive and negative factors that will impact on the prospects for improvement, but the conclusion drawn by the inspection team is that, overall, the prospects for improvement within this programme are promising.
- 195 Performance management is not yet fully effective with an unchallenging vision, work programmes that address some, but not all, corporate or service objectives and a set of insufficiently outcome focused performance measures.
- 196 Partner strategies both within and outside the Council, are not yet fully aligned.
- 197 Some major work programmes and initiatives are underway and these are therefore commensurately high risk areas. In particular the sector review approach is the key vehicle by which necessary savings and service rationalisation are to be achieved. Achievement by the ODPM deadline will depend on the application of rigorous project management techniques. Delivery on complex projects has been a historic weakness for the Council, but project management competence is now being developed among staff, including those within the Supporting People programme.
- 198 The Council responds well to inspection, is ambitious and willing to learn from others. It has expanded provision for vulnerable people and driven improvements in outcomes for service users and this track record is a positive indicator for the future. There is clarity over what are, and are not, its priorities for future funding of the programme.
- 199 The sector reviews will deliver a wealth of financial and qualitative information which will position the Council well to achieve value for money from the programme.
- 200 The human resources available to the Supporting People programme have been limited but additional capacity has recently been allocated to assure the completion of the critical sector review programme.

# Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

## Demographic information

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

**Table 4**

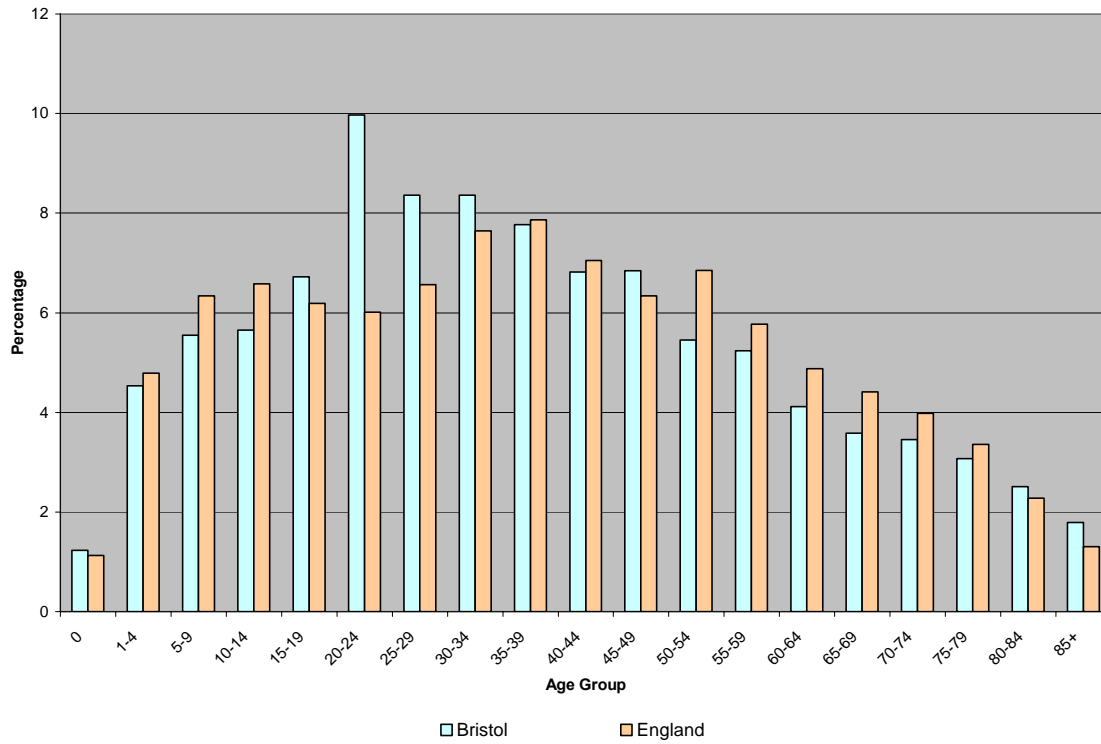
Measure	Bristol	England
Population (mid-2003) <sup>9</sup>	391,500	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2003)	16.5%	18.5%
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white – British 2003)	8.2%	10.44%
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) <sup>10</sup>	2.2%	2.4%
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>11</sup>	72	-

<sup>9</sup> Source: mid-year population estimates (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (June 2005).

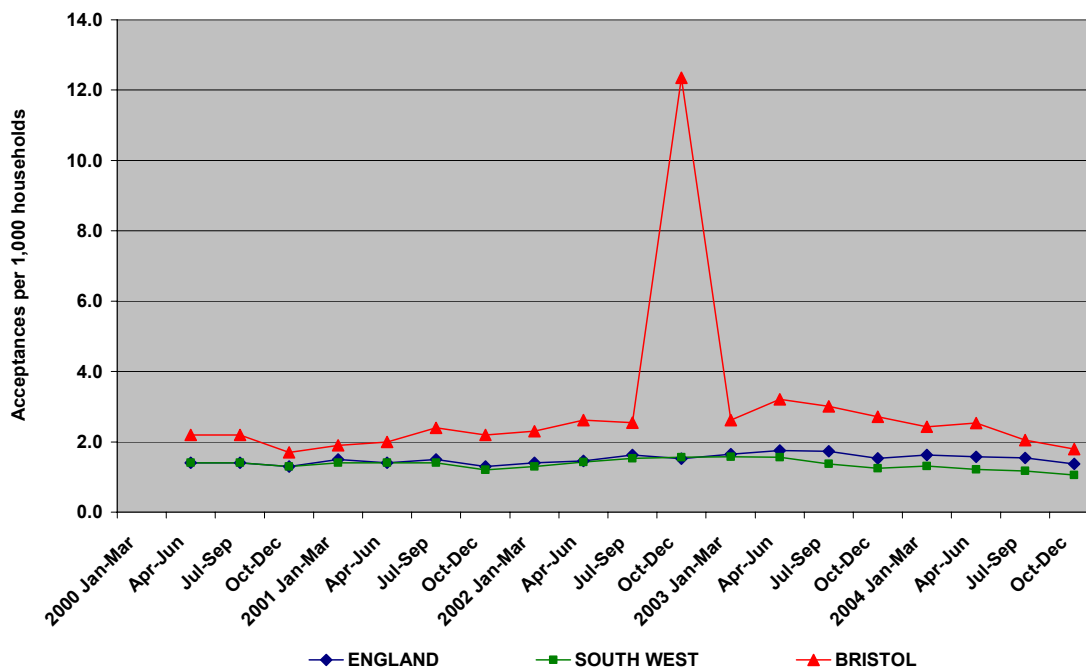
<sup>11</sup> Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

**Figure 1 Percentage of the population<sup>12</sup> in each age group compared with England**



<sup>12</sup> Source: mid-year population estimates (2003).

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

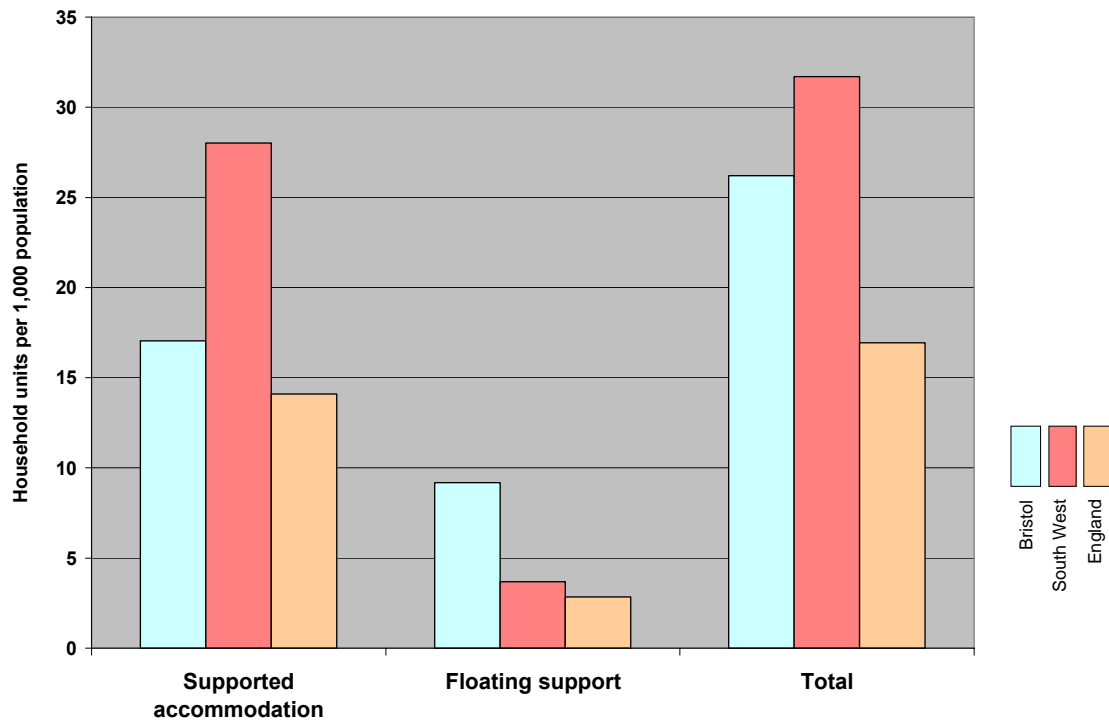


## Performance information

- 2 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.

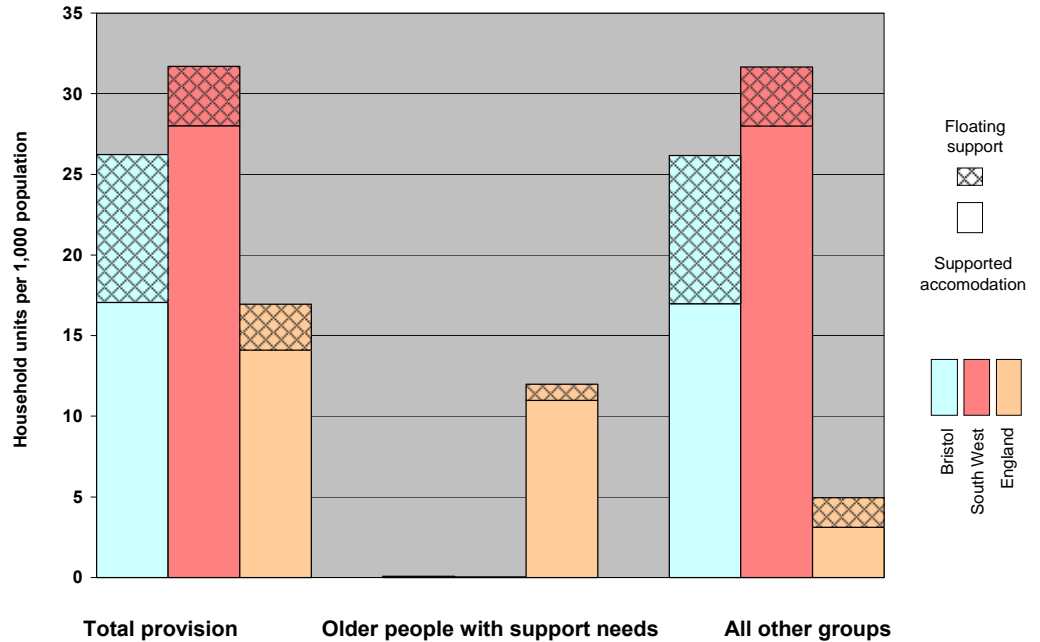
## Supporting People data

**Figure 3 Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>13</sup>**

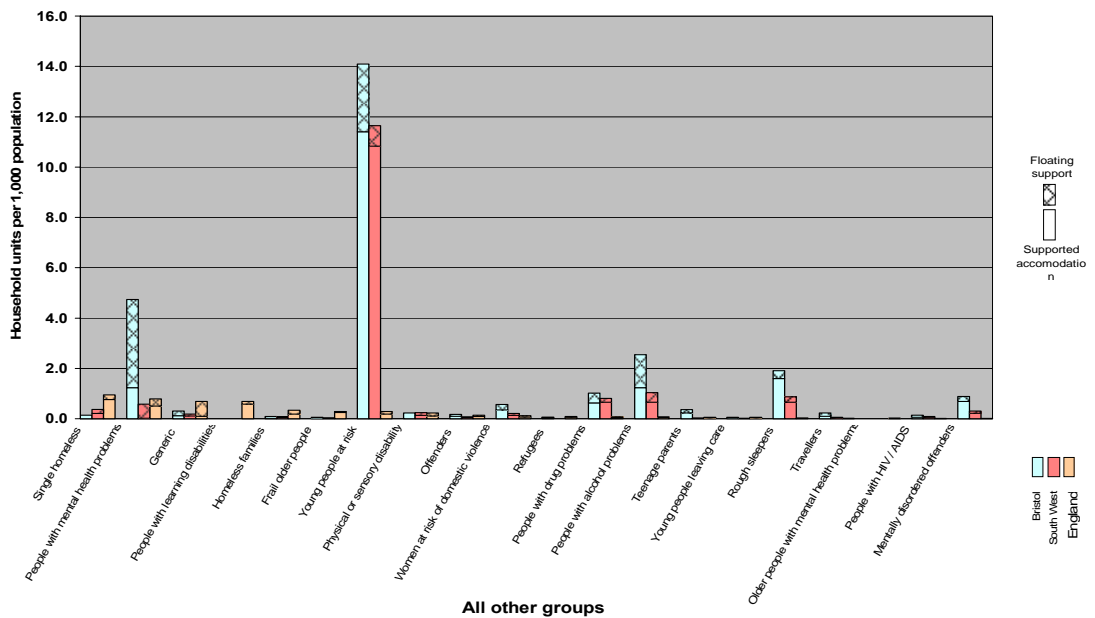


<sup>13</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>14</sup>**



**Figure 5 Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>15</sup>**



<sup>14</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Table 5 Funding for Supporting People<sup>16</sup>**

<b>Bristol</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>
Final Supporting People grant	£30,665,504	£30,430,550	£28,722,815
Pipeline allocation	£728,811	£1,185,265	£-
Administration grant	£324,784	£328,399	£262,719

**Table 6 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)<sup>17</sup>**

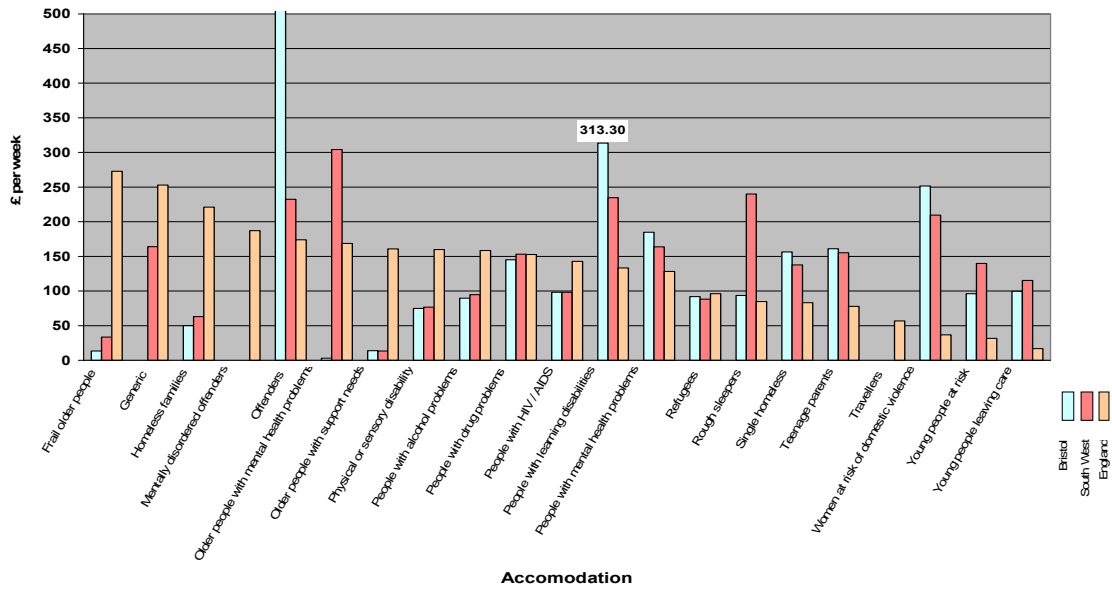
	<b>Per head of population</b>	<b>Per unit</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing</b>
Bristol	£ 1.55	£ 53.02	£ 53.02	£ 91.61
South West	£ 0.73	£ 33.33	£ 36.46	£ 80.42
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

*'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 from September 2005 and this will then be used.'*

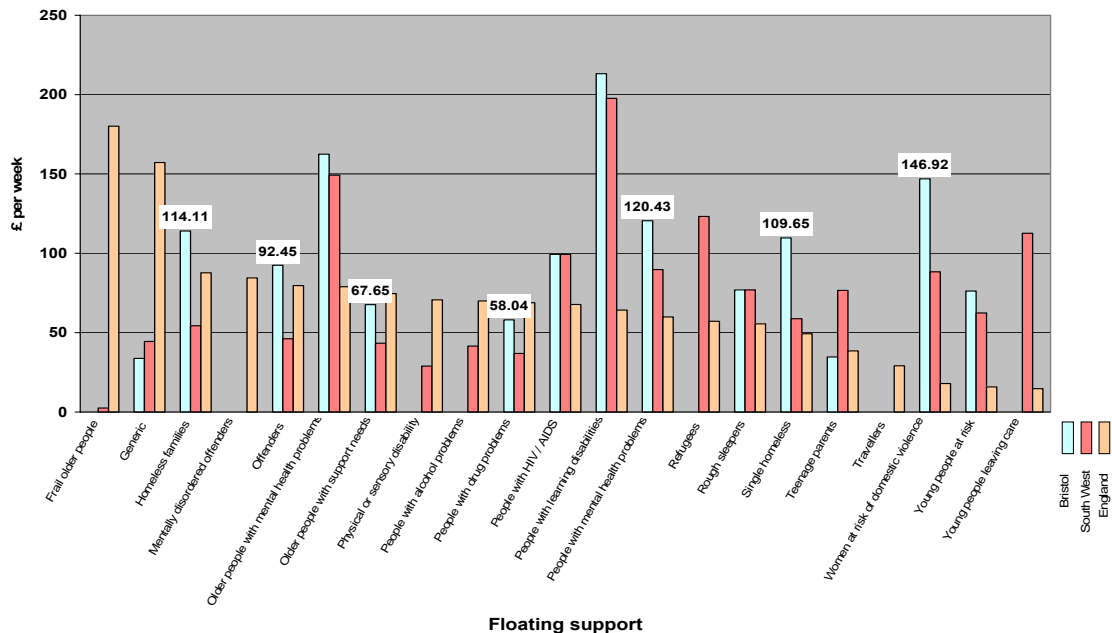
<sup>16</sup> Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

<sup>17</sup> 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) <sup>18</sup>**



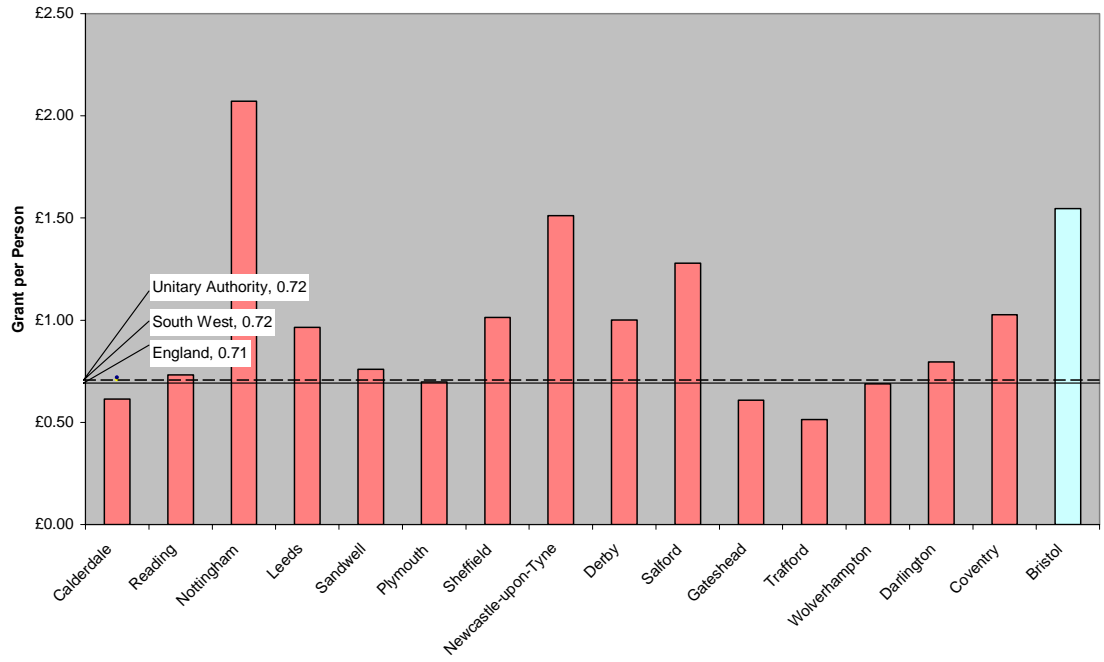
**Figure 7 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) <sup>19</sup>**



<sup>18</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

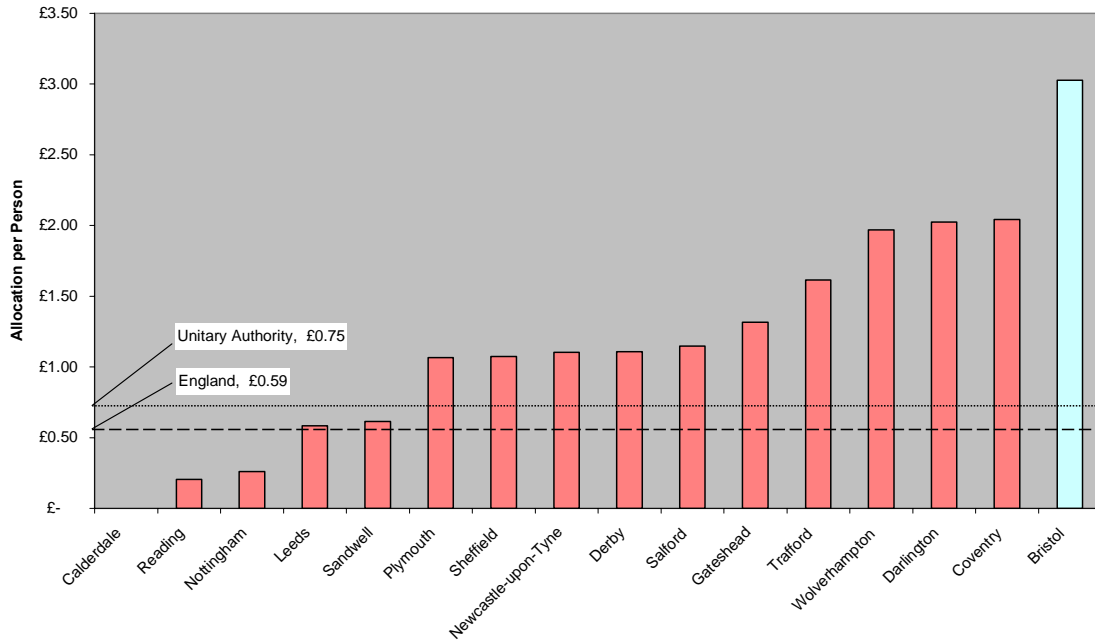
<sup>19</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Figure 8 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>20</sup>, all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)**

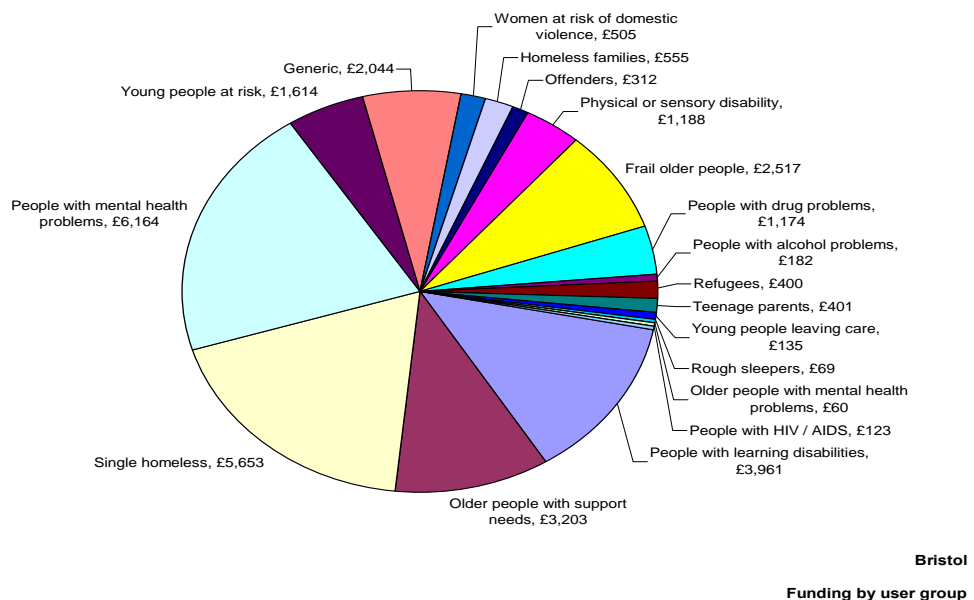


<sup>20</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

**Figure 9 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours,<sup>21</sup> all unitary councils and all English councils.**



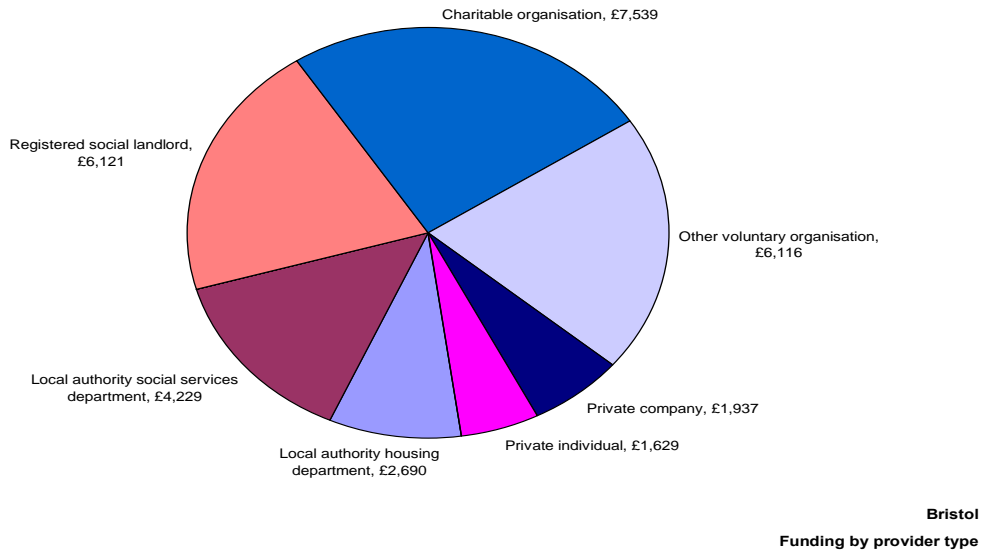
**Figure 10 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)<sup>22</sup>**



<sup>21</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

<sup>22</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Figure 11 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)<sup>23</sup>**



**Social Services star ratings November 2004**

**Table 7 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	Promising	★ (1)
Children’s services	Some	Promising	

<sup>23</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

## Social services performance indicators

**Table 8 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04**

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

<b>Bristol</b>	
Significantly above average (•••••)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). Older people helped to live at home (C32). Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54).
Above average (••••)	Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27). Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30).
Average (•••)	Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26). Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29). Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51). Delayed transfers of care (D41).
Below average (••)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40). Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39). Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4).

<b>Bristol</b>	
Significantly below average (•)	<p>Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5).</p> <p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6).</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57).</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)</p>

## Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 3 Before going on-site, and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
- the Council's self-assessment;
  - Supporting People five-year strategy;
  - the Council's corporate strategies with impact upon Supporting People, including the strategic plan;
  - plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
  - service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters;
  - service review timetable;
  - *'Better Care: Higher Standards'* document;
  - departmental and service improvement plans;
  - performance reports;
  - terms of reference for key governing groups; and
  - minutes of the commissioning body, core strategy group and other key meetings.

## Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 4 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:
- a questionnaire-based survey sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
  - focus groups with service providers and with carers, advocates and voluntary organisations;
  - visits to 17 contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and frontline staff;
  - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
  - interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the City Council, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
  - interviews with the leader of the council and with the relevant portfolio holder
  - staff focus group;
  - review of the website;
  - mystery shopping visits to housing and social services area offices;
  - desktop checks of procedure guides and service review files; and
  - observation of a meeting of the commissioning body.

## Appendix 4 – 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)

### **Welfare rights service assists supported housing providers**

- 5 Since April 2005, Bristol City Council's welfare rights service has operated a helpline for supporting people funded service providers to seek benefits advice on behalf of their service users. The service has been much in demand; twelve providers have agreed referral protocols and a further eight are in progress. Frontline staff and managers have indicated that the service adds significant value to their support work. Providers are now, for the first time, able to help service users to access the full range of benefits, rather than simply chasing their housing benefit claims.