

Inspection report

June 2005



Supporting People

London Borough of Croydon

Contents

Summary	3
Scoring the service	5
Recommendations	8
Report	10
Context (LA)	10
The locality	10
The Council	10
The service	11
How good is the service?	13
Governance	13
Delivery arrangements	15
Financial management and reporting	17
Service reviews	19
Value for money	22
User involvement	23
Partnership arrangements	25
Access to services and information	27
Diversity	29
Outcome for service users	30
Summary	33
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	34
What is the evidence of service improvement?	34
How good are the current improvement plans?	36
Will improvements be delivered?	37
Summary	39
Appendices	40
Performance indicators	40
Documents reviewed	49
Reality checks undertaken	50
Positive practice	50

Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing-related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including Transitional Housing Benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's Supported Housing Management Grant (SHMG) and Probation Accommodation Grant Scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 Administering Local Authorities.
- 4 The London Borough of Croydon was inspected at the beginning of the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Background

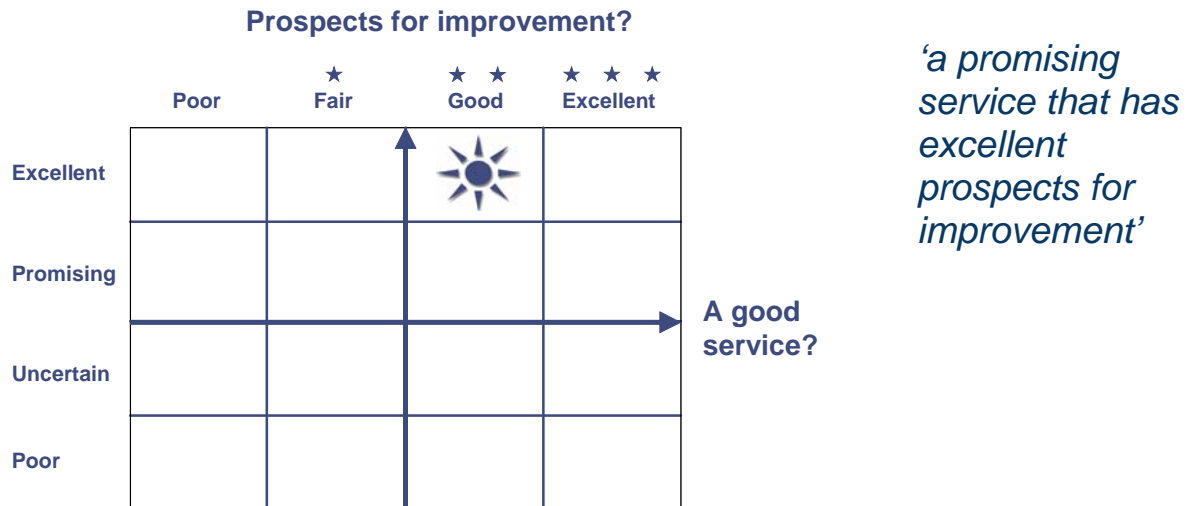
- 5 The London Borough of Croydon is an outer southwest London borough council. The Borough has seven main population areas including central Croydon, Purley, Thornton Heath, New Addington, Upper Norwood, South Norwood and Coulsdon. There are 135,000 households with only 17 per cent of the housing in the socially rented sector. The London average of socially rented housing is 27 per cent.
- 6 The population is 330,588 and Croydon is the largest borough in terms of population size but the fifth largest in terms of area. Thirty six per cent of the population describe themselves as 'other than white British' compared to the London average of 45 per cent.
- 7 Overall deprivation is average with the Borough ranked 174th out of the 354 English authorities where 1 is the most deprived. Unemployment at 3.4 per cent compares well to the outer London average.
- 8 The Council comprises 70 councillors with the labour party having control at 37 seats. There are 31 Conservative councillors; one Liberal Democrat and one Independent. The Council employs 7,616 staff (excluding agency and teaching staff) and the budget for the Council in 2004/05 is £411 million.
- 9 The Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in the area. In commissioning Supporting People services, the Council works in partnership with the Croydon Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the London Probation Service.

- 10 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the Council was £8,881,039 in 2004/05. This decreased to £ 8,572,039 in 2005/06. In addition, the Council received an administration grant of £281,315 in 2004/05 and £225,052 in 2005/06 to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The Council also received an additional grant of £35,000 in 2004/05 to assist in the service review programme.
- 11 The highest cost Supporting People service is £514.77 per person per week for accommodation services for an alcohol and rough sleeping recovery project. The lowest cost scheme provides support for older people in sheltered housing at £2.76 per person per week. There are 63 different providers with 208 services providing 3,802 units of service.

Scoring the service

- 12 We have assessed the London borough of Croydon as providing a two-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart¹: London Borough of Croydon - Supporting People



- 13 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented in Croydon.
- ◆ There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has produced real benefits for many vulnerable people in Croydon. These improvements have come about from the injection of additional revenue resources as well as how the programme has been implemented locally.
 - ◆ Existing mechanisms have been used to consult and involve service users in the programme as well as the introduction of twice-yearly inclusive forums.
 - ◆ A thorough needs assessment of the services that vulnerable people need is part of the new five-year strategy and means the commissioning plan that was developed from this will ensure that new services are tailored to meet needs.
 - ◆ The service review programme will be completed ahead of the ODPM deadline which will allow the Council to resolve any outstanding issues that may arise from service reviews prior to the March 2006.
 - ◆ Service users are engaged in the service review programme and there is an example of a service being reconfigured following the input of the service users.
 - ◆ There are strong and constructive relationships with providers. There is a regular providers forum and information is also shared through a monthly newsletter.

¹ 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.

- ◆ There is accessible information on the programme available including information on the Council's website. 'Better Care: Higher Standards' has been re-written to include information on the programme.
- ◆ Language tags are used on information to indicate that it is available in different languages and formats. Croydon has a large multi-cultural population due to the proximity of the Home Office's immigration service. The Council regularly updates the languages in use as this transient population changes.
- ◆ There are sound governance arrangements in place and the programme fits into wider council and partner's agenda. The commissioning body has clear links to the Local strategic Partnership.
- ◆ The Supporting People team are well-regarded and have a sound knowledge of the programme. This has helped other stakeholders understand and implement their responsibilities.
- ◆ The Supporting People team is located in the housing department with a 'champion' in social services. This has enabled the strengths of both departments to contribute to the delivery of the programme.
- ◆ Leading councillors are knowledgeable about Supporting People and the cabinet members for housing and social care are actively involved in the programme.
- ◆ The new strategy is comprehensive and inclusive and will shape the programme for the next five years. It has an annual action plan and is to be continually reviewed to ensure that it remains an active document.
- ◆ High costs services have been reviewed and a tool has been developed to address value for money issues through the service review process.
- ◆ There are well-established partnership arrangements with health and a number of joint commissioning arrangements are in place with the social services department.
- ◆ Croydon is a member of the southwest London cross-authority group. Partnership working here has been successful and the group has worked effectively with a number of initiatives in place such as the development of an information sharing protocol to ensure a consistent approach by the various authorities.

14 However, we found a number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.

- ◆ Information for service users is variable as shown by the response to our 'mystery shopping' exercise for advice relating to domestic violence. This is a serious failing as it may mean that vulnerable people are put off from accessing the services designed to assist and support them.
- ◆ There is no directory that would provide a comprehensive picture of all the services available for new and existing service users and their representatives.
- ◆ The Council has acknowledged that it needs to do more work to engage and involve all service users in all aspects of the programme. This task is in the work plan for the coming year.
- ◆ There is not a mechanism in place to measure the outcomes of the programme for service users.

- ◆ The provision of feedback to providers following service reviews is variable and this can impact on their ability to draw up appropriate service improvement plans.
- ◆ The Council does not carry out satisfaction surveys with providers after the service reviews and has lost this opportunity to gain feedback on the process and adjust it accordingly.
- ◆ Croydon, in common with the rest of London, has limited social housing availability and is addressing this through a number of mechanisms but this has impacted on service users ability to move on from supported housing once they have gained the necessary skills to live independently which in turn limits the availability of services for new users.

15 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has excellent prospects for delivering further improvements to the service. We found the following strengths.

- ◆ There is clear evidence of service improvements coming about through the service review programme. This includes an example of a service that has been continued with another provider after issues were discovered that jeopardised the safety of service users.
- ◆ The Council can demonstrate a significant number of areas where improvements have already been made and at the heart of these is the support planning for service users that will shape the services they receive in gaining skills in independent living.
- ◆ Funding has been obtained for new schemes that will meet identified demands for services.
- ◆ The Council has received beacon status for 'getting closer to communities' which reflects the strength of its consultation arrangements with local people and organisations.
- ◆ The housing department has achieved the top score of four out of four for its performance on community housing, housing management and housing strategy as part of the Corporate Performance assessment.
- ◆ There is a strong emphasis on partnership working and a very well-established track record of joint working with health, social services and the southwest London Supporting People group.
- ◆ The five-year strategy for the programme is comprehensive and inclusive and will shape the programme for the next five years. It is supported by an annual strategy action plan that meets the identified weakness of this inspection.
- ◆ Plans address resource and capacity issues and are in place to tackle two of the main weaknesses of service users involvement and move-on accommodation.
- ◆ There are sound performance management arrangements that are embedded across the Council and in the Supporting People team.
- ◆ Risks to the programme have been identified and are well-managed.
- ◆ Training needs are identified through the annual appraisal scheme and form departmental and council plans.
- ◆ The Supporting People team is well-managed, committed to their work and are well thought of by partners.
- ◆ There is clear ownership of, and ambition for, the programme across the Council and by partners.

Recommendations

- 16 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations.
- ◆ Within three months ensure that appropriate information is available on the range of services offered through the programme so that staff can sign-post enquirers, including information given in response to telephone calls.
 - ◆ Within three months develop a 'mystery shopping' programme across a range of Supporting People functions to provide information and feedback on how well systems and process are operating.
 - ◆ Bring forward the date for developing the directory of services to June so that this information is available by the summer 2005.
 - ◆ Within three months undertake satisfaction surveys with service providers following the completion of service reviews. Use this information to review and adapt the procedures as necessary.
 - ◆ Within three months review the procedures for giving feedback to providers as part of the service review process. Ensure that this is balanced and appropriate to enable providers to develop their own action plans for improving their service.
 - ◆ Within six months ensure that robust mechanisms are in place for provider representation on the steering group and that all providers receive feedback from the group and the commissioning body.

- 17 We would like to thank the staff of the London Borough of Croydon, particularly Kathryn Bull, Alan Hiscutt and Val Halsey, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Frances Childs and Masaud Subedar – Housing Inspectors

Mike Livingstone – Commission for Social Care Inspectorate

Joe Simpson – HM Inspectorate of Probation

Kay Collier and Joyce Williams – Service User Inspection Advisors

Dates of inspection: 30 March to 1 April and 5 to 7 April 2005

E-mail:

f-childs@audit-commission.gov.uk

m-subedar@audit-commission.gov.uk

**For more information please contact
Audit Commission
London Region
4th Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP
www.audit-commission.gov.uk
Telephone: 020 7233 6400
Fax: 020 7233 6490**

© Audit Commission

The official version of this report is also available on the Audit Commission's website at audit-commission.gov.uk. Copies of this report are also available from the address above. The Audit Commission cannot verify the accuracy of and is not responsible for material contained in this report which has been reproduced by another organisation or individual.'

Report

Context (LA)

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

The locality

- 19 London Borough of Croydon is an outer southwest London borough. The Borough has seven main population areas including central Croydon, Purley, Thornton Heath, New Addington, Upper Norwood, South Norwood and Coulsdon. Croydon is the largest London borough in terms of population size but the fifth largest in terms of area.
- 20 The population of the area is 330,588, living in 135,000 households. Only 17 per cent of the housing in the socially rented sector against the London average of 27 per cent.
- 21 Overall deprivation is average with the Borough ranked 174th out of the 354 English authorities where 1 is the most deprived. However, the Borough has some stark contrasts in terms of poverty and affluence. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 places Croydon eighth in the country in terms of inequality, that is, the size of the gap between the most and the least deprived wards.
- 22 Thirty six per cent of the population describe themselves as 'other than white British' compared to the London average of 45 per cent. Croydon has a higher than average population of asylum seekers as the Home Office department of immigration is located in Croydon. Unemployment at 3.4 per cent compares well to the outer London average.
- 23 Croydon is an area of high demand for housing. The Council's 2002 housing needs survey identified that the demand for affordable housing significantly outweighs the supply of housing and that there is an overall shortage of housing, even for those who can afford to buy or rent privately. The survey found that, over the next five years, a further 29,402 homes are required of which 21,070 need to be affordable.
- 24 When considered with the relatively small availability of social housing in the Borough there is increasing demand for housing. The waiting list contains in excess of 4500 applicants. Annually approximately 5,000 households approach the Council as homeless of which in excess of 1,300 are accepted for full housing duty as they are in priority need. As a result of this there is significant shortage of available properties to enable move on for tenants in supported housing.

The Council

- 25 The Council comprises 70 councillors. The Labour party has control with 37 councillors. There are 31 Conservative councillors; one Liberal Democrat and one Independent. Currently a leader and cabinet model governs the business of the Council.
- 26 The Council's overall budget for the year 2004/05 is £411 million. It employs 7,616 people excluding agency and teaching staff.

- 27 The Community Strategy sets out an overarching vision for the Borough and targets for improved quality of life in Croydon. The strategy sets out six key priorities.
- ◆ Improving the environment.
 - ◆ Investing in children and young people.
 - ◆ Regenerating the Borough.
 - ◆ Reducing crime and disorder.
 - ◆ Improving health and social care.
 - ◆ Providing better and fairer access.
- 28 The Council was assessed as a 'good' authority by the Audit Commission as part of the comprehensive performance assessment in December 2004 and as being a two-star authority for social care services by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (previously known as the Social Services Inspectorate) in November 2004. Croydon PCT is also rated as two-star. As part of the corporate performance assessment carried out by the Audit Commission, the housing service was scored as four, the top score, for its performance overall.

The service

- 29 The Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 30 The Supporting People programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing-related support needs of vulnerable people including the homeless, older people with support needs, people with a learning difficulty, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 31 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2004/05 was £8.9 million. This decreased to £8.5 million in 2005/06. In addition, the Council received £281,315 in 2004/05 and £225,052 in 2005/06 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The Council also received an additional grant of £35,000 in 2004/05 to assist in the service review programme.
- 32 The London borough of Croydon was inspected at the beginning of the third year of the programme. The 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.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

- 33 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
 - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 34 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier council areas, each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where it can demonstrate it faces a financial risk to the administering local authority.

How good is the service?

- 35 The assessment was based upon the following key issues.
- ◆ Governance of the programme.
 - ◆ Delivery arrangements including strategy and needs assessments.
 - ◆ Financial monitoring and management of the grant.
 - ◆ Service reviews carried out by the administering authority.
 - ◆ Value for money.
 - ◆ User involvement.
 - ◆ Partnerships with providers and others.
 - ◆ Customer care, access to services and information.
 - ◆ Diversity.
 - ◆ Outcomes for service users.

Governance

Summary

- 36 The governance arrangements put in place are robust and effective and show a sound understanding of the programme. They demonstrate the strong partnership approach that is in place throughout the Council and the wide involvement in the programme. There is evidence of good collaborative work through these mechanisms which has ensured the programme is embedded in the work of all the partners.

Governance arrangements

- 37 The Council has put in place all the key strategic planning and management groups required by the ODPM to support and sustain the Supporting People programme. The responsibilities of all the groups were reviewed in the autumn of 2004 and the terms of reference were re-written to ensure they were appropriate for the stage of the programme and made clear linkages between the groups.
- 38 There is clear corporate and political support and ownership for the programme from chief officers and councillors. Supporting People is already part of the Council's wider corporate agenda and there are clear linkages into a range of other strategies and priorities across the Council.
- 39 Councillors we met during the inspection are knowledgeable about the programme. The cabinet members for housing and social services share the responsibility for the programme. The current leader of the Council was previously the cabinet member for housing and has brought a wide understanding of the programme to his new role.
- 40 Both lead cabinet members for social services and housing are actively engaged in the programme and attend the twice-yearly inclusive forums along with the social care spokesperson from the opposition party. There have been a number of reports on the programme to cabinet and a regular 'member's briefing' is also used to keep all councillors up-to-date. Councillors have also attended local and regional Supporting People events.

Commissioning body

- 41 The commissioning body was established early in 2002 and has been regularly meeting on a quarterly basis. Membership of this group is at an appropriate senior level. All members of the commissioning body are also members of the 'Healthy Croydon Partnership' which is a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and is responsible for implementing community strategy objectives relating to health and social care. This has been an effective way of ensuring that the programme links into the LSP and wider community objectives.
- 42 The commissioning body can demonstrate leadership and influence over the programme especially in areas relating to finance and the service reviews. It has overall responsibility for the development of the programme and has achieved this through the role it has played in the production of the five-year strategy that became operational from April 2005.
- 43 The commissioning body receives regular performance and financial reports on the programme and has had to make some critical decisions following the service reviews. The minutes of the commissioning body meetings demonstrate effective management of issues. Engagement from all partners is positive and although not all partners have attended all the meetings, other members have endeavoured to ensure that they are kept abreast of issues.
- 44 The main achievements of the commissioning body include the approach taken to managing the funding especially in light of the uncertainty about future funding for the programme and the approach to be taken on how to get maximum impact from the way any savings are spent. It played a clear role in the decommissioning of a service and the auditing of the process and management of the subsequent appeal from the provider.

Steering group

- 45 In Croydon, the core strategy group is known as the Supporting People Steering Group. It was the first group to be established and has played an effective role in the development of the programme. The group has members drawn from senior managers across housing, social services, health and probation as well as a representative from providers. The group meets monthly and there is attendance from all sectors.
- 46 We were not able to observe a meeting of this group but met many of its members while we were on-site. They are committed to the Supporting People programme and have clearly incorporated Supporting People issues and opportunities into the day-to-day work of their specialist areas.
- 47 The group has been particularly involved in the detailed work of developing the five-year strategy including the review and collection of needs mapping data, developing specific scheme proposals and developing a model to assess development priorities. This is a major achievement as it should mean that future services are tailored to the identified needs of vulnerable individuals rather than being a collection of legacy services.
- 48 This group has worked closely with the commissioning body in the area of service reviews. For example, it has maintained an overview of the service reviews and provided expert advice and links to other partnership forums.

Accountable officer and social services champion

- 49 The accountable officer is the assistant director of housing, strategy and finance, and is responsible for ensuring effective planning, and that resourcing is in place and the structures are operating well. These tasks have been carried out effectively as can be evidenced by how well the team and structures are operating.
- 50 In addition to the accountable officer, there is a champion for the programme in the social services department. This officer has ensured that the programme has linked into the existing networks and partnerships within social services. This officer also chairs the Supporting People Steering group. This dual responsibility ensures that there is a high profile for the programme across the departments.

Delivery arrangements

Summary

- 51 In Croydon, the programme delivers a wide range of accommodation-based support services. These meet the identified needs of local people and there is a widely supported commissioning plan that has prioritised future service developments. However, only 6 per cent of the provision is floating support. This is a major shortfall when coupled with the lack of move-on accommodation that Croydon suffers from.
- 52 The team has the necessary skills and experience to deliver the programme and is doing so to a high level. The work of the team is guided by a comprehensive and inclusive strategy.

The Supporting People team

- 53 The work of the Supporting People team is well-planned and managed. The team is stable and has an extremely well-developed knowledge of the programme. This has meant that they have been able to ensure all stakeholders understand the impact of the programme and their contribution to the success of its operation.
- 54 The team is located in the housing department. The decision for this was based on two reasons – at the time of the programme's implementation, there was greater management capacity and it also took advantage of the housing department's experience and expertise in the area of strategic development. The champion in social services ensured that there were adequate linkages made to the work of that department.
- 55 The location of the team means it is well-placed to enable seamless service delivery and enables the strengths of both social services and housing to contribute towards the effective delivery of the Supporting People programme. This also ensures that the priorities of potentially competing service user groups are balanced and the specific skills in recognising the needs of the diverse users of Supporting People services can be accessed, for example, people with learning difficulties and homeless people.
- 56 The Supporting People team consists of the manager; an IT and finance officer; an administrator and a team leader who supervises the work of 4.5 service review officers. The team is effective and has worked hard to deliver a successful programme to date. It has achieved all the prescribed milestones and has all the necessary policies and process in place and working well.

- 57 The general assessment of the team by stakeholders is that it is approachable and effective and because of this, is well-regarded. This view was also supported by members of the steering group we met. One member of this group told us:

'the Supporting People team is a joy to work with.'

- 58 Evidence from our survey of service providers and from interviews with providers we met during the inspection confirmed our view of the team. One provider told us:

'the Supporting People team haven't lost sight that it's about helping people. There's a good range of experience and they're open about expectations.'

- 59 The Council has supplemented the administration grant by £72,000 for staffing resources and £15,000 to fund IT developments. The team used a module of the social services information system to deliver the IT requirements of the programme. This enables the team to make all the necessary payments as well as manage the information they hold on service users and providers. The system is also used for the production of regular reports and financial monitoring.
- 60 The accountable officer and the social services champion, along with the Supporting People lead officer have formed a project group to oversee the day to day work of the Supporting People team. This has ensured that the programme has good coordination across the different groups and diverse interests involved in the programme as well as monitoring progress against the team's work plan.

Five-year Supporting People strategy

- 61 All Supporting People administering authorities were required to submit a five-year strategy to the ODPM by 31 March 2005. Croydon had robust arrangements in place for this and delivered the strategy before the ODPM deadline.
- 62 The strategy is comprehensive and inclusive and will shape the programme for the next five years. It has an annual action plan and is to be continually reviewed to ensure that it remains an active document.
- 63 The production of this strategy has been a key achievement of the steering group. This has been managed through a high level project plan and has been worked on since May 2004. A large part of the work has been a comprehensive analysis of current need although it recognises that this work will be ongoing and forms part of the annual work plan for the programme.
- 64 With the knowledge of the needs of the community and the existing supply of housing-related support services, proposals for a range of new services to meet the gaps that have been developed. The steering group developed a model for evaluating new schemes and then applied this to the proposals.
- 65 The outcome of the evaluation was the commissioning plan which was widely consulted on and now forms part of the five-year strategy. This clearly shows what the priorities are and details what will be developed as and when resources become available. In our survey of providers, which 27 of the 63 providers replied to, all respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with how the Council involved partners in the development of Supporting People services.
- 66 The commissioning plan has helped social care commissioning managers see how the needs of their client groups will be met by the programme. This has also proved to be a strong tool for social care managers and has confirmed what was previously anecdotal information on service user needs.

- 67 Supporting People has been embedded in service delivery and now forms part of overall commissioning plans and the different client group strategies.

'It is in the consciousness of social care and partner agencies.' (Commissioning manager)

- 68 The Supporting People team made a number of presentations on the needs mapping and the emerging priorities to the partnership boards as part of the process of consultation for the strategy. The conclusion of this process was the 'signing off' of the strategy by the inclusive forum, the providers forum, the steering group and the commissioning body in March 2005.

Existing services

- 69 Existing services have been expanded to meet identified needs. The Council has identified gaps in provision and responded to these by developing new schemes prior to the implementation of Supporting People funding.
- 70 These included funding a resettlement service for 57 new council tenants with mental health problems – this service provides short-term support to ensure people are settled into their new community and are able to make use of its facilities and support. A housing association has set up a floating support scheme for refugees and a BME-led housing registered social landlord (RSL) set up a scheme for young people at risk across three southwest London boroughs including nine units in three houses in Croydon.
- 71 A pipe-line scheme that will provide five units of accommodation for care-leavers will be completed in August 2005.
- 72 However, only 6 per cent of the support available is floating support and this is a major shortfall in the programme. This is especially so as the other problem Croydon faces is the lack of move on accommodation and the potential for current services to become silted up limiting future availability for new service users.

Financial management and reporting

Summary

- 73 The Supporting People team has put in place good, robust systems of financial control and management. There are clear methods of reporting on a regular basis and finances are regularly discussed at all the groups involved in the governance of the programme. Providers are generally satisfied with the payment arrangements and these have been accurate and on time.
- 74 There is a sound understanding of costs and this has been used in the development of the commissioning plan for future schemes as well as making decisions on spending savings.

Financial arrangements

- 75 There was a good working relationship between the Supporting People team and housing benefits during the run up to the programme going live on 1 April 2003. The Supporting People team had a very thorough understanding of the programme and were able to ensure that service providers understood what they had to do to comply. There were no outstanding transitional housing benefit claims when the programme went live.
- 76 Only one contract remained unsigned at 31 May 2003. There were concerns about this provider and it became the subject of an investigation by the Charity Commissioners. This case is illustrated in more detail further below in the section on outcomes for service users.

- 77 Block gross and block subsidy contracts were chosen for administrative simplicity and as being the easiest for service users to understand, especially as most of the users who would have to pay a charge are in sheltered accommodation.
- 78 Payments to providers are automatically generated through the IT system used by the Supporting People team. Payments are by cheque and the system produces a PDF file that can be e-mailed to the provider showing the breakdown of the payment received. However, providers we met during the inspection were generally happy but would rather receive their payments by electronic transfer and the Council has implemented arrangements for this to happen in the autumn.
- 79 The Finance Manager in the housing department is responsible for the production of the monthly budget report which enables all Supporting People expenditure to be effectively reviewed. Supporting People financial reports are presented to the steering group and the commissioning body as a regular agenda item. Supporting People finance is also reviewed departmentally and corporately on a monthly basis through the Council's financial monitoring framework.
- 80 The implementation and operation of the programme has given the Council a far better understanding of the money that is being spent on housing-related support services and the services that are being provided. This knowledge has provided much greater accountability.

Fairer charging

- 81 In 2002 the Department of Health (DoH) introduced a fairer charging policy providing guidance to local authorities on how to set charges for non-residential services. Councils are not required to charge for services but in the event of a decision to charge, they are expected to follow the principles contained in this guidance.
- 82 The fairer charging team has been established for two years. The Supporting People team has part-funded one of the posts in recognition of the additional workload that the programme would generate. Information is published in a leaflet and on the Council's website. A series of seminars was held for supported housing providers and for service users in sheltered housing.
- 83 The fairer charging team go out to visit service users and are able to explain charges and help people apply for other benefits in order to maximise their incomes. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of appeals against charges.
- 84 Turnaround in terms of the time between application and assessment is quick with a visit made within five working days. Invoices are sent out promptly on a four-weekly basis. Corporately, the Council reviews all debts on a monthly basis to ensure that money that is due in is received and that people who may be experiencing difficulties in making payments are picked up early.
- 85 In 2004 the Supporting People team contacted all providers because of concerns about a lower than expected take up of fairer charging assessments. Providers confirmed that this was due to fewer people needing an assessment rather than a lack of information or any problems in how the system was operating.
- 86 At the time of the inspection there were only four service users being charged for housing-related support services. One couple is currently in arrears and this is being actively managed to ensure that they are in receipt of all the benefits they may be entitled to.
- 87 In response to our survey of service providers, 90 per cent who answered the question were satisfied or very satisfied with their understanding of the charging policy.

Achieving savings

- 88 Croydon has achieved an underspend against projected costs. This has been achieved through both reduced contract costs because of declining occupancy of schemes and savings made through the review process. The savings have enabled the Council to award inflationary increases to lower cost schemes despite no inflation increase being awarded to the Council from ODPM.
- 89 The ODPM announced the grant for 2005/06 in December 2004. Like many other authorities Croydon has had its grant reduced. It has approached this grant reduction cautiously and worked towards minimising the impact on local services. It has undertaken a risk analysis to generate easy wins through removal of funding for registered care homes and services which are not strategically relevant. These savings have been used to off-set the reduction in grant as well as providing a small amount of money for new scheme developments as identified in the commissioning plan.
- 90 Croydon has dealt with the reduction in the administration grant through the allocation of additional resources from the general fund budget to ensure that staffing levels can be maintained. This recognises that Supporting People is not a self-funding service and that the Council is committed to mainstreaming the service.

Service reviews

Summary

- 91 Croydon has in place a robust service review programme and process. It decided the programme on appropriate criteria against clearly identified risks and a significant number of reviews have been undertaken. A significant number of reviews have been, or are very near to completion. Reviews have already brought about service improvements and there is evidence that standards are being driven up and savings achieved through this process. However, there are a few areas that need to be addressed to ensure providers are fully engaged and involved in the process.
- 92 ODPM guidance requires administering authorities to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years, starting from 1 April 2003. Administering authorities are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to the ODPM as part of their regular performance reviews.
- 93 The service review process is central to ensuring that services are effective, strategically relevant, provide good value for money and comply with Supporting People grant conditions. Until services are reviewed, contracting decisions that will influence the future shape of services and meet strategic priorities cannot be made.

Implementing the review programme

- 94 Prior to the implementation of the programme, Croydon set out how it would approach the reviews taking into account a number of factors, including services where there was concern over cost and to ensure links with other service reviews being undertaken at the same time, for example mental health and homelessness. The programme then formed part of the shadow strategy. This represents a thorough and appropriate approach.

- 95 The Council is on track to have completed all service reviews by November 2005. This is positive as the Council was behind to begin with. It has now recovered its position and is ahead of its own timetable and will therefore complete the reviews ahead of the prescribed deadline. This early completion will allow the Council to resolve any outstanding issues that may arise from service reviews prior to the March 2006 deadline.
- 96 At the time of the inspection, 35 per cent of the reviews had been completed, 50 per cent were underway and the remaining 15 per cent started in April 2005. There had been concern, because of past recruitment difficulties, that Croydon would not complete the reviews by the ODPM deadline of 31 March 2006 and the Council successfully applied for an additional ODPM grant of £35,000 awarded for this financial year 2004/05.
- 97 Contract and review officers have the necessary skills and experience to carry out the service reviews. Their backgrounds are varied and include management of registered care homes, running mental health hostels, providing housing, supported housing and reconfiguring services. They also have project management skills gained in the areas of criminal justice, 'New Deal' and domestic violence.
- 98 The Council's approach to undertaking reviews is clear and easily understood. Reviews are completed in batches covering learning disability, mental health, domestic violence schemes etc. Partners are brought together for seminars prior to reviews to enable them to understand what will be happening and to prepare. Providers who are not able to attend the seminars are personally visited so they do not miss out on the preparation. Officers are allocated scheme reviews and know which ones they are leading on. As a result of this providers are familiar with what to expect and are prepared for the reviews.
- 99 Review officers ensure that they engage with key stakeholders through the review. For example in undertaking reviews of older people schemes officers will engage with the Social Services Older People Team and the PCT. As a result of this there is greater emphasis and understanding on support needs at an individual level. Similarly, the probation service is fully engaged in the service review of specialist offender accommodation.
- 100 A provider we met told us that their service review was 'pitched quite high' but they got a robust, thorough review and the review officer was competent. They were positive about the way the Supporting People team had adopted the process. We surveyed providers before our inspection and the response was that 96 per cent who answered the question were either satisfied or very satisfied with the Council's processes for service reviews.
- 101 Reviews are moderated internally at a monthly meeting to ensure that all the review officers are working consistently across different service providers. There is also moderation provided through the cross-authority group to ensure impartiality in internal reviews.
- 102 Once a service review has been completed and agreed by the commissioning body, a new contract is put in place with the provider. These contracts are usually for three to five years. However, if there are concerns about the quality of the service, a one-year contract is put in place and the service closely monitored. A longer contract is only issued once any concerns have been addressed.
- 103 Scheme reviews have had a number of positive outcomes. Forty four services have been found to be of an excellent quality through the service review programme and have continued as they are. Funding has been withdrawn from 11 care services that do not provide housing-related support. Action plans to improve the quality of 30 services have been agreed with the provider.

- 104 Providers have withdrawn three services from the market rather than meet the quality requirements of Supporting People. One of these services was a high cost accommodation scheme for people with a learning disability. The social services department had become concerned about the quality of the service which was being provided by a small private company. The scheme review was brought forward and the provider decided to withdraw rather than meet the QAF. The service users were all found alternative placements by the social services department.
- 105 The Council is taking steps to actively engage with users in the review process. Service users are notified prior to reviews and stakeholders are written to for comments. Service users are met during the process to get their views and comments. The team has had a varied response to questionnaires and service users sessions but overall service reviews have received good attendance and engagement. The team also engage with service users through letters and e-mails.
- 106 The Council however recognises the need to engage users far more in the review process. Contract and Review Officers agree that more work needs to be done to enable service users to be fully engaged and participate in the review process. For example, the team is considering developing 'mystery shopping' to check on users involvement and also more work on ensuring all users are able to access information on the review process in an appropriate format.
- 107 The Council does not undertake satisfaction surveys following reviews. As a result of this it is not able to gauge the effectiveness of the review process from a provider perspective and is therefore missing out on opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the review and implement improvements that may arise through feedback.
- 108 The provision of feedback to providers following reviews was seen as variable by some providers. There was concern that an emphasis on negative areas had a demoralising impact on some staff. Also a small number of providers commented on the brevity of responses to reviews which impacted on their ability to draw up detailed improvement plans and others indicated that there was little by way of sharing information on costs which prevented effective benchmarking by providers.

Sharing information and improving practice

- 109 Croydon has produced 'overview reports' as reviews have been completed on specific client areas. These are agreed by the commissioning body. They have been shared internally and have led to plans for general service improvements. For example, the completion of the service reviews on mental health services identified issues that need to be addressed to improve such as how people access the services and what level of service they receive. Although these have not yet been shared with providers it is planned to do so at future providers forums.
- 110 In addition, there have been other examples of sharing good practice. At the Inclusive Forum providers have run workshops on service user involvement and on preparing for service reviews. There have also been some 'buddying' arrangements established such as the link between large and small providers which was facilitated by the Supporting People Team.

Value for money

Summary

- 111 There is evidence of a clear understanding of, and commitment to value for money. Croydon was not identified as a 'high cost authority' by the ODPM and the charges for housing-related support are average when compared regionally and nationally. The service reviews process is the main mechanisms for ensuring services offer value for money.
- 112 There were very few speculative transitional housing benefit claims made because the Council was clear that landlords had to break the charges down and show what amount was being claimed for what service. The Supporting People team were able to advise on any claims that appeared to be excessive because of their knowledge of the sector and an informed judgement as to what was deemed reasonable.

Service cost comparisons

- 113 ODPM data on Croydon's costs show that the Council has no services with unit costs that exceed £600 per person per week and two that exceed £500. The highest cost service is £514.77 per person per week for accommodation services for an alcohol and rough sleeping recovery project.
- 114 The next highest cost service is an accommodation scheme for people with learning disabilities at £504.21 per person per week. The lowest cost service is an accommodation-based service for older people with support needs, with a cost of £2.76 per unit per week.
- 115 The unit cost of services is below the regional average and the cost per head of population is lower than the average at £0.52 per person, compared to the London average of £0.99 and the national average of £0.71.
- 116 Croydon's average unit cost for all Supporting People services is £38.35 per week. This is below the London average of £42.10 but above the national average of £28.16. However, these overall costs conceal a higher than average cost for some accommodation-based and floating support services. These include the following services:
- ◆ rough sleepers;
 - ◆ offenders;
 - ◆ people with a physical or sensory disability; and
 - ◆ young people at risk.
- 117 The data appendix at the end of this report provides further information and illustrates the variations in cost and provision of services in Croydon against the London and national averages.

Addressing value for money through service reviews

- 118 The Council recognises that the strategic relevance of schemes and value for money are critical issues in the provision of services and the reducing funding that is available for Supporting People. Croydon has undertaken reviews of its five highest cost schemes and so far found that two are not strategically relevant and will be decommissioned.

- 119 One of these schemes was a large hostel for people with mental health problems. The service users had all come from neighbouring boroughs and concern was raised by health due to the pressures it was placing on local services. The scheme withdrew from the Supporting People programme by mutual agreement and the placing social services departments resumed financial responsibility for its service users. The service users have remained in the hostel but under different funding arrangements that reflect more accurately the type of provision that it is.
- 120 The Supporting People team, and providers, found the value for money benchmarking recommended by the ODPM as being too general for services that can be very specific. The decision was to look at an hourly rate as salaries and staff costs are the biggest item of expenditure for providers.
- 121 The Council has implemented its own tool for identifying value for money. The tool enables the Council to make direct hourly comparisons with other similar schemes. Through this Croydon has a good baseline picture of hourly costs to enable comparison within the Borough and regionally to challenge service costs.
- 122 The tool is not an end in itself but is used to identify hourly costs which then trigger other analysis. Costs over £25 per hour are then examined critically to understand why the costs are so high. Similarly, services with costs under £15 per hour are looked at in terms of how the low hourly rate impacts on service quality.
- 123 The value for money methodology is explained during each individual scheme review. It forms part of the initial meeting as part of strategic relevance test and includes an explanation of how the scheme compares locally and whether there is any concern about value for money. Where scheme costs have been high, these schemes have been targeted for early reviews and the reasons for this explained to providers.
- 124 Croydon has also considered value for money in targeting inflationary increases to service providers. Only service providers who charge less than £20 per hour were allocated increases. The savings that the Council had available to pay these do not enable across the board increases. As a result of this targeting, the Council is ensuring that limited resources are used effectively.

User involvement

Summary

- 125 Croydon has successfully engaged with many users of Supporting People services and their representatives. This has been achieved through the existing mechanisms of the partnership boards, the service reviews and the bi-annual inclusive forum. However, the Council acknowledges that there is still more to be done in this area to ensure that all users are reached and able to play an active role in the programme.

Service user involvement

- 126 Community involvement is a strength in Croydon and is evidenced by the Council receiving ODPM beacon status for community involvement in March 2005 which reflected the strength of its consultation arrangements.
- 127 There are recognised mechanisms for consultation and involvement across the Council. In housing, housing panels have been established for main groups such as sheltered housing, BME groups, people with disabilities and young people. Tenants lead these panels. There is also a 'housing sounding board' which has been used by the Council to find out how tenants want to be consulted and involved in housing issues and developments.

- 128 In the social services department, one of the main consultation mechanisms is through the partnership boards. These exist for the majority of client groups and each has an associated service user forum or network to enable views to be fed into the main board. The Supporting People programme has primarily used these partnership boards as a way of reaching and consulting with service users. For example, presentations that were made to each of them on the development of the five-year strategy to ensure that they were aware of what it included and that they had an opportunity to comment on and contribute to it.
- 129 Service users are involved in the reviews of their services and many have taken this opportunity to contribute their views and comments. In one scheme review, it was the views of service users and their involvement in the process that led to the reconfiguration of the scheme.
- 130 Through the involvement of service users in the reviews, the Supporting People team has learned that many who live in shared facilities want more privacy and their own 'front door'. Where this is an issue there will be greater emphasis at second reviews on how providers are planning to deliver this in the medium-term.
- 131 In our survey of providers, 84 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the Council's arrangements for consultation with service users. However, providers we met during the inspection voiced a general concern that the inclusive forum is not an effective way of consulting with users. This was because of the size of the forum where in excess of 100 people attend and the relatively few users who attend. At the forum in March 2005, 15 service users attended.
- 132 While using existing established mechanism is positive, it is likely that this will not reach all service users, especially those who do not want to join a group or who are in services for a very short time. The Council has acknowledged that more work needs to be done in this area to ensure that it is reaching as many service users as possible.

Inclusive forum

- 133 The inclusive forum in Croydon has been established since 2002. It is held every six months and attended by a diverse group of organisations and individuals. This includes a number of service users. The forums are promoted by service providers to help users feel prepared to attend.
- 134 Service users are usually accompanied by staff from their service or advocacy groups such as First Friday (for people with a learning disability); Hear Us (for people with a mental health problem); Age Concern and Women's Aid. However, there are also service users who are confident enough to actively participate in the forum and as an example, one service user led a workshop at a recent forum.
- 135 In December 2004 there was also a sub-regional inclusive forum arranged by the southwest London cross-authority group. This enabled stakeholders from all the participating authorities to come together. This was judged to be a success and it is proposed that this becomes an annual event.

Partnership arrangements

Summary

- 136 Partnership working is a particular strength of the Council and this is also evident in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme. There is a transparent and effective process for communicating across the Council and with partners and external stakeholders.
- 137 Partnership working is well-established both strategically and operationally and there is an evident level of maturity in negotiations with parties focused on solving problems, not allocating blame or responsibility.
- 138 There is evidence of effective partnership working locally and regionally and sub-regionally. The Supporting People team has worked well with its partners in the southwest London cross-authority group and the group has a number of initiatives in place.

Providers

- 139 There are strong, effective relationships with providers. The Council has very clearly taken the approach of working alongside providers to ensure that services operate at their optimum level. The relationship was seen as supportive and constructive and the approach was seen as better in comparison to other authorities that providers work with.
- 140 There are regular forums held for providers that are well-attended and valued by the providers. A representative of the providers group sits on the steering group and provides one of the ways that information and views are passed between the groups. However, the providers we met during the inspection were not clear who the representative was or the method of feeding back. This is now being addressed by the Council.
- 141 Supporting People has developed many opportunities for partners to engage in the programme. For example, the development of the QAF was undertaken with providers and enabled them to buy into the process early on.
- 142 Another way the Council keeps in touch with providers is through the monthly Supporting People newsletter. The Council is keen to share good practice and has used the newsletter to promote this. The newsletter is also used as a way of keeping providers in touch with each other and includes articles written by providers.
- 143 In our survey of providers, 84 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the arrangements the Council had in place for consulting with them and 93 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the information provided to them on Supporting People. This was reinforced by providers we met during the inspection whereby many indicated that they saw communication as a strength of the Supporting People team and the Council.

Health and probation partnerships

- 144 The Council works effectively with health services and uses the 'Healthy Croydon Partnership' to further information and awareness of the Supporting People programme. This has helped the programme gain credibility with the wider group of health stakeholders that are involved in this partnership.

- 145 The Council has a number of joint commissioning arrangements in place with health, for example mental health and learning disability services. Budgets have been pooled for occupational therapy services and equipment stores. There is also an integrated CAMHs (child and adolescent mental health) team. The approach is to ensure that the service works in a way that makes sense for the user.
- 146 It is evident that health is engaged in the Supporting People agenda and it is able to influence the programme. Supporting People fits with health's local delivery plan and examples of this can be found in the plans for people with a learning disability, teenage pregnancies and domestic violence.
- 147 The Council recognises that in comparison to health, the partnership with probation has not been so successful. This has been due to restructuring of the probation service across London and changing personnel. The probation representative on the commissioning body has moved on and the replacement is not as yet wholly familiar with the Supporting People programme.
- 148 However, other staff from the probation service have been engaged with the process. There has been input into the mapping of service provision with key input into strategic thinking about offenders. The need for accommodation services to help them move out of a life of crime is recognised in the commissioning plan.
- 149 The probation service is positive about the inclusive environment that the Supporting People programme operates in. They consider that their voice is heard and that they 'have a place at the table' even though they have not always been able to fully capitalise on these arrangements.
- 150 Risk management policies to handle the housing of high risk offenders in the area are in place and are working well. Supporting People is integrated into arrangements through the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). These arrangements in Croydon involve a multi-agency panel which meets monthly to discuss cases where there are public protection issues arising from an ex-offender, who potentially poses a risk to the community, moving into the Borough or becoming known to services.
- 151 The panel considers issues such as the support needed to promote rehabilitation in the community, any specialist support services and the location of the property the offender will move into. These arrangements are strong and work well.

Cross-authority working

- 152 The Council is part of the southwest London cross-authority group which aims to meet on a monthly basis. This includes the neighbouring councils of Lambeth, Wandsworth, Richmond, Sutton, Merton and Kingston. This is part of the wider southwest London housing partnership. There is a joint work plan for the 2004/05 year in place which aims to ensure collaborative working to enable effective delivery and management of the Supporting People programme.
- 153 Partnership working here has been successful and the group has worked effectively with a number of initiatives in place. These include benchmarking work and the development of a value for money methodology which has enabled greater consistency in service reviews. Additionally the group has developed and agreed an information sharing protocol to ensure consistency of approach by the various authorities.

- 154 Positively, a professional practice group has been established for the service review officers which has enabled the sharing of information and practice and led to a consistent approach across the area. Additionally the working group has also established a southwest London Strategic statement which will incorporate a work plan for the forthcoming financial year.

Other partnerships

- 155 The Supporting People team has set up strong partnerships across the Council that work at both an operational and strategic level. This is particularly evidenced by the engagement of the social services commissioning managers in the programme and how well it is linked into other council strategies.
- 156 There are constructive relationships with other agencies particularly with the police and other areas of the Council in dealing with domestic violence. However, the interface between the programme and other criminal justice agencies such as the YOT (youth offending team) are not so well-developed.

Access to services and information

Summary

- 157 Access to information and services is generally good. There is a variety of information available on Supporting People for service users and service providers. Information is of a good quality and available in a range of formats and languages. However, information to potential service users is not consistent and needs addressing.
- 158 Access to services is through referral systems which are tailored to the needs of specific client groups. Many potential service users will be known to a worker or agency that will have access to information and advice on supported housing services.

Access and information

- 159 There are a number of information and referral systems to help people gain access to supported housing services. For young people, advice is available through the Council's housing advice service for young people and referrals can be made through this route to supported housing schemes.
- 160 Another advice and referral service operates out of hours for people sleeping rough. People are referred onto the hostel for street homeless people and then further advice is available on move-on to longer-term supported housing.
- 161 People with a learning disability have a clear access route now that there is a learning disability housing strategy. Opportunities have been mapped and are therefore better understood than in some other services.
- 162 Referrals to supported housing services for people with a mental health problem are not so clear and this has been highlighted through the service reviews. Work to address this is now part of the annual work plan for the programme.
- 163 For other client groups, workers will identify housing needs as part of an overall support plan and liaise with the Supporting People team to identify the most suitable type of provision. Work to improve the fairness and transparency of access arrangements for all service users is an action in the strategy action plan.

- 164 A general leaflet about Supporting People has just been re-produced. This is clear, well-laid out and is easily accessible. It contains ways of finding out more information and has a language tag providing contact numbers for people who want the information translated. Due to the transient nature of the population there are frequent changes to the language needs of the community and the Council continually reviews the most appropriate ones to use for these language tags.
- 165 The Council also provides interpreters on request so that people can discuss their own circumstances and receive detailed advice and assistance. Information can also be requested in Braille, large print or audiotape. Information has also been produced in large print and in pictorial form for people with a learning disability.
- 166 Better Care: Higher Standards, the charter document explaining access to health, social care and housing services for vulnerable people, has been re-written to include information on Supporting People and explains what services are included and how to find out more information. It also includes information on charges for these services.
- 167 Information is also provided on the Council's website. This is easy to access and includes copies of the monthly newsletters, the five-year strategy, general information and frequently asked questions. It also has details on how to contact the team. As yet there is not a directory of services available but this is planned for production later this year.
- 168 In our survey of providers, 92 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the information that the Council provides for service users. Although this is positive, accessibility to service information by telephone is poor. As part of our inspection we carried out a number of 'mystery shopping' exercises. The response to our telephone calls was disappointing. On two calls we waited over five minutes for an answer and had to hang up.
- 169 One call asking for information on domestic violence was answered but the operator had difficulty using the system to give us information and suggested that we phone back. We repeated this query two weeks later on two occasions and again the operator was not clear how to advise us or who to put us through to. Although the Council policy is that people suffering domestic violence do not have to have reported this to the police, we were advised by the operator to contact the police. This is a major failing in the provision of information. Such an unhelpful response could mean that further help or advice is not sought with possibly fatal consequences.
- 170 The Council is aware that the experience of customers ringing into the Council is not what it should be. The customer contact centre has suffered recently from sickness and resignations in this key staff group. This has resulted in a deterioration of the service. In recognition of this, a number of additional temporary staff were recruited to help resolve this shortage. Telephone calls to the Council after the inspection were answered quickly.
- 171 In the Council offices we visited, we did not see information in other languages other than directional information (queue here, this way etc). There was no information on display that translation services were available. However, the Council responded positively to our criticism and this was remedied while we were on-site. Information was put up in reception areas in the main languages so that people were aware that this service was available.

Diversity

Summary

- 172 Diversity is a core corporate value in Croydon and has been effectively mainstreamed. The Council recognises the challenges that a multi-cultural area brings and especially so with the high level of asylum seekers that there are in the area due to the proximity of the Home Office's immigration service.
- 173 The Council has a good understanding of the demography of the area and how this frequently changes as the number of asylum seekers fluctuates in response to external world events. The Council works with a range of community groups in ensuring that there are pathways into council services for its diverse population.

Consultation and involvement

- 174 The Council is aware of its demography and the changing needs of the community. The Council monitors the use of languages used for the community and aims to meet the needs of its citizens. Supporting People services are monitored and providers maintain records on access from all the different groups.
- 175 The Supporting People team used the Council's equalities impact assessment framework in developing the priorities that are part of the new five-year strategy. This framework ensures that equality is looked at in terms of gender, disability, age and sexuality as well as race.
- 176 The domestic violence strategy in Croydon recognises that this can happen in any relationship and that victims can include men and people in same sex relationships. The strategy focuses on enabling people to stay in their homes safely through the use of judicial sanctions such as injunctions and the management of perpetrators. Supporting People has been actively involved in the development of this strategy because of the support the programme provides in this area.
- 177 The Council attained level three of the Equalities Standard for Local Government at March 2004. It is targeting level four by March 2005 and currently end of year returns show the Council as on track to achieve this.
- 178 The Council recognises the many facets of diversity and positively the Council is ranked at 20th in the Stonewall top 100 employers having achieved 79 per cent on its Corporate Equality Index. The Index ranks organisations on the implementation of equality policies towards creating an equal workplace and action to be undertaken towards this.
- 179 The Council works in a number of ways to ensure there is 'buy in' to equalities and diversity issues including putting forward the business case as well as the moral case for compliance. Better and fairer access is a key part of the community strategy and forms part of the agenda in a wide range of local partnership groups that are used to promote equalities.
- 180 Social services wanted BME communities to be involved in decision making processes and achieved this through the use of training and learning activities such as mentoring and coaching.
- 181 The Council has an established BME forum which operates borough-wide and consists of 100+ community groups. The Forum is linked into Local Strategic Partnership and has been in operation for the last two years. A key aim of the forum is to maximise engagement of BME communities into the regeneration and neighbourhood renewal agenda. The Forum was consulted in the development of the five-year strategy.

- 182 The Council has ensured that councillors also own and promote diversity in governance. All reports presented are required to ensure compliance with diversity and equalities policies. A number of councillors also have job descriptions and positively these include specific reference to promoting diversity.
- 183 The Council ensures that all staff recognise the corporate diversity and equality agenda. A consistent theme for all staff is the filter for diversity and equality which cascades to individual competency through annual job reviews. Part of the corporate framework is the use of Investors in Equality as well as Investors in People (IIP).
- 184 The Council aims to ensure that all staff are aware of the diverse needs of the community through ensuring that staff receive diversity training at the induction stage. Within the social services department there is general anti-racism training and specific learning activities addressing cultural competencies. In addition it is now looking towards the delivery of sexuality training for staff and the implementation of a new phase of diversity training to be cascaded through the departmental.
- 185 Equally positive is the approach taken within the older people's services team whereby all staff are assessed against a competency framework which focuses around specific issues to address cultural competency. This approach enables staff to progress from level one to four depending on their assessment and therefore enables the monitoring of progress.

Outcomes for service users

Summary

- 186 Significant improvements in the range and quality of services for vulnerable people in Croydon have been achieved. There is now a very clear focus on the needs of the service users and ensuring that these are met through the use of support plans. Many service users have now acquired the necessary skills to live independently in the community.

Outcomes for service users

- 187 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has produced real benefits for many vulnerable people in Croydon. These improvements have come about from the injection of additional revenue resources as well as how the programme has been implemented locally.
- 188 Examples of additional schemes that were developed as part of the implementation of the programme through transitional housing benefit include:
- ◆ a resettlement service for council tenants with mental health problems;
 - ◆ a floating support service for refugees;
 - ◆ a new service for people with a learning disability providing reducing support as users gain independence;
 - ◆ an accommodation scheme for people with mental health problems and complex secondary problems;
 - ◆ a move on scheme for young drug misusers; and
 - ◆ an accommodation scheme for young people at risk.

- 189 The programme is improving the opportunities available for independent living which is having a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. Below is an example of the contribution that Supporting People is making to the lives of vulnerable people in Croydon.

Supporting People Case Study 1 – Outcomes for a young person

Service User Group: Care leaver/young person at risk

Type of service: Supported accommodation the floating support

Key players: Support worker and personal advisor

Issues to be addressed

- Need to normalise behaviour after living with a mentally ill mother.
- Understand what is appropriate behaviour, self care and hygiene.
- Get back into formal education.
- Develop independence skills.

Action taken

- Place at college.
- Placed in a semi-independent unit.
- Support to develop self-confidence.
- Development of life skills.
- Programme developed to cover all the skills needed such as budgeting, shopping, cooking and living with other people.

Outcomes for service user

- User has obtained some college qualifications.
- Acted as a young people's representative with the Council.
- Travelled abroad unaccompanied.
- User gaining in self-confidence and building housekeeping skills.
- Moved to independent living with floating support.

- 190 A further example of successful outcomes is demonstrated by a service user who had remained in his supported housing for nine years. He was unable to move on because of rent arrears. The implementation of the programme and support plans enabled this issue to be identified and he was supported to clear his arrears and is now living independently.
- 191 Through the service review process, the Supporting People team found that many service providers did not have adequate support planning arrangements in place. Use of support plans has now been widely promoted and providers can now evidence the work they are doing and the contribution that they are making to promoting the independence of service users. The support plans also ensure that service users understand and can influence the service they are receiving.
- 192 An additional benefit of this was identified at one establishment we visited where staff told us that the use of the support plans and records that are developed with residents has enabled relatives to quickly see that their relative is getting the help and support they need and that these services have actually been delivered.

193 The following case study illustrates how the programme has tackled serious deficiencies on the part of a provider that has resulted in better outcomes for all the residents of one establishment.

Supporting People Case Study 2 – Change of service provider

Service User Group: Young people 18 to 25 years

Type of service: Hostel

Key players: Charitable Service provider
Council Supporting People team
Charity Commissioners
Alternative provider

Issues to be addressed

- Health and safety issues – many staff without criminal records checks.
- Health and safety issues – building in a poor state of repair and poor standard of refurbishments.
- Residents outside age limit for service users (25+ years).
- Conflict of interests – some staff and residents were related to Trustees or were Trustees themselves.
- Fraud investigation relating to housing benefit claims.
- No assessment or support plans for service users.
- Residents did not have any form of occupancy agreement.

Actions taken

Council tried to work with the provider to regularise the situation.

Charity Commissioners suspend the Trustees.

Recovery plan developed by the Council, the Charity Commissioners and an alternative provider – the plan is for the original trustees to build their capacity and take back the management of the project.

Due to the scale of the problems that emerged Charity Commission appoints a Charity Act Receiver to investigate finances.

Alternative provider appointed as a corporate Trustee.

Original Chief executive dismissed.

Alternative provider and Council looking at the strategic relevance and long-term future of the service.

Outcomes for service user

Alternative provider has resolved major health and safety issues.

Project now complying with legal obligations, Supporting People contract conditions and charitable objectives of the service.

Significant improvement in the living environment and quality of support for service users.

- 194 The processes and systems introduced through the Supporting People programme have led to a much greater knowledge of what services are provided through the programme and where the gaps are. Through this, the needs of care leavers have been identified and plans are now in place to develop services for this group as resources are available.
- 195 Risks to the programme are well-understood and documented and there is a risk register and contingency plans in place that are used by the Supporting People team. The risk register is regularly updated and is part of the regular work processes of the team.
- 196 During our visits to nine service providers, we saw a good standard of accommodation and there was evidence of positive relationships between staff and service users.
- 197 Move on accommodation in general is in short supply in Croydon and this will have an impact on all services if residents are not able to move out into more independent living to use the skills they have acquired in a more supported setting. The Probation service is aware that specialist provision has become 'silted up'. Because of this they are not able to ensure that offenders who need this service are able to access it and that residents who have gained skills are able to move into more independent accommodation.
- 198 The Council is also aware that performance management needs to change now that the programme is established and running well and concentrate on what the programme is producing for service users in terms of outputs.

Summary

- 199 We have assessed the Supporting People programme in Croydon as providing a promising, two-star service. It has provided significant improvements in the range and quality of services that are meeting the needs of vulnerable people.
- 200 The strategy for the next five years is comprehensive and inclusive and is well-connected with other aims and priorities of the Council and partners. The commissioning plan will guide the development of new services as money becomes available. Diversity is a strength of the Council and there is a good understanding of the demography of the area. The programme is supported by reliable structures and processes. This includes robust governance arrangements and efficient financial systems.
- 201 There is good quality information available on services and access to them. Service users are involved in the programme and the Council has made good use of many existing consultation forums. The service reviews have already delivered improvements in quality and achieved savings for re-investment in new services.
- 202 There are mature partnership arrangements that work effectively at strategic and operational levels. This coupled with the level of joint working and commissioning between the Council and the PCT has been a sound foundation for the programme to be built on. Partnership working extends to other groups including service providers and various community groups.
- 203 However, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed. Information is not consistent for service users or providers. The Council has acknowledged that more work needs to be done to ensure more users are actively engaged in the programme.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 204 The Council has made significant and sustained progress in constructing a strategically well-aligned Supporting People programme that has been built on existing partnership arrangements and sound planning. It has enabled the programme to be effectively implemented and delivered.
- 205 We saw evidence of improvements across the range of services provided through the programme and of achievements that were outlined in the shadow strategy. These include the robust needs analysis that has taken place and the commissioning plan which will enable services to be tailored to the needs of vulnerable people in Croydon as opposed to the collection of legacy services, some of which have been found not to be strategically relevant.
- 206 There is evidence of the commissioning body working well and making difficult decisions that have impacted on the quality of services provided to service users. This was especially so in decommissioning a scheme providing accommodation for six people with mental health problems that was not strategically relevant. The provider was aware that the Council had identified floating support as being needed rather than additional accommodation-based services. The commissioning body also played a crucial role in managing the subsequent appeal by the provider.
- 207 Over two thirds of the services have been reviewed and there is evidence of service improvements coming about through this process. A few services were found to be working extremely well and will continue in this way, others have had detailed action plans drawn up that will improve their operation. One example is the re-configuration of a service for people with a learning disability that was based on feedback from service users. A number have either been decommissioned or have decided to cease operating rather than fulfil the quality requirements of the programme.
- 208 The case study on the change of service provider in the previous section on outcomes for service users shows the amount of careful work that has been undertaken to enable a necessary service to continue in a way that is safer and more sustainable for service users. While some young people may not see obvious benefits from these actions, the fact that staff are appropriately vetted and that the organisation is operating in a professional way will provide a more secure environment that will enable them to develop their independence.
- 209 The Council has ensured that improvements through the service review programme continue by funding additional posts in this team. In developing proposals for this increase in staffing resources, benchmarking on service reviews completion rates per officer was undertaken with other authorities to ensure that Croydon was operating at a comparable level of work.
- 210 Learning from the review process is captured through 'overview reports', following batches of scheme reviews for specific client groups. These are presented within the Council and to service providers for discussion on the strategic and service-related issues that have been identified overall. This process provides the opportunity for disseminating good practice and implementing improvements to how services operate. An example of this is the overview report on the mental health service reviews that has highlighted issues about how these services are accessed. Plans to address this have been drawn up and will form actions for both the Supporting People team and staff delivering these services from health and social care.

- 211 The programme has also evidenced other improvements such as the securing of funding for two new schemes of supported accommodation for care leavers. These schemes are in development and follow from needs identified in the shadow strategy. Similarly, a sheltered housing scheme for BME elders is due to open in August 2005 and is in response to a previously identified need.
- 212 Croydon is a key partner in the cross-authority sub-regional group and there have been positive outcomes from these meetings that have improved service delivery. For example, the benchmarking work and the development of a value for money methodology which has enabled greater consistency in service reviews. Additionally the group has developed and agreed an information sharing protocol to ensure consistency of approach by the various authorities.
- 213 Another service improvement that will also have benefits for users in supported housing is that the fairer charging scheme is joining with the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) from April 2005 to carry out joint assessments. This will ensure that users have information on the whole range of benefits and pensions that they may be entitled to and thereby maximise their household income.
- 214 Croydon can also evidence improvement as a council and a main achievement that has a bearing on the Supporting People programme is that of receiving beacon status for 'Getting Closer to Communities'. This reflects the strength of its consultation arrangements with local people and organisations. Part of these arrangements is the BME forum that is funded jointly by the Council and the Millennium Commission. Nearly 100 individuals and local organisations are involved in this group that directly links to the LSP.
- 215 For the past three years the Council has been judged as a 'good' authority by the Audit Commission as part of the comprehensive performance assessment. In December 2004, the housing service scored four out of four, the top performance score, in recognition of its performance on community housing, housing management and housing strategy. Croydon was one of only 14 councils nationally to have its housing service score four in the 2004 CPA ratings.
- 216 The Commission for Social Care Inspectorate has confirmed that the Council's social services have continued to improve and in 2004 awarded the service two stars with excellent prospects for improvements for its adult services. One of the areas of service improvement was the 'major adaptation unit' that had enhanced the process for accessing disabled facilities grants and the completion of adaptations making it easier and quicker for people to remain in their own homes.
- 217 For young people, a 'one-stop shop' has been set up that brings together the Council's housing and social services departments, Connexions, the Youth Offending Team and a service provider. This enables young people to access the whole range of information on housing, including housing-related support services provided through the Supporting People programme.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 218 The current improvement plans are good and will address identified weaknesses in the Supporting People programme. These cover all the areas we identified when we looked at the service in detail. The plans we saw were detailed, specific and resourced.
- 219 The Strategy Action Plan (SAP) is an annual plan developed from the five year strategy. It will provide the overarching improvement plan for the Supporting People Programme. There is a clear link between the unmet needs and issues identified in the strategy and the specific actions detailed in the commissioning plan and the action plan. Progress on the SAP will be reported regularly to the Commissioning Body and to the wider partnerships through the governance arrangements and will be reviewed annually.
- 220 The detailed planning has involved an assessment of the resources and capacity of the authority to deliver on the commitments made in the SAP. This has involved looking at the action plan alongside the wider service plan for housing for 2005/06 to identify opportunities and resources to support implementation of the SAP.
- 221 It has also involved taking account of the different areas of expertise available within the wider team. Where staff are undertaking new areas of activity, for example procurement, they will be supported by people with relevant expertise elsewhere in the service and Council.
- 222 The SAP incorporates proposals for developing a performance management framework in relation to service quality, including performance indicators, baseline standards and targets for improvement. It also includes an action to develop the understanding of how Supporting People is contributing to wider aims and specific best value PIs or targets in the community strategy.
- 223 There is a clear commissioning plan for future developments of the programme which has been informed by the needs analysis and assessment of the gaps in service provision.
- 224 The communication plan for the Supporting People programme is currently under review now that the SAP has been finalised. This next stage of the communication plan will seek to further build the knowledge of frontline staff and middle managers. Meetings have already taken place with housing and social services management teams during the development of the SAP. There will be further involvement of middle managers in some of the improvement projects identified in the action plan. For example, the review of the mental health referral and access system.
- 225 The SAP also sets out areas where it is intended to improve and develop the involvement of service users. These include involvement in the commissioning of new schemes; a review of information for service users and providers; a pilot initiative with Carr Gomm to train service users to be involved in the scheme review process; and establishing a mental health and housing group with service user representation.
- 226 There are also positive indicators for the future involvement of the probation service in the programme. For example, the London Accommodation Strategy being developed by the probation service recognises the need to increase the capacity of the service to engage with providers and is considering the option of recruiting two additional staff to do this.

- 227 The SAP also covers areas of process that will be reviewed and improvements made as necessary. These include a review of the Supporting People IT system to ensure it is still fit for purpose and to evaluate newer systems that may have come onto the market more recently. Financial arrangements are covered and payments to providers will be made by BACS instead of cheques by the autumn of 2005.
- 228 In response to our feedback during the inspection that providers did not understand how the provider representative linked to the steering group, there are now plans in place to improve the linkages between the two forums and to consult with providers about an increased level of representation. Other improvements planned for providers include establishing an e-mail group to be able to circulate news and information quickly and to undertake a short provider survey each year to test the effectiveness of information and consultation systems.
- 229 There are other plans in place that will address areas of weakness that we found during the inspection and that will improve services over the whole council. Examples of these include the changes that are planned to the customer contact centre. A further range of services will have their 'front desk' operations transferred to the centre and staffing will be increased considerably. This will provide a much larger group of staff who will be better placed to deal with fluctuations in service demand.
- 230 There are also actions planned to improve information in other languages and on translation services that will be in all council reception areas.
- 231 There are separate plans to address the lack of move on accommodation. A project group that involves council staff and service providers and RSLs is overseeing a number of different initiatives that will have a positive impact on this problem. Solutions include a target of 50 per cent of lettings to new one-bedroom flats from people moving on from supported housing, reviewing lettings policies and using the Croydon Rent in Advance Scheme, funded by the Council, to access private sector accommodation.

Will improvements be delivered?

- 232 Ownership of the Supporting People agenda by the key partners, senior managers and councillors is evident and there is a clear commitment to the strategy, the action plan and to delivering improvements. Ambitions for the programme have been developed with stakeholders as can be evidenced by the commissioning plan.
- 233 The governance arrangements provide a good, clear strategic lead for the programme and the team is knowledgeable and effective. Partnership working with stakeholders is mature and well-developed and the programme has clear linkages to a range of wider community objectives.
- 234 The commissioning plan will be used to assess the impact of any future financial changes. The model can be manipulated to provide for a range of changes such as an increase or decrease in the grant, changes to the cost of subsidy contracts and the effect of scheme reviews on contract levels. This ensures the programme will be able to respond effectively and continue to focus on the development of provision to meet identified needs.

- 235 Performance management is embedded into the operations of the Council and therefore does not represent an area of concern. Councillors are actively engaged in the review of performance. There is quarterly reporting on BVPIs, however although there are no specific Supporting People indicators there are indicators that enable some examination of the Supporting People service. For example there is reporting of performance relating to older people and people with mental health problems. As a result of this councillors are aware of the performance and readily identify performance that deviated from overall council plans.
- 236 The performance management framework is cascaded down to an individual level and is seen as an organic process rather than mechanical one. Arrangements are well-embedded and reporting lines are clear and responsibilities are understood. As a result of this all individuals are able to assess their responsibilities and contribution to organisational objectives.
- 237 The Supporting People team is part of this performance management framework. The team is well-managed and the work is monitored through regular formal monthly supervision meetings. The work plans clearly link to service and departmental plans.
- 238 Appraisals are undertaken annually with half-yearly reviews. These reviews are used to identify key areas of work, ensure that the post holder has resources to take the task and the identification of development and training needs. There are robust systems in place to ensure that organisational and departmental training needs are addressed. Training is provided in accordance with needs and staff are empowered to address training needs through a variety of means, not solely through training courses. Each team identifies training needs which feeds into the departmental and then the council plan.
- 239 The Council has addressed managerial competency through the establishment of a corporate training programme for all managers. A management training programme has recently been run internally over eight days. Such an approach ensures that staff have key competencies irrespective of their experience and qualifications.
- 240 The Supporting People team has a good range of skills and experience with a lot of experience around partnership working. This has enabled good working relationships, cross-fertilisation of ideas and delivery of key tasks in accordance with key actions. Staff are proud of working in the team and proud of the progress that has been made to date in delivering a complex programme.
- 241 There is a robust IT system that is used as a database, to generate and monitor payments to providers and produce a variety of reports. It has good functionality and is reliable. Staff have received training on the system and further training is planned on Business Objects to make greater use of the systems capacity to generate reports.
- 242 Risks are well-managed in the Supporting People programme and there is an up-to-date register of risks. The SAP has been translated into a detailed project plan which includes an assessment of risks. This has been reflected in a review of the risk register.

Summary

- 243 We have assessed the Supporting People programme in Croydon as having excellent prospects for delivering further improvement to the Supporting People programme. There is a well-managed, committed team who are proud of their achievements. There is clear ownership of the programme and a clear strategic lead from the governance arrangements.
- 244 The five-year strategy is the key driver for future improvements and there are clear, accessible and resourced plans to tackle identified areas of weakness. The commissioning body displays leadership along with the accountable officer. Service reviews are another driver in the improvement of housing-related support services. The reviews are providing a mechanism for challenging, reconfiguring, decommissioning and improving services.
- 245 The Council can demonstrate a significant number of areas where improvements have already been made and at the heart of these is the support planning for service users that will shape the services they receive in gaining skills in independent living.
- 246 There is a strong emphasis on partnership working and a very well-established track record of joint working with health, social services and the southwest London Supporting People group. The Council has the necessary systems in place to ensure that improvements are planned and monitored and located in individual work plans.

Appendices

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

Performance indicators

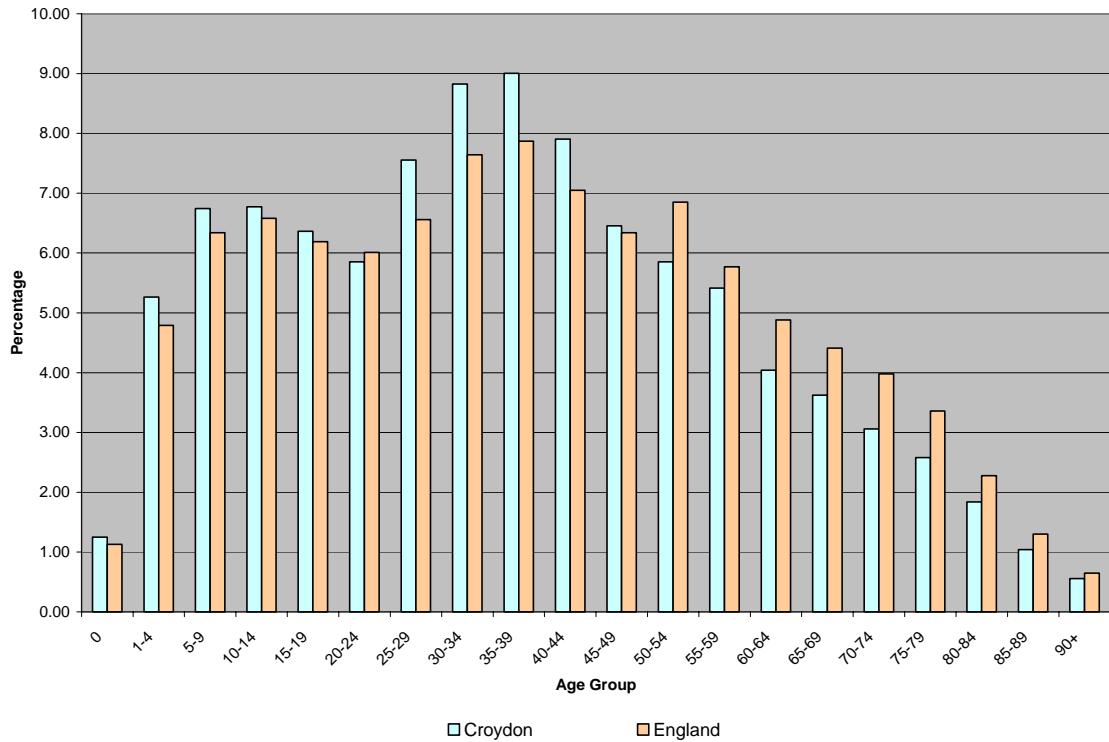
Demographic information

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

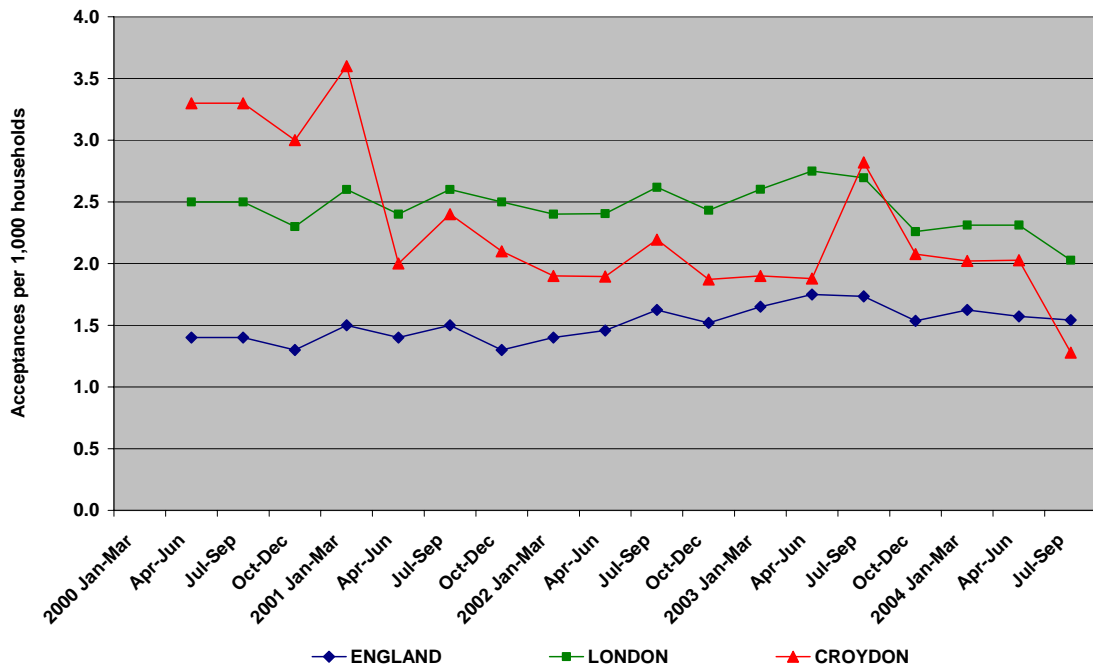
Measure	Croydon	England
Population (mid-2002)	336,600	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2002)	16.19	16.41
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2002)	36.3	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2004)	2.8	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ²	148	-

² Deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



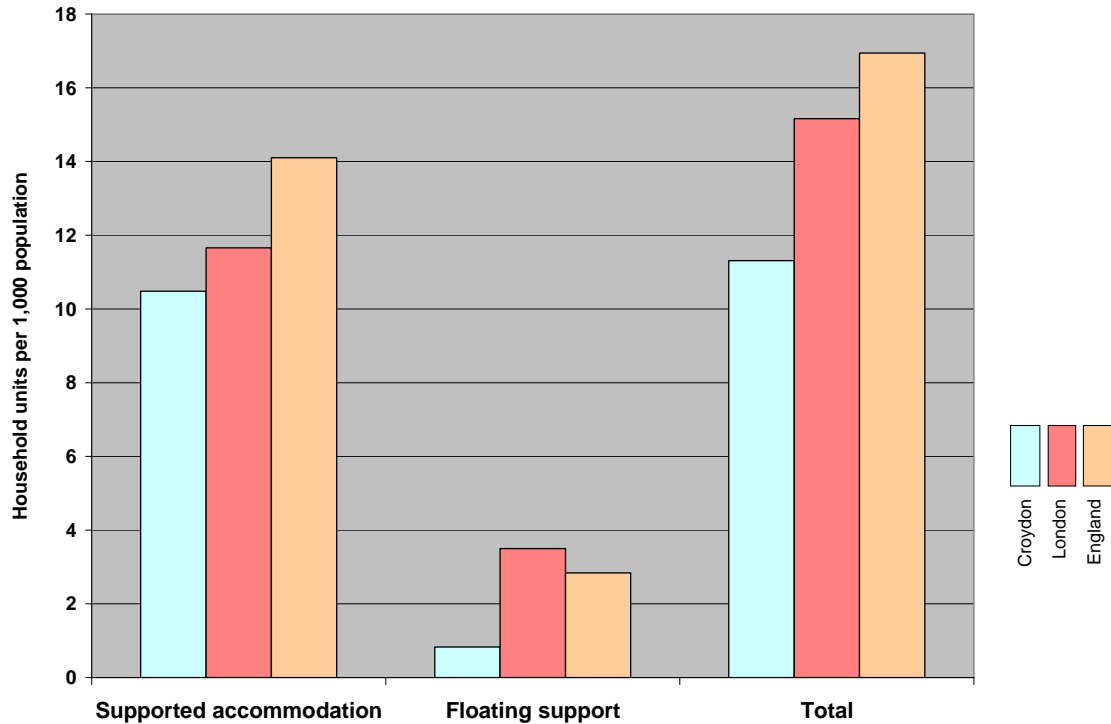
Performance information

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

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

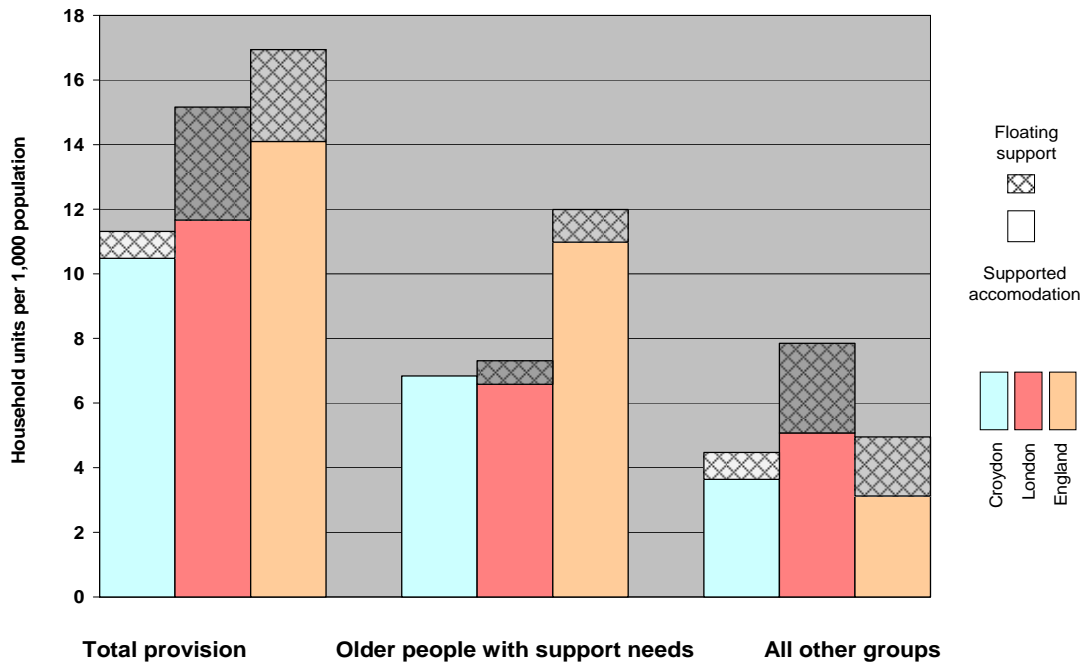
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People³

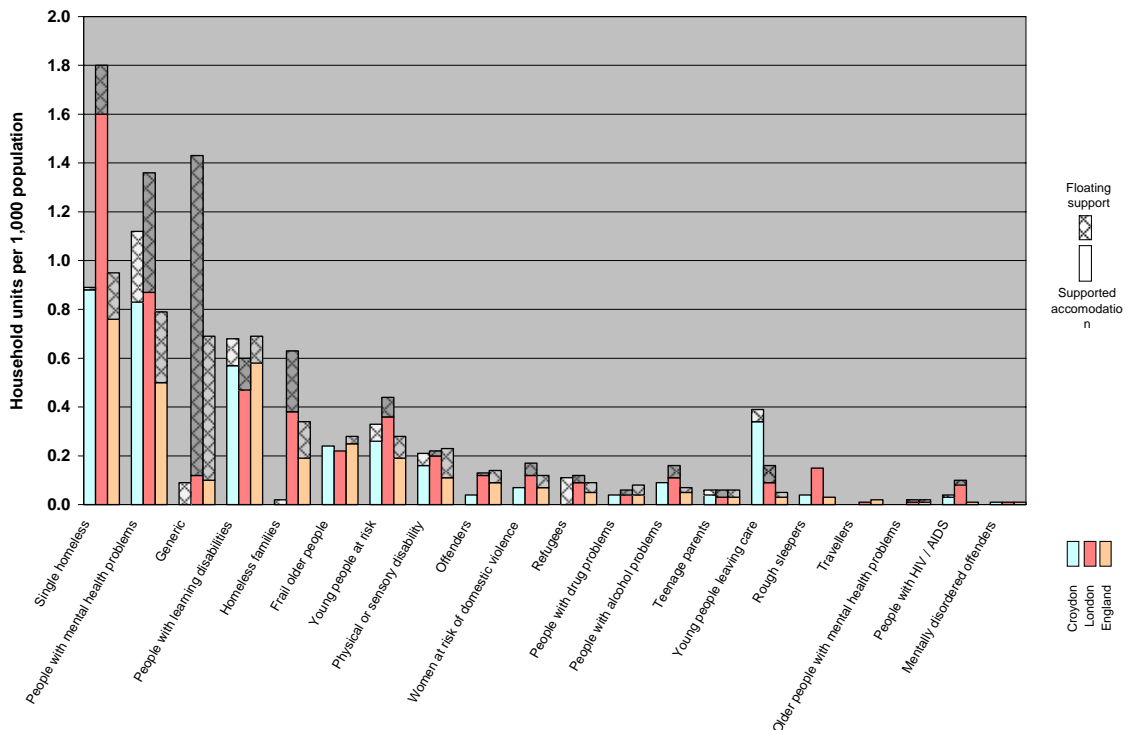


³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁴



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁵



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

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

Funding for Supporting People⁶

Croydon	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£9,102,163	£8,881,039	£8,572,165
Pipeline allocation	£21,710	£27,170	£ -
Administration grant	£287,285	£281,315	£225,052

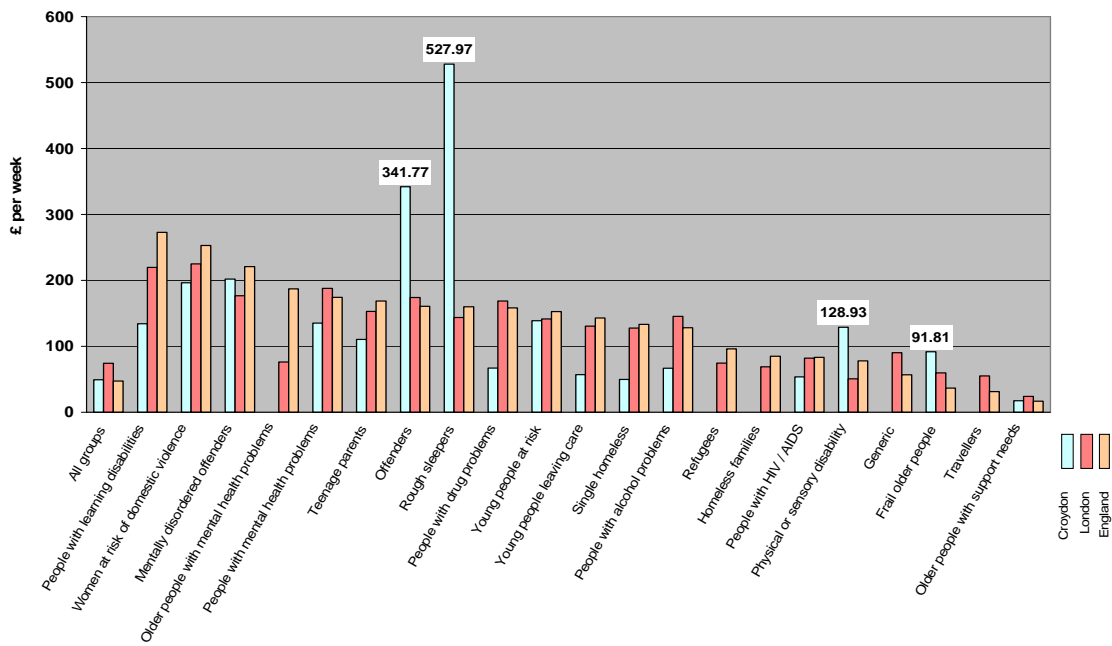
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2004/05 (£ per week)⁷

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Croydon	£0.52	£38.35	£38.35	£65.33
London	£0.99	£42.10	£48.24	£61.75
England	£0.71	£28.16	£34.51	£61.08

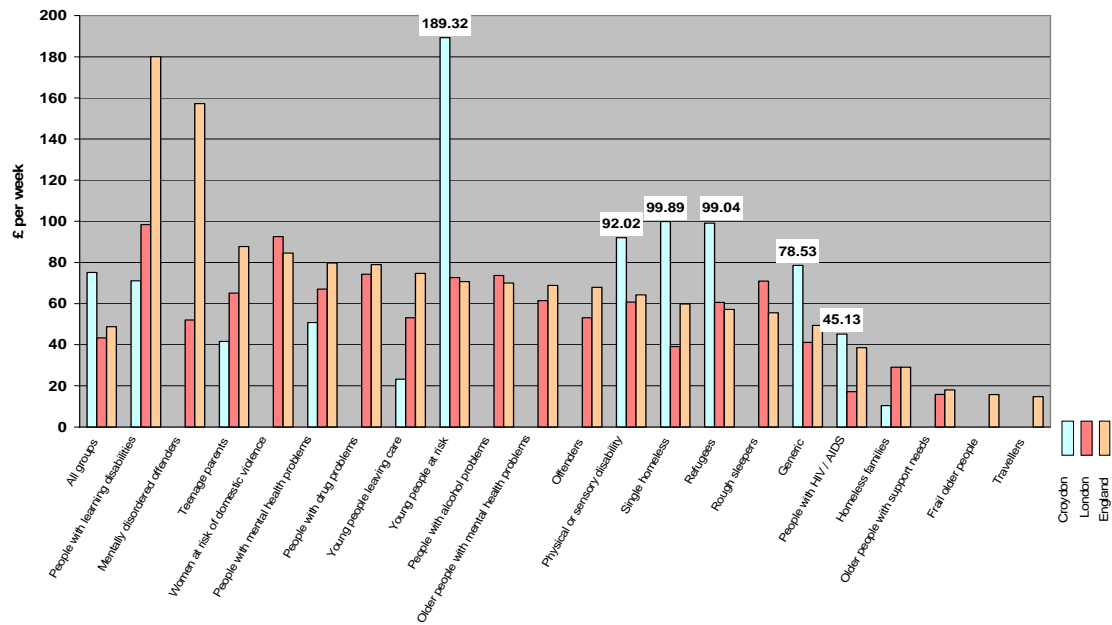
⁶ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

⁷ Source: Platinum cut grant information and 2004/05 Supply data.

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)⁸



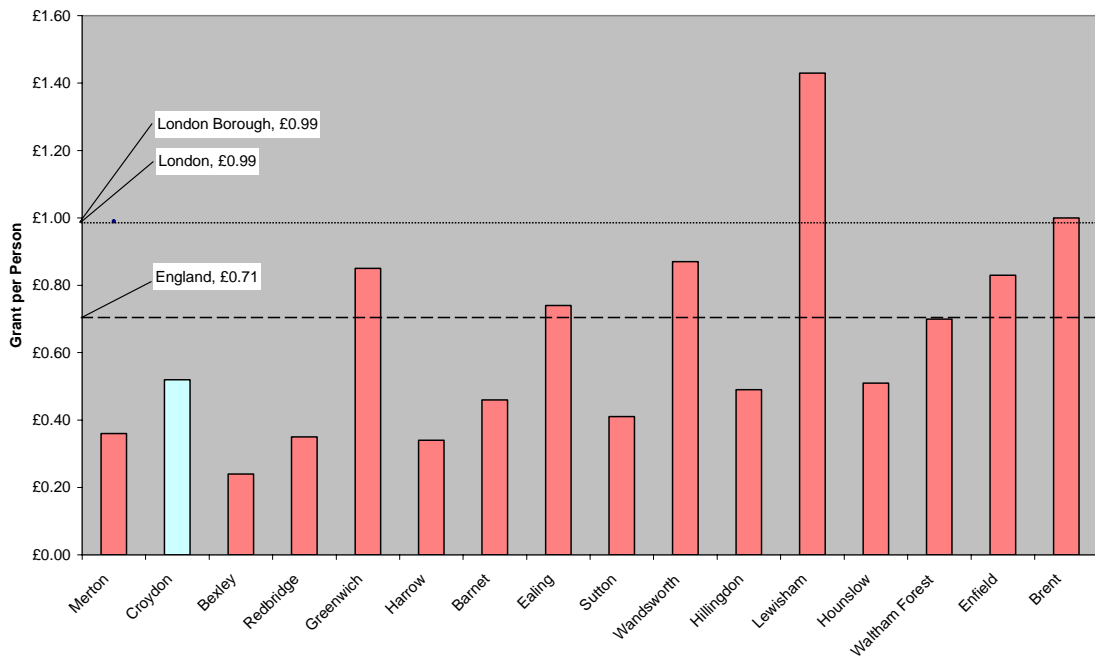
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)⁹



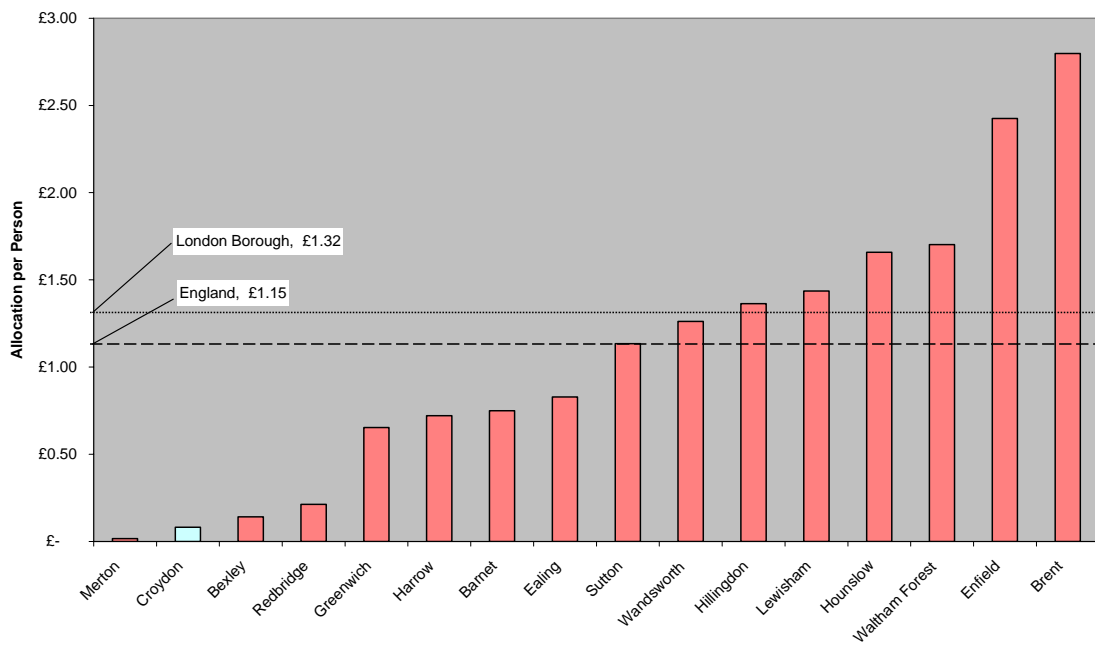
⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁰, all London boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)



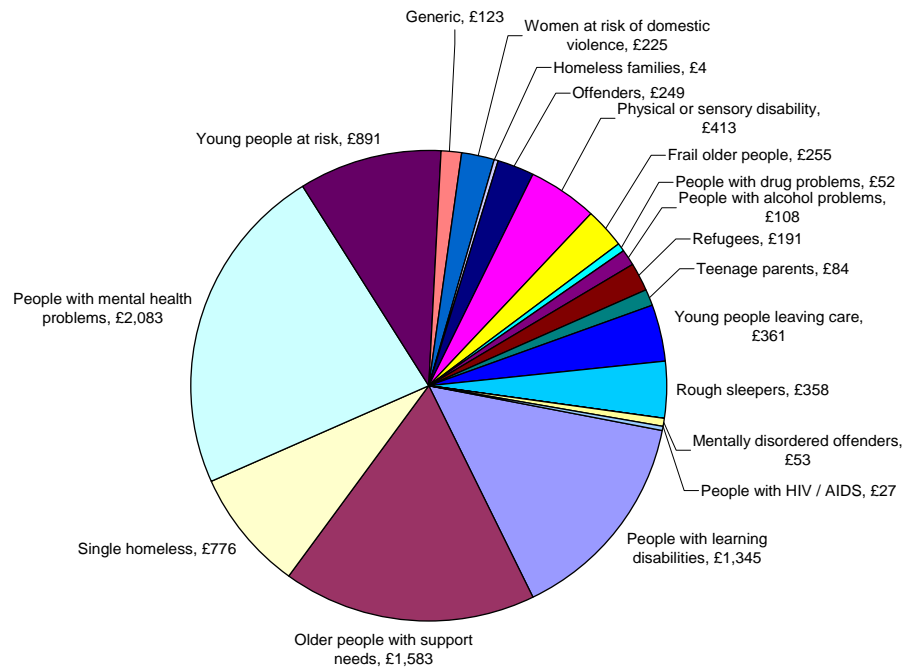
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹¹, all London boroughs and all English councils



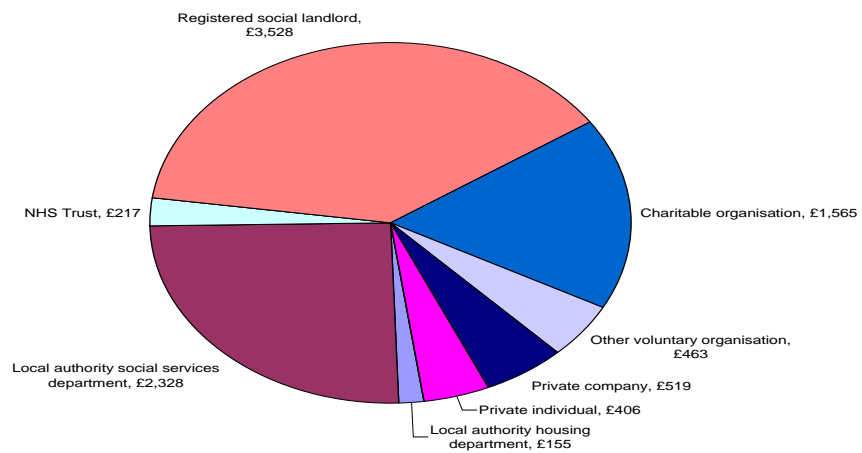
¹⁰ A comparator group of similar councils.

¹¹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹²



Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹³



¹² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Most	Excellent	☆☆
Children's Services	Most	Promising	(3)

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Croydon	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Above average (●●●)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of older people to residential/ nursing care (C26) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32)
Average (●●)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Delayed transfers of care (D41)
Significantly below average (●)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with London boroughs

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

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

Documents reviewed

Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the Council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ Croydon Supporting People Shadow Strategy;
- ◆ Croydon Supporting People Five-Year Strategy 2005 to 2010;
- ◆ Croydon's Community Strategy;
- ◆ Croydon Drug and Alcohol Action Team Strategic Overview;
- ◆ service documents including policies and procedures;
- ◆ performance reports;
- ◆ minutes and supporting documents from key groups such as the commissioning body, the steering group and the project management group;
- ◆ value for money methodology;
- ◆ Supporting People Strategy Action Plan 2005 to 2006;
- ◆ job descriptions for members of the Supporting People team;
- ◆ needs mapping documentation;
- ◆ Commissioning Plan for the Supporting People programme; and
- ◆ Communication Plan for the Supporting People programme.

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ visits to nine service providers;
- ◆ mystery shopping by person and telephone;
- ◆ visits to council offices and the main library;
- ◆ telephone interviews with members of the southwest London cross-authority group;
- ◆ observation of an inclusive forum meeting;
- ◆ interviews with service users; and
- ◆ focus groups with service providers, staff and councillors.

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)

Location of the Supporting People team

The Supporting People team is located in the housing department and the accountable officer is an assistant director of housing. In addition, there is a 'champion' for the programme in the social services department.

The location of the team means it is well-placed to enable seamless service delivery and enables the strengths of both social services and housing to contribute towards the effective delivery of the Supporting People programme. This also ensures that the priorities of potentially competing service user groups are balanced and the specific skills in recognising the needs of the diverse users of Supporting People services can be accessed, for example, people with learning difficulties and homeless people.

Commissioning plan

A large part of the work of developing the five-year strategy was a comprehensive analysis of current need. With this information and the knowledge of the existing supply of housing-related support services, proposals for a range of new services to meet the gaps that have been developed. A model for evaluating new schemes was developed and then applied this to the proposals.

The outcome of the evaluation was the commissioning plan which was widely consulted on and now forms part of the five-year strategy. This clearly shows what the priorities are and details what will be developed as and when resources become available.

South-west London Professional Practice Group

This group is part of the south-west London Supporting People cross-authority group and brings together staff responsible for scheme reviews and Supporting People contracts. It facilitates comparison and challenge across each of the authorities' policies and practices and ensures a consistent approach. It also provides opportunities for joint training in these areas.

Overview Reports from service reviews

Croydon has produced 'overview reports' as reviews have been completed on specific client areas. These are agreed by the commissioning body. They have been shared internally and have led to plans for general service improvements. Although these have not yet been shared with providers it is planned to do so at future providers forums.