

Inspection report

May 2004

Supporting People Programme

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current complex and unco-ordinated 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 inspection of Supporting People services in Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council has taken place within the first year of the inspection programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it moves from implementation to the introduction of the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the prospects for improvement and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

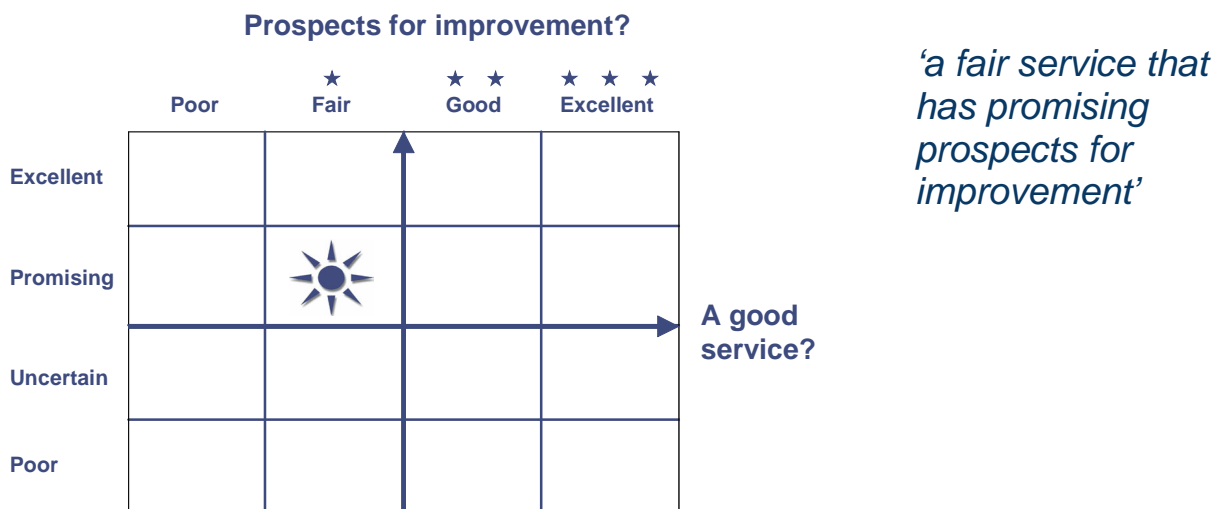
Background

- 5 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is located in the Black Country region of the West Midlands of England. The council's population is 301,155 of which 7.5 per cent are from black and minority ethnic communities (census 2001). The council is led by the conservative party who hold 31 of the 72 seats.
- 6 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with the Dudley Beacon and Castle primary care trust, the Dudley South primary care trust and the West Midlands probation service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 7 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council received a Supporting People grant allocation of £6,517,598 in 2003/04. This level of funding when analysed per head of population is relatively low compared to other councils in England. The council received an additional allocation of £54,287 towards the cost of new services being developed in year and £224,143 administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. Expenditure forecasts show a balanced budget in terms of the overall programme and a potential under spend of £45,000 in the administration grant (primarily due to savings made from staff vacancies) which will be rolled forward into 2004/05. The administration grant will reduce to £202,000 in 2004/05. The Supporting People grant available for 2004/05 is £6,526,246 and this includes a total of £254,751 towards the cost of developing three new services still in the pipeline.
- 8 The highest cost Supporting People service in Dudley is £694.71 a week which relates to floating support provided to an adult with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.83 which relates to emergency call alarm support. There are a total of 154 schemes and 99 supporting services.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart¹: Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 10 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date. These include:
- ◆ The vision for the Supporting People programme in the area is clear. Areas of strategic overlap with wider council planning and performance improvement initiatives have been identified.
 - ◆ There are particularly good cross agency linkages with respect to homelessness, young peoples’ needs and in serving the needs of older people residing in council run sheltered accommodation. There has also been effective links made with the community safety strategy.
 - ◆ A number of new services have been commissioned in areas where previously there was limited or no provision.
 - ◆ There has been a good and there is ongoing appraisal of need for most of the Supporting People service user groups. Further research is being undertaken to improve local understanding.
 - ◆ Mystery shopping undertaken with a variety of customer services points revealed good standards of customer care with staff able to appropriately signpost the caller on to key people/agencies who are able to help.
 - ◆ There is evidence of a strong commitment to understanding and promoting diversity in day to day operations and this approach is embedded in a number of policies, strategies and action plans. A number of new services have been developed that cater for the specific religious and cultural needs of some BME users. Efforts have been made to improve access to interpreting and translation facilities.

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 evidence of effective inter directorate working as well as joint approaches with other agencies. The Supporting People programme overlaps with and has both contributed to and extracted added value from a number of well established partnerships.
- ◆ The work and commitment of the Supporting People team is valued by most service providers. Team members have shown themselves to be flexible and are always willing to help.
- ◆ The housing with care schemes provide positive examples of joint working that have led to a strong focus on prevention and the promotion of independence.
- ◆ All providers who responded to our questionnaire were pleased with the method of payments and level of accuracy achieved and high standards have been consistently maintained.
- ◆ Risk and contingency planning concerning the Supporting People programme has recently been reviewed and reflects the transition to the new phase of implementation. A comprehensive risk management matrix now exists. The issue of risk management relating to the needs of offenders is well managed locally.
- ◆ The council's carer's emergency card scheme is a positive example of proactive work being undertaken to manage risk to the carer of a vulnerable person and to ensure there are robust systems of support for them and the vulnerable person they care for.
- ◆ Individual support plans have been developed for all people living in the council's housing with care schemes (ahead of the ODPM target).

Areas for improvement

- 11 However, we found a number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed. These include:
- ◆ Health agencies and some social care teams in the area do not yet have a clear enough understanding of their role and contribution to the Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ There is further work to do in order to map out the links to tackling health inequalities, and in identifying how the programme can assist the modernisation of local mental health, learning disability and physical disability services in particular.
 - ◆ There are some areas where the commissioning body needs to review its approach in procuring services, for example, in terms of people with some specialist/additional needs and in ensuring flexible levels of support including out of hours support.
 - ◆ There has been weak involvement of most service users and carers in the development of the Supporting People strategy to date. Stronger connections are needed with local service user, carer and voluntary sector organisations so that they own and can contribute to the strategic direction of the programme and are actively involved in monitoring its progress.
 - ◆ More detailed analysis is required of the particular needs of some vulnerable adults with mental health, learning disabilities and offenders from BME communities as well as ensuring that services properly address gender related needs.
 - ◆ Further work is needed to uncover the specific needs of some potential Supporting People service users such as those with sensory impairments and travellers.
 - ◆ There are some areas within the commissioning body's memorandum of understanding that require further clarification so that partner agencies are

fully aware of the extent of risk to them and have contingencies in place to address any emerging resource commitments.

- ◆ There is not much evidence yet of potential or actual outcomes from cross authority working in terms of a shared approach to meeting needs, joint commissioning, agreements regarding the provision of move on accommodation or the sharing of expertise across council areas.
- ◆ A number of providers reported they remain confused about the charging policy and only one independent sector provider has yet implemented the policy and is currently recovering the sums due.
- ◆ There has been insufficient staffing within the Supporting People team to meet the demands of the review timetable which has led to slippage against the original programme. The service review team has more work to do to establish value for money, benchmark costs and quality of provision with others delivering a similar offering, and ensure there are close linkages with mainstream health and social care services for service users in common.
- ◆ There has not been the capacity in the Supporting People team up to now to formally analyse, benchmark and report performance against the Supporting People key performance areas. Further work is needed to develop local and cross cutting performance indicators that formally integrate the contribution of the Supporting People programme with partner agency activity and bigger corporate aims such as the public service agreement (PSA) targets.
- ◆ There are some inaccuracies in terms of the unit costs of services for specific service user groups that need further exploration in terms of cost and levels of need served, before they can be seen to be reliable and capable of comparison.

12 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements. We found the following strengths:

What works well

- ◆ The commissioning body has worked hard to make sure that the key building blocks essential to the smooth running of the Supporting People programme have been put in place. There is good corporate ownership of the programme and a strong focus on financial controls.
- ◆ The five year strategy development work is well underway and is providing a clearer and more up to date picture of need and demand levels. The commissioning body is currently in the process of agreeing systems to aid decision making regarding strategic relevance of services and to identify its top priorities.
- ◆ There is a strong culture of council directorates and local agencies working together to develop solutions to shared challenges.
- ◆ The council has taken positive action to improve its understanding of and support to local BME community members and has structured its planning and decision making so that equalities issues are appropriately considered and mainstreamed.
- ◆ The newly appointed Supporting People team manager has given the team a new focus and has enabled clearer future direction for the programme.
- ◆ The proposals to upgrade the Supporting People IT system later in 2004/05 should enable better management information, performance reporting capabilities and interface with the social services management information system.
- ◆ Probation services have also invested in improving management information relative to the accommodation and support needs of offenders and ex offenders and will have a stronger local management focus in Dudley later in the year.

Areas for improvement

- 13 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve:
- ◆ Further work is needed to identify and manage the contribution of the Supporting People programme alongside health and social care providers in the continuing development of community based services. This in particular relates to developing a wider range of support services for adults with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems that are targeted at different levels of need.
 - ◆ There is an urgent need to ensure that frontline staff in health and social care services have a proper understanding of the Supporting People programme and its impact on their day to day practice.
 - ◆ Performance management and service reviews are areas for significant development.

Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:

Commissioning services to meet local needs

- ◆ The commissioning body must forge stronger links with local health and social care adult commissioning plans. It must also explore the potential for joint commissioning and aligning mainstream health and social care funds with the Supporting People programme to extract added value.
- ◆ The boundaries between care and support should be clarified so that frontline staff and providers are fully aware of their responsibilities under the programme.
- ◆ The commissioning body must review its high cost services as a priority and determine the appropriateness of funding relative to the Supporting People eligibility criteria. It must also review those services that currently do not have the level of resources they need to appropriately meet need.
- ◆ The commissioning body must evaluate the effectiveness of floating support services combined with speed of access to move on accommodation so that future access to services is maximised. In addition, it must create a clearer picture of the contribution of the housing with care schemes to wider agency performance.
- ◆ The council and its partner agencies must establish a clearer view of what services are being delivered by generic providers and ensure they deliver value for money.

User involvement and access to services

- 15 Service users, carers and voluntary organisations must be given a clearly identified role in shaping the future direction of the Supporting People programme. Joint working with the council must be carried out to create a better understanding of how this fits with other wider local service developments, best value action plans and partnership board agendas.
- 16 There needs to be a stronger promotion of the work and aims of the programme so that service users, providers and frontline staff are fully aware of the range of local Supporting People services and understand their fit with mainstream health and social care services.
- 17 Efforts must be made so that those service users who are not yet connected with the programme can be appropriately included and have access to more innovative services that encourage prevention and the promotion of independence.

Diversity

- 18 The commissioning body must ensure that the five year strategy presents a detailed picture of the areas of need that were under developed in the shadow strategy and clearly identify any additional cultural, gender or additional health and disability related needs service users may have.

Partnership working

- 19 A conflict of interest protocol must be developed to guide the work of the commissioning body and the core steering group as they make difficult decisions about future investment or disinvestment in services. There must be transparency so that internal and external providers are treated in an even handed manner.

- 20 Partner agencies need to be clear about the level of contribution they are liable for in situations of resource shortfalls and have contingencies to address this.
- 21 There must be stronger partnership working with frontline health and social care staff for those vulnerable people who continue to require ongoing care and support inputs including people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and physical disabilities.

Quality and monitoring

- 22 Performance management of the programme must be more robust. This includes putting in place processes that will deliver the following:
- ◆ Ensuring that the programme aims have measurable targets which clearly interface with the priorities and performance of partner agencies.
 - ◆ Ensuring that there is adequate capacity in the Supporting People team to formally analyse, benchmark and report performance against the Supporting People key performance areas as well as undertaking further work to ensure unit costs are reliable.
 - ◆ Ensuring that the social services directorate has a clear role and contribution to service reviews in order to provide an expert view on how well vulnerable children and/or adults are being served.
 - ◆ A sharper focus on the management of voids.
 - ◆ Aligning performance management systems between agencies letting contracts to the same provider so that there is effective benchmarking of costs, monitoring of contracts, complaints and reporting systems.
 - ◆ Providing training to and developing learning groups for frontline health and social care staff in particular so that they are clear about the implications of the cross cutting aims for them in their day to day work and so that they have clear boundaries to work to.
- 23 The work that has recently commenced on developing a Supporting People complaints procedure must be completed by the end of April 2004. This will need to be widely publicised with a clear explanation of how this fits with wider directorate, other agency and corporate complaints policies.
- 24 Service providers must receive further training about Supporting People charging arrangements as a priority and no later than the end of April 2004 so that are able to collect any sums owed.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 25 Individual support plans must be more outcome focused so as to ensure that relevant individual goals can be more easily monitored and can address the identified housing related support needs of vulnerable service users.
- 26 The council is also asked to address the other weaknesses identified in the body of this report.
- 27 We would like to thank the staff of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, particularly Sue Morris, Tracey Smith and Pat Merrick who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

- 28 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

- 29 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is located in the Black Country region of the West Midlands in England. Its neighbouring authorities are Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall. The population of the area is 305,155 who live in 128,289 households. The 2001 census identified that 7.5 per cent of the population are from black or minority ethnic community groups (all groups other than white British). The largest BME communities are the Pakistani and Indian communities with less than 1 per cent from the African Caribbean communities. There is one ward with a significantly higher BME profile whose representation is almost 25 per cent.
- 30 The population of the borough is now declining as a result of reduced birth rates and net outward migration. A total of 16.7 per cent of the population is above the age of 65 years, slightly higher than the England average of 15.9 per cent. There has been an 8 per cent increase in the older person population since 1991.
- 31 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is ranked 142nd in the country in terms of indices of multiple deprivation. There are two wards that fall within the top 10 per cent most deprived areas of the country and a further six wards fall within the worst 25 per cent. Areas of deprivation have been well mapped and have been identified as priority neighbourhood areas. Unemployment stands at 3.2 per cent (April 2003) compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. However, there are variations across the townships, and unemployment is twice the national average in one of the most deprived areas.
- 32 Residents of Dudley have the second lowest average wage levels in the West Midlands which is driving the need for more affordable housing in the area. Over 37 per cent of the population have no formal qualifications compared to a national figure of 28.9 per cent. In addition, 20 per cent of the population report that they have a long term illness, health problem or disability against an England average of 17.9 per cent.
- 33 Seventy one per cent of homes are owner occupied and 19 per cent of the housing stock falls within the council rented housing sector. The registered social landlord (RSL) sector is relatively small at 2.4 per cent and is exceeded by the private landlord sector (3.5 per cent). Dudley has continued to have higher numbers of households accepted as homeless than its regional or national comparators as shown in the data appendix attached.

The Council

- 34 The council is led by the conservative party who hold 31 of the 72 seats. The leader and all members of the executive are conservatives. There are 6 select committees in place that deliver the scrutiny function.
- 35 The council has 10,500 staff and its net revenue budget for 2003/04 is £314.6 million. The council's overall gross expenditure for the year 2003/04 has been set at £299.2 million. The social services budget amounts to £89 million and there is £57.8 million available to housing. Current estimates show a balanced budget at year end.
- 36 The Corporate Performance Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission in July 2002 resulted in the council being judged as fair.

- 37 The council's values aim to encourage social inclusion and high standards of public service and are centred in trying to build a fairer society.

Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Dudley

Management Arrangements

- 38 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (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.
 - ◆ Elected members: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
 - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 39 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority (ALA), health and area probation service. Each named representative has one vote although the ALA has a veto where it can demonstrate a financial risk to the ALA.
- 40 The Supporting People team is located in the housing directorate. The accountable officer is the assistant director of housing strategy and he line manages the team.
- 41 The Supporting People team is currently made up of the following staff all of whom are temporary posts: a team manager, two monitoring and review officers (one of whom is currently vacant), an IT lead/information officer, a part time finance officer, a project officer (currently vacant) and a part time admin assistant. The team manager post was vacant from June to November 2003.
- 42 There are three additional staff that have been seconded on a short term basis to assist with the service review development work. One of these has been seconded from the West Midlands probation service. The other two have particular experience in undertaking best value reviews and in implementing the EFQM business excellence model. The team composition has been reviewed and the commissioning body has now agreed the team structure for 2004/05 and posts will be made permanent.
- 43 The Supporting People programme falls within the portfolio of the lead member for housing and he is the council champion for the programme. Reports from the commissioning body are regularly submitted to the council's cabinet and select committee members and provide a good overview of progress and challenges.
- 44 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council received a Supporting People grant allocation of £6,517,598 in 2003/04. This level of funding is relatively low when compared per head of population with other councils in England. The council received an additional allocation of £54,287 towards the cost of new services being developed in year and £224,143 administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. Expenditure forecasts show a balanced budget in terms of the overall programme and a potential under spend of £45,000 in the administration grant (primarily due to savings made from staff vacancies) which

will be rolled forward into 2004/05. The administration grant will reduce to £202,000 in 2004/05. The Supporting People grant available for 2004/05 is £6,526,246 and this includes a total of £254,751 towards the cost of developing three new services still in the pipeline.

- 45 The efficiency savings required by the ODPM in year 1 have been achieved primarily from the windfall allocation in April 2003 coupled with a prudent approach to the management of the programme and movement of service users within subsidy contracts.
- 46 The highest cost Supporting People service in Dudley is £694.71 a week which relates to floating support provided to an adult with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.83 which relates to call alarm support provided. There are a total of 76 contracts in place that deliver 154 support services.
- 47 All ODPM milestones have been successfully met by the council. All transitional housing benefit (THB) claims were resolved by the end of May 2003.

Strategy

- 48 The ODPM required all Supporting People administering local authorities to submit a shadow strategy in the autumn of 2002. The shadow strategies were required to demonstrate a clear vision and strategic steer for the programme and to set out the map of existing housing related support provision. The ODPM assessed the council's shadow strategy as good, with a rating of excellent for its content. The council was praised for its clear and comprehensive picture of local need.
- 49 ODPM feedback to the council identified that further work was needed in terms of risk assessment and contingency planning and in the areas of service quality and review.
- 50 The Supporting People shadow strategy is comprehensive and provides detailed information on most of the Supporting People user groups. The areas where detail is relatively weak concern adults whose primary need is associated with alcohol misuse, travellers and people with sensory impairments.
- 51 The shadow strategy is clear about its future direction and aims to encourage the development of accommodation based services for young people and adults under 65 with particular needs. It also gives emphasis to improving services for homeless people, extending the range and specialist focus of floating support services and to ensuring that the new services being developed are flexible and competent in supporting people with multiple needs.
- 52 The shadow strategy has identified a large number of priorities, 9 in total, that have shaped its first year of implementation. Given its low inherited resource base, the commissioning body has tried to ensure opportunities were available for almost every service user group for whom there was little or no provision previously. This has resulted in the development of a number of small floating support schemes. The commissioning body recognises it will need to refine its approach to priority setting in the future and is now developing some decision making frameworks to assist with this.

Services

- 53 The level of provision of supported housing and floating support in Dudley is low compared to others in the region and nationally. The majority of services address the needs of older people, this accounts for 85 per cent of all provision.
- 54 There is a relatively equal spread of expenditure across the local authority, registered social landlord and independent sector providers. A significant amount of specialist provision is provided by small local charities/voluntary sector organisations.

- 55 Four small providers of residential care services for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the Supporting People programme to remodel their services to supported living arrangements. The national care standards commission was involved in the decision making related to the cancellation of registrations.

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 56 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 57 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 58 The vision for the Supporting People programme in the area is clear and is widely understood by service providers:

'Independence through inclusion, equality and support'. - Shadow strategy.

- 59 The shadow strategy outlines a number of key aims and these are underpinned by a total of 12 objectives with measurable outputs. The aims of the service can be summarised as:
- ◆ Continuous improvement and consultation.
 - ◆ Equality, access and choice.
 - ◆ Flexibility and synergy.
 - ◆ Recognition, innovation and involvement.
 - ◆ Community focus, best value and partnerships.
 - ◆ Independence and choice.
- 60 The commissioning body has not yet formally reviewed its progress or the performance of partner agencies against these aims. The aims do not have targets or specific outcomes attached to them. A number of frontline health and social care staff we met with are still unclear about the implications of these cross cutting aims for them.
- 61 The Supporting People programme is viewed as a key driver in assisting the council to modernise its housing services, and it provides positive alternatives to institutional care for a number of vulnerable people. It has enabled all the stakeholder agencies to strengthen their local capacity and assists people to safely remain in their own homes and communities for longer periods of time.
- 62 The potential of Supporting People has been recognised at a senior level. Areas of strategic overlap with wider council planning and performance improvement initiatives have been identified. For example, Supporting People has been specifically highlighted in both the council plan and the best value performance plan in terms of its strategic relevance and resource contribution.
- 63 The Supporting People shadow strategy clearly recognises the links to council and national priorities and it is well integrated into wider service aims and plans at a strategic level. There are particularly good cross agency linkages with respect to homelessness, young peoples' needs and in serving the needs of older people residing in council run sheltered accommodation. For example the leaving care forum connects the Supporting People development programme with the quality protects management action plan targets in children's services so

as to provide a wider choice of accommodation for young people and to ensure the needs of care leavers are given prominence.

- 64 There have been effective links established with the community safety strategy. The Supporting People programme has enabled additional and more focused support in a number of key areas including the housing and support needs of young offenders and support to offenders who have additional problems related to alcohol or substance misuse. It has also put in place new and enhanced support services to women and children fleeing domestic violence.
- 65 The priorities highlighted within the Supporting People programme complement and will lend the council additional capabilities to help it achieve some of its public service agreement (PSA) targets, though further work is needed to connect the two.
- 66 Health agencies in the area have more to do to understand their role and contribution to the Supporting People programme and to map out the contribution Supporting People can make to tackling health inequalities and in assisting a joint approach alongside social care agencies and Supporting People service providers in building community capacity. There are plans in place and additional resources have been targeted by the council to improve access and develop a wider range of support services for adults with mental health needs and those with learning disabilities. However, the contribution of the Supporting People programme to these plans needs to be clarified particularly in terms of preventative services and addressing the needs of those with low level housing related support requirements.
- 67 The aims and key issues underpinning the development of the Supporting People programme have been discussed at the private sector landlord's forum. The council recognises it needs to enhance existing networks so as to build on partnership working and joint approaches in the delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- 68 There was limited involvement of users and carers in the development of the shadow strategy. Senior managers are aware that there is more they can do to consult with Supporting People service users and ensure that they own and can contribute to the aims and strategic direction of the programme. The commissioning body intends to create stronger links with existing service user fora/advisory groups in order to encourage regular feedback about the programme and capture service users' ideas to inform the future shape of services.
- 69 The council is making steady progress in developing its five year strategy. Consultation to inform the five year strategy began in July 2003 when the council held a workshop with a wide range of stakeholders to challenge how well needs were being met and to identify key gaps in services. The commissioning body is currently in the process of reviewing its initial aims and objectives and intends to set specific targets and outcomes against which progress can be measured and monitored.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 70 Having considered the aims that the council has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it set out to do. The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ Commissioning services to meet local needs.
 - ◆ User involvement.
 - ◆ Diversity.
 - ◆ Partnership working.

- ◆ Quality and monitoring.
- ◆ Outcomes for service users and carers.

Commissioning services to meet local needs

- 71 There was close scrutiny of transitional housing benefit (THB) claims to ensure compliance with grant conditions. The commissioning body in conjunction with the housing benefits service has operated a tight definition of who might be eligible for housing related support. It took the decision that the funding underpinning Supporting People services should complement mainstream services but should not be integrated or pooled with existing packages of care. This in part may explain the low level of take up for some adults with learning disabilities or physical disabilities compared to other councils.
- 72 This policy now needs to be reviewed so that there is a clearer picture of the sorts of circumstances that may benefit from a pooled approach to funding support costs. This in particular relates to those vulnerable people who require both low level housing related support coupled with specialist support/care inputs to maintain their place in the community. There are a small number of people whose supported accommodation unit costs need to be reviewed to ensure compliance with the Supporting People programme eligibility criteria, and in some circumstances social care funds will need to replace some of the existing Supporting People grant contribution.
- 73 Some frontline social care assessment staff reported they were challenged in terms of the time estimates they calculated were necessary to provide the support their clients needed in undertaking shopping or other related household management activities. In some cases they reported that their estimates were reduced and had some concerns about this.

'Dudley has been modest in its service development and appropriation of Supporting People funds. Its approach has been achievable and deliverable'. – A voluntary sector provider.

- 74 The key commissioning issues relating to each service user group and the progress being made in each area is highlighted below:

Older People

- 75 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council has a low supply of supported accommodation for older people with a range of needs compared to the typical ODPM supply profiles. However, it has significantly higher numbers of older people served by floating support services. The council has reconfigured its directly managed sheltered accommodation for older people through its housing with care initiatives so as to have the capacity and flexibility to respond to people with higher levels of need. There are 11 housing with care schemes that provide extra care support to 333 older people. In addition general support is provided to 854 older people living in sheltered housing.
- 76 A total of 2,780 people are linked to the Homecall centre and there is capacity to further increase this. The home improvement agency provides assistance with home safety and home repairs to 300 private sector households per annum. The growing number of ageing BME community members has led to the development of one new scheme that will offer culturally specific support to elders from the African Caribbean community. There is little consideration as yet given to how the Supporting People programme can assist older people with mental health problems and there is a limited focus on the specific needs of older people with sensory impairments.

Homelessness

- 77 Comparison with ODPM supply data shows the availability of supported accommodation for single homeless people to be in the mid range with slightly

higher levels of floating support available compared to the supply profile. However, there are some factors that demonstrate significant under provision in terms of local demand. Data collected by the council shows that homelessness acceptances have increased by 173 per cent over the last 5 years. Households with children are the largest group in need, but the number of single homeless people is increasing. A particular gap has been identified in terms of emergency access.

- 78 The council has block purchased a bed space for emergency use in two local hostels one of which can be accessed by vulnerable young women. Funding has also been secured for a night stop scheme in order to improve the response to those in crisis. The housing department is currently working to develop two furnished flats for use as emergency accommodation as alternatives to hostel provision and is beginning to build a range of move on accommodation to prevent people from having prolonged stays in hostel accommodation.

Young People

- 79 There is evidence gathered from a number of sources that shows a severe shortage of appropriate housing for vulnerable young people in the area. The council is now working to amend existing allocations to enable young people to access a wider range of property. In addition, it is in the early stages of planning a Foyer scheme in the area. Comparison with ODPM supply profiles shows that Dudley falls within the mid range for both floating support and supported accommodation for young people at risk and for those leaving care.
- 80 The council has recognised its corporate parenting responsibilities and 6 flats have recently been commissioned to provide long term accommodation for care leavers with a 50 per cent reduction in rent charges. The number of dedicated properties for care leavers has been reviewed against current levels of demand and the supply appears appropriate to need at this point in time. Housing and social services staff are also in the process of developing an assessment and emergency accommodation centre for young people who are homeless and who may fall within the 'children in need' criteria.
- 81 The young person's housing strategy group identifies that at least 130 young people known to the youth offending team have unmet housing needs and lack appropriate move on accommodation. Supported housing has been developed for 12 young people known to the youth offending team who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- 82 In addition the council has commissioned 15 units of floating support for teenage parents and their children and will develop a specialist supported accommodation scheme for teenage parents during 2004/05. Prior to the Supporting People programme there were no dedicated services for teenage parents. This had been identified as a critical area for development given the relatively high numbers of young parents in the area.
- 83 There is some research now being undertaken on the numbers and needs of young people who have to leave the borough due to difficulties in accessing supported accommodation in the area.

People with learning disabilities

- 84 There has been a comprehensive analysis of need undertaken by the council and its partners which has identified significant unmet need for people with learning disabilities including those who continue to be cared for by their elderly parents. The housing and support strategy and action plan for adults with learning disabilities indicates that there are significant pressures, and reports that given financial constraints placements have been limited to mainly emergency and crisis demand.
- 85 High numbers of people still reside in residential care services and comparison with ODPM supply profiles shows very low availability of supported

accommodation locally. The council and PCTs have identified that there are 48 people with complex needs still living in hospital that will need to be supported in appropriate community based settings. It is also now mapping the level of need related to people with Asberger's syndrome. The Supporting People programme has enabled an additional 49 units of supported accommodation places for adults with learning disabilities and 23 service users benefit from floating support services.

People with mental health needs

- 86 The level of supported accommodation available to adults with mental health needs is low when compared to ODPM supply profiles with higher numbers of people benefiting from floating support services. There is a clear need to develop a range of supported housing to people of all ages to provide a reliable alternative locally to admission to hospital care. The Supporting People programme has provided an additional 43 supported accommodation places and an additional 75 people benefit from floating support schemes. A new scheme is currently being developed to address the needs of Asian men with mental health problems.

People with a Physical Disability or Sensory impairment

- 87 Comparison with the ODPM supply profile shows very low levels of supported accommodation for people with physical or sensory disabilities, a significant proportion of which is in sheltered housing for older people, and access to floating support falls in the mid range. New support services have been targeted to assist 14 people with acquired brain injuries. The specific needs of adults with hearing and/or visual impairments is an area that requires further research. The social services business and commissioning plan for 2004/05 aims to get a better picture of need in this area.

Offenders

- 88 Comparison with ODPM supply profiles shows a very low level of both supported accommodation and floating support provision. The shadow strategy identifies that offenders or people who are at risk of offending are amongst the most under provided for groups in the area. A need has been identified for more appropriate direct access accommodation linked to floating support within the borough.
- 89 A number of key accommodation services have historically been located in neighbouring councils in the West Midlands with a low level of provision in the Dudley council area. Cross authority implications are currently being mapped and there is a particular focus on the needs of high risk offenders. Work is ongoing to identify the needs of ex offenders and to ensure better access to local housing and support for prison leavers who wish to return to the area including those who have served less than a 12 month prison sentence.

People who misuse drugs or alcohol

- 90 There is currently no specific supported accommodation for people whose primary need relates to alcohol misuse. The shadow strategy identifies a 'pressing need' to develop supported accommodation for people who misuse alcohol. Comparison with ODPM supply profiles shows higher numbers of people with alcohol related needs accessing floating support services. There is a low level of supported accommodation for people with drugs related problems and a higher number benefit from floating support services compared to ODPM supply profiles. There are three hostel schemes that provide support to a range of vulnerable people and which partially address the needs of those who misuse substances.

Refugees

- 91 The shadow strategy identifies the need to develop floating support services for refugees to assist with their inclusion in everyday community life in the area. A small scheme has been developed over the past year to address this need.

Women fleeing domestic violence

- 92 Comparison with ODPM supply profiles shows a low level of both supported accommodation and floating support services for women fleeing domestic violence. There is a particular requirement for larger units of supported living and move on accommodation for women with larger families and to develop support arrangements that can accommodate families with older male children. There are three refuges in the area one of which is a small home (out of borough) catering for the needs of Asian women. There is a small four bedded supported accommodation scheme under development for African Caribbean women.

People with HIV/AIDS

- 93 There is currently no dedicated supported accommodation available for this service user group and there is limited access to specialist floating support. The council and its partners recognise that further research is needed to better understand the needs of this service user group and how support may be most appropriately provided.

Travellers and Romani gypsies

- 94 There is limited information in the shadow strategy on need and likely levels of demand and further work is due to be undertaken to establish the need for support.
- 95 The commissioning body currently funds a number of generic support services. The council and its partners will need to have a clearer understanding of the areas of need addressed and the levels of expertise of these providers in dealing with people with multiple problems in order to establish the extent of service effectiveness and any ongoing gaps.
- 96 A number of providers we spoke to indicated that the Supporting People programme has enabled the provision of more flexible services. For example, the restructuring of the council's warden services and close joint working with frontline health and social care staff has enabled the housing with care schemes to provide higher levels of support in response to increasing need. In addition it has strengthened the focus on prevention services. The capacity of wardens in each area has been closely monitored and support is now provided to an additional 64 people living in council property close to the housing schemes within existing resources. There is now little capacity to develop this further without additional investment. However, there may be opportunities for closer collaboration with the tenancy sustainment teams or other floating support providers in particular areas.
- 97 The commissioning body and the Supporting People team have been effective in getting smaller and specialist providers engaged with the programme. The Supporting People grant has enabled a number of these small providers to employ additional staff and therefore they are now more able to offer regular and/or more intensive support as required. In some cases this has enabled voluntary sector providers to direct their charitable funds to other priority areas such as providing accommodation appropriate to the needs of disabled service users.

'It has ensured our survival and continued success'. - A small provider.

- 98 There is a growing need to develop some 'half way' services between supported accommodation and floating support to enable people to have access to tailored support as they increase their independence and move through services. For

example there is lack of staged support for people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction who are currently moving from 24 hour support to a few hours per week which may not be enough.

- 99 Some gaps currently exist in terms of out of hours support services for some service users. In particular we were made aware of the need to review the availability of support services in the evenings and weekends for some service users where risk is highest 'out of hours'. The Supporting People programme funds support to young offenders living in the supported housing scheme during office hours Monday to Friday. Back up support from the sessional workers attached to the youth offending team is seen to be difficult to access in some cases and is not consistent. In addition we were made aware of limited access to warden support out of hours in one RSL scheme. These are areas that need to be reviewed and the potential for shared approaches across providers is an area for further exploration.
- 100 One pipeline supported accommodation scheme was originally intended to support people with mental health needs with higher levels of need. This scheme had to be re-configured to include those with lower levels of need due to a funding gap of £37,000. The council appealed to the ODPM but were unsuccessful. This decision occurred late in the commissioning and service development process when the council was about to select to the scheme. Staffing had to be reduced in line with available funds and out of hours support is now limited to telephone contact with the support provider's out of borough office coupled with care support from the mental health crisis team based at the local hospital. This new scheme will need to be closely monitored so that the people placed have the level of support they need to sustain their tenancies and to ensure that out of hours support is appropriate and effective.
- 101 A clearer picture is needed locally of the levels of need and the drivers for cross authority movement of vulnerable people and the appropriateness of provision then accessed. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to enter joint commissioning arrangements with neighbouring authorities for specific services for those for whom developing local services would not be cost effective.

User involvement and access to services

Consultation

- 102 Consultation on the development of the shadow strategy took place via the inclusive forum and was linked to a number of other complementary strategic planning groups such as the supported housing forum, younger person's housing strategy and the homelessness strategy. There were sub groups established to look at the particular needs of each user group but the level of user and carer involvement was limited. Whilst providers were generally satisfied about their opportunities for involvement a number reported that their service users were not invited to attend events or otherwise contribute to the process.
- 103 Members of the commissioning body recognise that further work is needed to build effective consultation and feedback systems that keep service users, carers and voluntary organisations up to date with Supporting People developments and which support their contribution to the future direction of the programme.
- 104 The Supporting People service delivery plan aims to put in place a communications strategy that will encourage engagement with and wider awareness of the programme. The new post of service development and consultation officer will add capacity in this area.
- 105 Most providers reported that service users now have a stronger say and are able to exercise choice in the way services are delivered. Some providers have worked hard to ensure service users are actively engaged in the running of their own services. For example one floating support scheme for adults with physical disabilities is overseen by a steering group which includes three service users. Some service users have been actively involved in developing and reviewing

their own support plans whereas previously this was taken out of their hands. There was evidence from a number of providers that they regularly consult with service users and act on the feedback and issues highlighted. A number of providers reported they undertake at least annual surveys of customer satisfaction.

- 106 The council is working to promote user involvement within its sheltered housing service. Quarterly tenants' forums are held in the housing with care schemes. These are chaired by the co-ordinators and serve to encourage feedback and drive improvements in services. Progress against areas for improvement is monitored. There is also an annual borough wide consultation event for tenants.
- 107 One provider we met has an innovative approach to helping learning disabled service users to be aware of and contribute to the development of key agency policies and procedures relating to the protection of vulnerable people. This involved a trainer engaging the service users in role plays so that there was a better understanding of risk and they were able to give feedback on what works and share their understanding of the issues. This has resulted in people feeling more aware and able to identify and report abuse. The organisation is now looking to make the harassment policy meaningful in a similar way.

Information about Supporting People

- 108 The Supporting People team has provided a range of information for service providers through regular meetings, workshops and newsletters. Providers are kept up to date through regular e mail briefings and through attendance at the provider's forum. A web page has been developed as a general information point and is currently being incorporated into the council's web site.
- 109 A start has been made on developing a customer service plan that incorporates an easy to follow complaints procedure. This will need to be widely publicised with a clear explanation of how this fits with wider directorate, other agency and corporate complaints policies.
- 110 There is a short general information leaflet that provides some answers to frequently asked questions about the Supporting People programme. It makes clear the sorts of support that are eligible as well as identifying those areas that are outside the remit of the programme. It includes details of the council's role in quality assuring services and advises service users that they have a key role to play in contributing their ideas about how services can be improved. This information sheet also indicates that information can be provided in a range of community languages and formats on request.
- 111 Some providers have developed their own information leaflets to make sure their service users understand the separation of their rent from their support costs and the kinds of support the Supporting People programme offers them. There are regular newsletters for tenants in the council's sheltered housing schemes. Information sheets have been prepared to help offenders be aware of the range of services that are available to address their needs and include issues relating to housing benefit and eligibility for tenancies.
- 112 The council has recently developed a new information leaflet concerning the needs of young people and homelessness. This was considered to be very useful by support agencies working with young people at risk.
- 113 Mystery shopping visits were made to three housing offices. All offices had Supporting People information leaflets readily available and although the staff spoken to had limited knowledge of the Supporting People programme all were able to give a basic outline of the services available and where to go for help.
- 114 In addition, the telephone mystery shopping undertaken with a range of organisations responsible for the first point of contact with the council revealed good attention to customer care with appropriate signposting to people/services who could help in all cases.

Access to Services

- 115 Improving access for customers is one of the council's top improvement priorities and it is working to develop single points of contact across the borough. The first such community customer access point will be operational later in the year and aims to address queries relating to the full range of council services.
- 116 The council and its partners on the commissioning body has recognised that there was an uneven spread of provision for some user groups and has used the opportunities afforded by new pipeline services to develop better local access. The council has also identified other people such as those with gambling addictions that may be at risk of becoming homeless and have linked them into floating support schemes.
- 117 There is an ongoing need to ensure that all service providers and newly appointed staff are clear about who can receive Supporting People services and the range of services available in the local area. Telephone contact with one independent sector support provider revealed that they were unclear about other Supporting People specialist provision in the borough and that they had only recently found out about the council's tenancy sustainment scheme.
- 118 Another provider manager we spoke to was under the impression that Supporting People services could only be accessed by council tenants receiving housing benefit. This may be an isolated example but there is a need to ensure that all providers and frontline staff are clear about access and that newly appointed staff have been fully informed about eligibility for services. The council has taken this issue on board and will ensure that eligibility criteria are widely communicated to prevent such confusion in the future. In addition, the Supporting People team is currently producing a revised 'services list' which will be issued to all stakeholders at the beginning of April.
- 119 The single point of contact in the housing directorate for referrals with particular letting needs such as sex offenders and young parents is working well and offers are generally made within 2-3 weeks.
- 120 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is taking positive steps to ensure its sheltered housing schemes are available to the wider community. Some vulnerable clients outside the scheme now receive support via patch visits and are encouraged to attend activities within the sheltered housing schemes so as to extend their social contacts and support networks.
- 121 There is an effective and confidential referral path from health for people who have HIV or AIDS and social workers are advised during training of the support services available including the Supporting People funded floating support service.

Diversity

- 122 There is evidence from those we spoke to within the council of a strong commitment to understanding and promoting diversity in day to day operations and this approach is embedded in a number of policies, strategies and action plans.
- 123 The commissioning body has been keen from the outset of the Supporting People programme to engage with its hard to reach user groups. The shadow strategy has a strongly stated aim that seeks to ensure that the Supporting People programme in Dudley includes people who are at risk of being marginalised as a central strand of its development work.
- 124 There is growing recognition of the need for 'cultural competence' as a more sophisticated approach to managing diversity and the need to balance culturally or ethnically specific provision with mainstream provision that is culturally sensitive. The council is improving its understanding of the level of take up of services by local BME community members and is targeting its response to

address areas where people are under served by existing provision relative to their needs.

- 125 The council has recognised the relatively low levels of take up of existing sheltered housing by BME community members and is committed to doing more research to identify true demand levels and to develop services that are targeted to their culturally specific needs. It will be hosting open days to encourage older members of BME communities to know more about and consider sheltered housing as a future option. This approach needs to be taken forward by all providers to ensure they are effectively engaging with and encouraging equal access and take up of services.
- 126 In some cases, services have been developed to specifically address peoples' ethnic and cultural needs. For example, the council has developed strong links with the African Caribbean befriending society and a registered social landlord with a specific focus on meeting the needs of BME communities. This has resulted in the development of a new supported housing scheme with community facilities for predominantly frail BME elders.
- 127 Women from BME communities fleeing domestic violence have valued the flexibility and options available to them in terms of access to refuges. Some Moslem women have preferred to use predominantly 'white' refuges. There remain some key service gaps in addressing the housing related support needs of adults with mental health problems or learning disabilities who come from BME communities. Further work is needed to identify the cultural and ethnicity requirements of offenders from BME communities.
- 128 The homelessness strategy identifies the growing risks of homelessness for some members of BME communities.
- 129 The draft black and minority ethnic housing strategy identifies the key issues for BME community members in terms of meeting decent housing standards. Whilst the level of private sector unfitness in Dudley is well below the regional average, the level of unfitness experienced by black and minority ethnic communities is twice that of the population as a whole within the borough. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council has now entered a partnership with a regional agency to provide loans to low income families for repair and maintenance of their properties. The council currently monitors the level of take up of grants by level of BME representation.
- 130 The Supporting People team aims to put in place a Supporting People BME strategy as soon as capacity allows and this will form part of the service and improvement plan for 2004/05.
- 131 The council aims to increase the availability of community based services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, but it is not yet clear how the Supporting People programme can assist with this. A similar piece of research needs to be undertaken for people who are blind or partially sighted.
- 132 There has been limited consideration given to the need for and appropriateness of gender specific services in terms of needs analysis or future commissioning. There are no mental health gender specific services.
- 133 Effective support has been provided to people in the area with HIV/AIDS though demand is almost double the capacity of the organisation to respond in terms of the level of funding it receives.
- 134 There are no specific Supporting People funded services for travellers. The council recognises that further research is needed. Earlier consultation with the traveller community identified the need to improve their housing environment and this has now been attended to.
- 135 The housing directorate has developed its own interpreting service based on the ability of its workforce to converse in the local community languages. A number

of employees have volunteered to provide interpreting services in a range of languages including Urdu, Mirpuri, Punjabi, Gujarati and British Sign Language. A local college has given accreditation to the registered interpreters. This is in addition to being able to access the language line. Most public information leaflets carry the strap line to show that information is also available in a range of community languages and formats.

- 136 In addition, interpreting and translation services are provided by a team of staff located in the race equality and communications unit in social services and are available to the wider council. External agencies are additionally used as necessary to handle high demand. Minicom services are available for those who are hard of hearing. There is an agreement in place with a local voluntary agency to enable documents to be provided in Braille or on audio tape.
- 137 The council has established a council wide disabled workers and black workers advisory group in order to encourage and support diversity in the workplace. The social services directorate has had a black workers group in place for a number of years. The council is at an early stage in developing targets for the number of BME and disabled staff it employs.
- 138 The council has carried out an audit of all its buildings to check compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and has action plans in place to deal with environments that are currently non compliant.

Partnership working

Commissioning Body

- 139 The commissioning body has met regularly since it was established in April 2002 and all the key stakeholders are engaged, with senior managers present from all agencies. During the period the Supporting People team manager post was vacant the commissioning body took on the role and some of the responsibilities previously handled by the core strategy development group. The commissioning body is chaired by the director of finance. Other standing members include the director of housing, assistant director housing strategy (accountable officer), the director of social services, the assistant chief probation officer and the head of partnership and regeneration representing the PCTs.
- 140 Terms of reference and a memorandum of understanding has been agreed. However, there are some areas that require further clarification so that partner agencies are fully aware of the extent of risk to them and have contingencies to address their commitments. These include:
- ◆ 'Agreeing to provide resources reasonably required by the commissioning body'. Dealing with situations 'where the commissioning body may make some local policy changes which deviate from ODPM assumptions about levels of income, that may then result in any subsequent shortfall in the Supporting People budget having to be met from partner's funds'.
 - ◆ As well as dealing with exceptional circumstances where there is an agreement to over commit the budget leading to all partners being liable to share the costs and any associated financial risks on an agreed basis. A conflict of interest protocol needs to be developed to guide these difficult decisions.

Core Steering Group

- 141 The core steering group is made up of managers from the relevant partner agencies and includes representation from the local strategic registered social landlord forum and the council as a direct provider. The purpose and remit of the core group has been reviewed and the group has recently been re-formed (it had lapsed during the period the team manager post was vacant). There are plans under consideration to extend its membership further and to ensure that user and carer views are linked into future decision making. Monthly meetings have now been scheduled. It has new terms of reference that more appropriately reflect the

transition to the new phase of the Supporting People programme with an emphasis on performance management and service review.

- 142 Further development work is needed to ensure that group members are clear about their roles and responsibilities and to make sure that the group has the necessary capacity to deliver to its new terms of reference.
- 143 Members of the group have been required to declare any conflicts of interest. The group has yet to work out how this will be managed in practice.

Inclusive Forum

- 144 The inclusive forum meets twice yearly. Some providers did not feel the inclusive forum was working as effectively as it could. Terms of reference are now being drawn up to clarify its focus and enable better partnership working.
- 145 Further work is needed to build effective consultation and feedback with user, carer and voluntary organisations on shaping the future direction of the Supporting People programme and in understanding how it fits with other wider local service developments, best value action plans and partnership board agendas.

Provider Forum

- 146 The provider forum meets on a quarterly basis. However, attendance by providers is relatively low with only about 10 per cent of potential providers attending.
- 147 A couple of small independent sector providers we spoke to were yet adequately engaged in the Supporting People programme. One said they were unaware of the provider forum and another specialist provider who is not yet delivering Supporting People services but is keen to do so is confused about what this may entail. Another small provider we spoke to was completely unaware of the quality assessment framework requirements and did not know they should have been developing individual support plans alongside their service users. The Supporting People team has quickly acted following this concern being raised with them and a meeting has now been scheduled to share learning about what is required.
- 148 The providers list is currently being updated and the Supporting People team will check that all providers are being properly communicated with.

The Supporting People team

- 149 The work and commitment of the Supporting People team is valued by most service providers. Team members have shown themselves to be flexible and willing to help with any problem as borne out in the comments highlighted below:

'I cannot praise enough the efforts of the Supporting People team in Dudley. They have always been at the end of a phone or available for a visit to assist us in understanding all there is to know about Supporting People.' - **Small voluntary sector provider.**

'Staff in the Supporting People team have been very helpful to providers and have made every effort to engage them in the process.' - **Large local provider.**

'The Supporting People team is absolutely wonderful. They hold your hand through everything.' - **A number of providers.**

- 150 A number of providers highlighted that communication with the administering authority had been difficult during the time the Supporting People team manager post was vacant, but that there was now regular contact and that the new team manager was quickly addressing the areas that had not been able to be dealt with previously.
- 151 The Supporting People team needs to establish stronger networks and ongoing feedback with voluntary organisations and charities that often hold good

information about levels of need and gaps in services that may not come to light through other means. There is the potential to link with and further build on the strong networks that currently exist between the voluntary sector and the social services directorate.

Cross Authority issues

- 152 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is a member of and now chairs the Black Country cross authority working group. The council is also a member of the West Midlands strategic planning group and is at the early stages in developing a way forward for the regional Supporting People strategy. The council is active in a number of other regional groups that focus on IT development and addressing the needs of particular user groups. The Supporting People team is currently working with the West Midlands contracts group on accreditation and the pass porting of providers.
- 153 There is not much evidence yet of outcomes from cross authority working in terms of a shared approach to meeting needs, joint commissioning, agreements regarding the provision of move on accommodation or the sharing of expertise across council areas.

Other partnerships

- 154 The Dudley young peoples' housing forum has brought together the views of different stakeholders working with vulnerable young people and has helped to drive service developments including the provision of additional crisis accommodation and ensuring move on accommodation from local hostels.
- 155 The probation service has a positive relationship with its local authority partners through the crime and disorder partnership. There is effective inter agency working between housing and probation services to enable successful resettlement of offenders. A pre and post care for prison leavers group has been formed to ensure close collaboration between prison and community based probation and housing staff in meeting need. The probation services has been working closely with local drugs services to build a range of opportunities that both complement the Supporting People programme and make best use of other funding streams.
- 156 The learning disability housing and support strategy group is developing closer links with the housing directorate and the Supporting People team, though it is not yet clear how future joint approaches will be achieved. The council and its health partners are keen to explore the further development of complementary multi agency services which may be more appropriate than simply pooling of budgets.
- 157 There are good links between the council and the Housing Corporation in developing capital projects. Plans are reported to be well thought through on presentation. There is evidence of good joint working between women's refuges and the social services child care staff.
- 158 We met some frontline mental health staff who do not yet understand how the Supporting People programme fits within the overall context of their work. They are unsure about what Supporting People services entail and are confused about the boundaries and accountabilities between low level housing support and the other needs a person may have. Introductory Supporting People awareness raising sessions have been provided for primary care trust board, professional executive committee members and GPs. Similar awareness raising sessions now need to be promoted amongst front line staff alongside opportunities to reflect on practice.
- 159 There is regular consultation with the registered social landlords active in the borough through the Dudley housing partnership. A sub group was formed to consider special needs issues and to inform the council's Supporting People strategy.

- 160 The council is actively involved in the West Midlands BME housing network. Issues highlighted have helped inform the BME housing strategy and collaboration with others has assisted in the development of culturally sensitive services.
- 161 The housing with care schemes provide positive examples of joint working that have led to a strong focus on prevention and the promotion of independence as evidenced in the following case study:

Service User Group: Older People with Support Needs and Frail Elderly

Type of Service: There are 11 housing with care schemes that provide support to people with low, medium and high support needs. Tenants range in age from 62 to 105 years. Admissions to the accommodation is managed on an inter agency basis to ensure that at any time there is an appropriate balance of need and that this is sustainable within available resources. Referrals are received from social services, health and the police. The core aims of the service are to promote safety and encourage personal independence

Key Players and Processes; The key players include the scheme co-ordinator and individual wardens, home carers and social work staff, a range of health professionals and the police. There are regular meetings held and this has led to increased collaboration and team working, and a joint approach to assessment and service provision. There is flexibility in the way services are delivered so as to accommodate to changing needs. Individual support plans are in place for each tenant and incorporate both care and support, and are reviewed regularly

Added Value; The council's housing with care initiative coupled with complementary projects such as good health campaigns (largely funded by local health services) and the security and care scheme enable a holistic approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable older people. In some schemes a community nurse runs monthly well being sessions and there are exercise classes each week to encourage mobility.

Housing revenue account resources have been used to create stronger links with local health agencies and to address hospital discharge needs. There is a borough wide handy person who works with Age Concern locally on personal safety and accident prevention and undertakes tasks to make homes safer for older people. The Supporting People funding that underpins the housing with care schemes is seen to have been a key component in modernising services and supporting effective partnership working. It now means that many more people can live independently in their homes.

Outcomes for service users

'It's the best of both worlds - we have housing and social care in one place'. - Scheme manager.

Quality and monitoring

Contracts and Payments

- 162 There were 39 subsidy contracts outstanding on 31 May 2003, but these have all now been approved.
- 163 All providers who responded to our questionnaire were pleased with the method of payments and level of accuracy achieved, and high standards have been maintained even when the team had staffing shortages.

'This has been the best Supporting People team out of 7 that I have dealt with.'
Independent Sector provider.

- 164 The Supporting People subsidy contract and the service level agreement with internal providers clearly lays out the risk that the annual Supporting People grant from central government may fluctuate and advises providers they will need to

achieve savings in line with any reduction in the grant. The contract notes that this will be achieved through a service review or at any other time following the issuance of not less than two months notice in writing. Some providers reported to us that they had concerns about this, but were advised that they needed to sign the contract, otherwise their payments could be jeopardised.

- 165 The commissioning body has been made aware of a small number of providers who do not have the capacity within existing financial allocations to meet increased need or demand. They have been allocated additional financial support on a time limited basis from in year slippage to address identified resource shortfalls. Providers were required to provide evidence of spend and outcomes achieved. The commissioning body will have to develop contingency plans to address any ongoing resource shortfalls and vary contracts in the light of these changes.

Charging

- 166 A fairer charging policy has been recently introduced and all new and legacy funded Supporting People service users are offered benefits maximisation advice as part of their financial assessment. Information about charging and appeals has been provided to the provider and inclusive forums and then in turn cascaded to service users. However, a number of providers reported they remain confused about the charging policy and only one independent sector provider has yet implemented the policy and is currently recovering the sums due. It is important that service providers receive further training about charges as a priority so that are able to collect the sums owed.
- 167 The commissioning body will need to consider the approach to be taken in situations where arrears may arise that may place at risk the viability of some smaller providers.
- 168 A proportion of the Supporting People administration grant is currently being directed to those Welfare Benefits officers who deal with the Supporting People charging arrangements. This is currently being monitored given the low number of charges currently being processed.

Service Review Programme

- 169 The service review timetable is based on risk assessing services and the Supporting People team operate a scoring mechanism to prioritise services for early review. This includes those services that are higher cost and where there may be concerns to vulnerable people. However, there has been insufficient staffing within the Supporting People team to meet the demands of the review timetable and this has led to slippage against the original programme which was scheduled to begin in July 2003. A further review of the timetable is now taking place with the aim of getting the review programme back on track by June 2004. The approach taken in managing service reviews fits with ODPM guidance. The council aims to carry out on site reviews of all its providers.
- 170 Two principal housing officers have been seconded to the team to provide additional capacity (initially for three months), as well as a secondee from probation who has contributed essential expertise in reviewing services for ex-offenders. Two further staff have been seconded in for 30 hours per week each to look at the monitoring processes and to prepare the documentation for reviews.
- 171 However, there are still some areas that require specialist input from front line social work or health staff given the complexity of peoples' needs. This in particular relates to services that support parents and their children or services to adults with learning disabilities, mental health needs or physical disabilities. The social services directorate and local health agencies need to map their contribution and ensure capacity is in place to provide an expert view on how well needs are being served.

- 172 To date, there has been only limited progress on completing service reviews. At the time of our inspection, the review team has completed a validation visit to one small specialist supported accommodation provider that was selected for early review because of its perceived high costs. Another specialist floating support provider was in the process of being reviewed because of its relatively high costs and focus. Initially this scheme was established to address service users with high needs, but in fact was supporting people with lower level needs given lack of referral for its original target user group.
- 173 Feedback on the reviews has been provided to both the commissioning body and the core steering group and the skill gap in terms of the review team's current understanding of value for money has been recognised. There is more to do to benchmark costs and the quality of provision with others delivering a similar offering.
- 174 The service review framework needs further development so as to include feedback from front line staff and to ensure others involved in supporting and monitoring vulnerable people have the opportunity to feed into the process. For example front line mental health staff report that there are wide variations in the quality and availability of floating support services.
- 175 The commissioning body is currently working to put in place a representation procedure to deal with situations where providers seek to challenge review findings or decisions to re-configure or close a service.
- 176 Two providers about whom there were some initial concerns have now withdrawn from the market and alternative arrangements have been put in place for those service users affected. Joint investigations have taken place with social services in situations where there have been concerns about the welfare of vulnerable people. This approach now needs to be firmed up so that is a clear protocol in place that specifies the role to be taken by the Supporting People team alongside other regulators and frontline staff in such investigations.

Performance Management

- 177 The council as a whole has been working hard to strengthen its approaches to performance management. There are business, implementation, annual and service delivery plans in place to support the work of each directorate and service area.
- 178 Further work is needed to develop local and cross cutting performance indicators that formally integrate the contribution of the Supporting People programme with partner agency activity and which allow measurement of the contribution of the programme to bigger corporate aims such as the public service agreement targets.
- 179 In addition, there needs to be a well aligned performance management system in place between agencies letting contracts to the same providers so that there is effective benchmarking of costs, monitoring of contracts, complaints and reporting systems. There is potential for more efficiency to be gained from a joined up approach to performance management.
- 180 All providers are now completing their quarterly performance returns. However, there has not been the capacity up to now within the team to formally analyse, benchmark and report performance against these key performance areas. A number of providers told us that the quarterly performance monitoring has helped them to be more conscious about what they are doing and to be more accountable to the people they support. Adherence to the quality assessment framework is assisting them in building a consistent approach to the application of policies and standards and has resulted in organisations concentrating more on their communication with staff, their development and morale.
- 181 The commissioning body will need to receive regular reports so as to understand the movement of people through services and ensure there is timely access to

appropriate move on accommodation so that the whole system works together at the pace of the individual. There is some evidence to show that time delays in being able to access family sized move on accommodation are becoming longer particularly for women fleeing domestic violence where the location of the house is often a critical factor in their move to greater independence.

- 182 The commissioning body also needs to look closely at void levels in particular for schemes which are currently carrying a high level of voids. From data provided by the council there are some schemes that currently have void levels in excess of 25 per cent. The council needs to have a better understanding of why this is the case and ensure services are well publicised, and that areas of potential over supply are reviewed.
- 183 The commissioning body has sought to target a significant element of its resources to floating support services. It will need to ensure these services are effective and have the capacity to assist people to greater independence in order to continue to stretch the availability of services. One scheme provides different levels of support to people with high, medium and low mental health needs. The effectiveness of this scheme needs to be reviewed and the outcomes and costs benchmarked against the performance of other providers in the area that also offer support to people with mental health needs.
- 184 The commissioning body has been working to get a complaints management process in place that connects with the existing social services and housing directorate's complaints processes. The complaints system now needs to be finalised and priority should be given to advising frontline staff, service users and providers of its existence. The commissioning body has directed that it receives a quarterly performance report on complaints.
- 185 Some providers reported that the process for alerting the council when people's needs fell outside the Supporting People eligibility criteria and they required more intensive support was unclear. There are no jointly funded packages of support, and even the highest support packages are fully funded by the Supporting People grant. There leads to some confusion amongst frontline staff about the boundaries and accountabilities of the Supporting People provided services and those provided by statutory agencies. Providers and frontline assessment staff need clearer direction so that they are aware of their roles and monitoring obligations as individual agencies and jointly.
- 186 The commissioning body must make sure that protocols are developed that assist decision making related to the nature and duration of crises and the appropriateness and capability of Supporting People services to respond. For example, we identified one situation where the weekly costs of supported accommodation initially totalled £250 per week. This person was then transferred to a new Supporting People provider at a cost of £650 per week. This situation should have triggered a re-assessment and consideration as to whether some of the costs should more appropriately be funded from mainstream social care budgets. We were left with a sense that this response was compounded by the limited supply of supported housing for adults with learning disabilities within mainstream health and social care services.
- 187 The new team manager has comprehensively reviewed current operations and is working to strengthen performance management systems. The Supporting People team will adopt the national housing federation framework of performance indicators and will use the housemark benchmarking service. She has built on and strengthened the Supporting People service delivery plan. Procedure guides and service manuals have been developed for most aspects of financial administration. However, there is no system yet in place to promote positive practice and to share learning so as to ensure continuous improvement.

Risk and Contingency Planning

- 188 The council as a whole is working to strengthen its approach to risk management and there are inter directorate working groups that aim to identify risk and ensure adequate safeguards are in place.
- 189 Risk and contingency planning concerning the Supporting People programme has recently been reviewed and reflects the transition to the new phase of implementation. A comprehensive risk management matrix now exists that covers in detail issues relating to contracting, charging, governance, service reviews, HR, finance and IT. Risks have been graded in terms of their impact and key actions have been identified to appropriately manage risk in most cases. This is linked to the council's emergency plan and with social services protocols for handling risks to vulnerable people.
- 190 There is regular financial monitoring undertaken with reports being provided to every commissioning body meeting. Up to now, the focus has primarily been on the bottom line ensuring spend within the overall grant allocation. This has enabled under spends to be responsively targeted to providers who have difficulties in managing within available resources. However, the commissioning body and core steering group would now benefit from a more detailed analysis of areas of individual provider under or over spend. For example one small (high cost) learning disability supported accommodation provider had a forecast overspend in excess of £22,000 and another small specialist learning disability floating support provider was also forecasting an overspend of £22,000.
- 191 The commissioning body was concerned to ensure the continued viability of small providers in particular those who provided supported lodgings who are likely to struggle in their ability to meet current quality assessment framework standards. Consideration is now being given to converting these schemes to adult placements.
- 192 We found that some provider files did not have a current insurance certificate or lacked one altogether. This is an area that the Supporting People team is aware of and intends that its new IT system will have the facility to flag this up as an early warning in the future.
- 193 The council operates a targeted risk management policy that has led to the exclusion of certain offenders on a limited number of its council estates. This policy was introduced as part of a joint initiative between the council and the West Midlands police force to increase community safety by targeting drug offenders. This policy sits alongside a range of other interventions to safeguard community members including a well co-ordinated joint agency approach to offender management, increasing access to the council's tenancy sustainment service, and increasing the level of engagement and empowerment of tenants on these particular estates. This approach has been widely consulted upon and reviewed and has resulted in making the neighbourhood safer.
- 194 The council's carer's emergency card scheme is a positive example of proactive work being undertaken to manage risk to the carer of a vulnerable person and to ensure there are robust systems of support for them and the vulnerable person they care for. The council's call centre is alerted and an agreed plan of action followed. It is now intended that the scheme will be extended to include the carers of people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people. A target has been set to increase take up by 20 per cent by March 2004.
- 195 In addition, the council aims to continue to raise awareness the 'bogus callers' initiative that links tenants of sheltered housing schemes with the police via a 24 hour dedicated hot line. It has also put in place Home Check audits and has targets to upgrade and fit call alarms and safety equipment in the home so as to reduce the risk of accidents.
- 196 The issue of risk management relating to the needs of offenders is well managed locally. Risk assessment and management is a key aspect of the focus of the

probation service and partner agencies in their work with offenders including the management of high risk offenders through the MAPPA process.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 197 We visited and carried out a number of reality checks in different services in the area. The staff we met showed they were committed and caring in their approach. As part of the inspection process we looked at a number of individual support plans across the different service user groups. Whilst the majority highlighted the tasks and levels of support offered, many would have benefited from a tighter focus in terms of expected outcomes at the individual level. This in turn would have enabled more effective reviewing of progress.
- 198 Individual support plans have been developed for all people living in the council's housing with care schemes (ahead of the ODPM target) and good progress is being made in developing support plans for people linked to the peripatetic warden services.
- 199 Most service providers we visited were able to demonstrate a strong focus on promoting independence and were actively encouraging a range of opportunities to enable people to be fully included in the life of their local communities. For example one housing with care service has developed close links with a local school. This has resulted in tenants receiving training in the use of the internet. Local children have benefited from learning about the life experience of older people, their local history etc. This project is an example of positive practice and has the potential to be replicated across the borough so as to promote inter-generational relationships and understanding.
- 200 The Supporting People programme is enabling providers to give stability to service users who may have had chaotic lifestyles previously, for example young offenders and people with multiple problems as identified in the pen pictures below. There is some evidence to show that some service providers supporting people with higher levels of need and those who may require longer term support to sustain their independence are effective in promoting independence and in reducing the level of support over time as individual service user's skills and confidence grows. This is critical in Dudley given its relatively low Supporting People funding base combined with low levels of service and increasing demand in most areas.
- 201 The pen pictures outlined below serve to show the impact of the Supporting People programme in a number of areas:

Adults with physical disabilities

- 202 A is a 58 year old woman who suffered a stroke 10 years ago which has affected her speech and her mobility. She felt she needed support to improve her computer skills and to assist her in building up her social contacts. Following the introduction of a support worker from a specialist floating support scheme A has completed both a home based computer course and a Learn Direct college course and is currently undertaking a further course in health and fitness

'I enjoy the visits from my support worker. I find them fun and enjoyable. I look forward to the continuation of the service'. - Service user A.

Woman and children fleeing domestic violence

- 203 B moved into the women's refuge in November 2002 following an assault by her partner. Refuge staff involved the GP and health visitor and a child psychiatrist given they had concerns about the relationship between B and her children and how they were coping. B was re-housed in January 2004 and now receives outreach floating support. This has assisted her in beginning a new life. The floating support worker has helped in making links with key community facilities and the children now attend nursery and playgroup. Work is ongoing to enable

B's skills and confidence to grow so that she can independently support herself and her family.

Person who misuses drugs

204 C is a 24 year old and came to a supported accommodation service straight from custody in May 2003. He was trying to overcome a heroin addiction. C has benefited from regular contact from his support worker and has been linked into appropriate training courses. He is now in full time work. He has been accepted for re-housing and is awaiting an offer.

Person who misuses alcohol

205 D is a 52 year old woman with a history of alcohol abuse, has suffered from depression and is profoundly deaf. She came to the supported accommodation scheme in August 2003. She has benefited from the individual support, has grown in confidence and this has led to improvements in her emotional health. She has a particular skill which she has been encouraged to share for the benefit of other tenants. Plans are underway to help her acquire her own tenancy in a specialist housing scheme catering for the needs of dry alcoholics.

Young Offender

206 E is a young woman with a history of offending, anti social behaviour, debt problems, depression and low self esteem. She reports that the supported accommodation scheme has had a significant impact on her life. She is now facing up to her problems, dealing with the causes of her offending and maintaining her tenancy without getting into arrears.

'Without this scheme, I would be back with my boyfriend being abused and in trouble with the police'. - Service user E.

207 These positive outcomes are encouraging. However, the real challenge for the commissioning body will be to ensure that there is much wider access to Supporting People services over the coming years and that the council and its partners are able to improve on the current position of comparatively limited access by most Supporting People user groups.

How does the performance compare?

208 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.

209 Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with the best and worst performing 25 per cent of unitary authorities for that indicator.

210 The social services directorate has been assessed as a two star service by the Social Services Inspectorate and is seen to be serving most adults and some children well with promising prospects for improvement. The council performs significantly above average in terms of admissions of older people to residential or nursing care and adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems helped to live at home. However, it has relatively high numbers of people with a learning disability historically placed in institutional care relating to past resettlement programmes. Increased access to local, person centred and independent living models of support are now being developed. It has above average performance in terms of adults aged 18-64 years admitted to residential or nursing care and in terms of older people aged 75 years and older admitted to hospital with problems related to a fall or hypothermia. It has below average performance in terms of education, training and employment for care leavers.

The latter are areas where the Supporting People programme can have a stronger impact. Full details in terms of the council’s performance relative to Supporting People issues are to be found in the data appendix attached.

- 211 The council’s has top quartile performance in terms of best value performance indicators relating to the length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation, council homes that will not meet the decency standard and length of time for processing new housing benefit claims. Its performance is weakest with regard to the energy efficiency levels of local authority owned dwellings, racial incidents recorded and racial incidents that have resulted in further action, and the availability of domestic violence refuge places.
- 212 A recent Audit Commission inspection of housing strategy resulted in a judgement of a fair one star service with promising prospects for improvement
- 213 The unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 are seen to be low per head of population when all services are considered as outlined in the table below. However, they are more in line when with West Midlands comparators when the costs of community alarms and sheltered housing are stripped out.

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

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Dudley	£ 0.41	£ 18.36	£ 18.36	£ 66.08
West Midlands	£ 0.62	£ 23.18	£ 28.17	£ 63.88
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

- 214 However, there are some inaccuracies in terms of the unit costs of services for specific service user groups that need further exploration in terms of cost and levels of need served before they can be seen to be reliable and capable of comparison. Some show very high unit costs for some providers and below minimum wage levels in others. The council is attending to this as a priority in order to ensure accurate and reliable comparison in the future. Unit costs appear particularly high for supported accommodation for offenders or people at risk of offending and generic user groups, and for people with learning disabilities and physical disabilities accessing floating support schemes.
- 215 There are some significant variations in the unit costs of some services that need further analysis. The table below shows the profile of supported accommodation costs for adults with learning disabilities. This compares with a unit cost of residential care for people with a learning disability in the area of £641 (2002/03 figures). Service reviews will need to closely consider the appropriateness of funding of some of these services in the context of low level housing support criteria. It will need to carefully consider the value for money implications of these services in terms of their effectiveness and added value.

Unit cost of provision £ per person per week				
Learning Disability Supported Accommodation	Provider 1 £661.27	Provider 2 £502.67	Provider 3 £259.80	Provider 4 £248

- 216 The high support costs amounting to £694.71 per week relating to floating support provided to an adult with a learning disability is an area for urgent investigation.

Summary

- 217 The council has limited Supporting People services in a number of areas though it has used the opportunities provided by the Supporting People programme to enhance its capacity. The shadow strategy has established a good initial baseline of need and the five year strategy development work currently being undertaken is providing a more detailed analysis that will inform future priority setting. The programme is well aligned with the priorities of local housing and probation services. However, there is a need to make more explicit the links between local health and social care agencies and the Supporting People programme particularly for adults with complex needs. This includes clarifying the boundaries between care and support, aligning approaches and sharing capacity in terms of commissioning, performance management (including playing an active role in service reviews and contract monitoring for providers in common) and engaging with service users and their carers. There needs to be a stronger promotion of the work and aims of the programme so that service users, providers and front line staff are fully aware of the range of local services and their fit with mainstream health and social care provision.
- 218 There are some examples of innovative practice and there has been a clear focus on trying to improve access by members of BME communities. However, there are some areas in terms of programme implementation that need further work. These include implementing the charging policy, complaints management process, determining accuracy of unit costs and progressing the service review programme in particular improving the focus on value for money and benchmarking activity.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 219 Inspectors have judged the service's prospects for improvement based on its capacity to improve using the four building blocks for effective improvement identified in '*Changing Gear*'.
- ◆ Ownership of problems and willingness to change.
 - ◆ A sustained focus on what matters.
 - ◆ The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement.
 - ◆ Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management.

Ownership of problems and willingness to change

- 220 The management letter prepared by the Audit Commission in December 2003 identifies strong council leadership and a willingness to tackle poor performance and to modernise its services. The council for example has made good progress in the approach it has taken to working in partnership at a number of levels.
- 221 The commissioning body has recognised the key issues in terms of transition to the new phase of the Supporting People programme and aims to ensure that the process for commissioning future services is clearly targeted, meets strategic relevance requirements and is not spread so thinly as to have limited impact. This will require building new relationships and systems that allow for sharing of some mainstream agency resources with the Supporting People grant.
- 222 There is also a strong culture of council directorates and local agencies working together to develop solutions to shared challenges. Multi agency boards representing different service user groups are well structured and link into the Dudley health and wellbeing partnership. There is evidence of joint working at all levels in tackling homelessness, and the new systems of support to young people and older people provide examples of effective joined up thinking and working.
- 223 There is evidence of effective frontline working across agencies where the expertise of each is integrated to provide a holistic service to people. For example in the case of women fleeing domestic violence, the Supporting people programme works with parents and social services are closely involved in addressing the needs of the children. In addition a floating support team that supports people with a range of physical disabilities operates alongside a small project funded by social services staffed by volunteers for people who don't meet the criteria for access to the Supporting People programme.
- 224 Further work is needed though to identify and manage the contribution of the Supporting People programme alongside health and social care providers in building a robust range of community based services, in particular for adults with mental health needs and so reduce the current reliance on hospital based care.
- 225 Relationships have improved between local hostels and local lettings offices in order to promptly identify re-housing needs. The council has clearly mapped the specific issues of inadequate access to housing by young people and the council is trying to address this on a block by block basis as vacancies arise. The shortage of move on accommodation has been highlighted as a key need within the five year strategy development work currently being undertaken.
- 226 The council has secured a grant of £71,000 over the next 3 years to fund a debt advisor trainer so that all estate officers can proactively work with people at risk of homelessness and to prevent recurring homelessness. This will complement the work being undertaken by the Supporting People programme.
- 227 Gaps in accommodation and support services for adults with learning disabilities have been recognised and are being further analysed in the context of the development work underpinning the five year strategy. A joint feasibility study is now being undertaken by housing and social services staff to consider the re-

modelling of an existing sheltered housing scheme to accommodate older people with learning disabilities. A bid will be made to the extra care housing fund initiative to meet the development costs in November 2004. In addition the council is reviewing its harder to let bungalows to consider their appropriateness in terms of their suitability to be upgraded and modelled along the lines of the key ring scheme where there is a cluster of suitable properties.

- 228 The council has taken positive action to improve its understanding of and support to local BME community members and has structured its planning and decision making so that equalities issues are appropriately considered and mainstreamed. Each directorate's equality and diversity action plan is considered by the relevant select committee. There is annual monitoring of progress against targets.
- 229 The council and its commissioning body partners recognise that building effective consultation with users, carers and the voluntary sector is an ongoing key area of work. The council is formally launching its consultation strategy in April 2004. The Supporting People consultation strategy will effectively link with this and should also draw on partner agency consultation arrangements.

A sustained focus on what matters

- 230 The commissioning body has worked hard to make sure that the key building blocks essential to the smooth running of the Supporting People programme have been put in place. There is good corporate ownership of the programme and a strong focus on financial controls. There is an ongoing commitment to ensuring that good quality services exist and that areas of unmet need are properly scoped and prioritised.
- 231 Some of the key implementation agenda has been delayed given capacity gaps in the Supporting People team. However, it is evident that the newly appointed Supporting People team manager has given the team a new focus and has enabled clearer future direction for the programme:

'We have been on a huge learning curve and we have turned the corner. Everyone is positive and pulling together'. - Supporting People team member.

- 232 There are some areas identified in the early part of this report that show the need for tighter performance management and in particular an urgency in progressing service reviews, benchmarking activity and establishing value for money and the cost effectiveness of services. It will be particularly important to assess the cost effectiveness of the restructured sheltered housing schemes in terms of their impact on wider health and social care priorities and performance given that this is an area of significant investment in terms of the Supporting People grant.
- 233 There has been good progress in terms of strengthening risk management and contingency planning to ensure programme and provider stability. Smaller providers have been given priority so that they are aware of and able to meet the required standards.
- 234 The commissioning body recognises the need to unpack the generic category of need to get a better sense of the needs served and identify potential areas of overlap with other providers. This work has now commenced.
- 235 Council priorities for 2004/05 included implementing the race equality scheme and reviewing services and priorities to ensure that they comply with the Race Relations Amendment Act. The council is currently also giving due consideration to the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Supporting People programme is being reviewed within the race equality scheme by the end of May 2004.
- 236 The council will not achieve the ambitious equality standards targets it has set itself. To date it has achieved Level 1 (although not formally stated) and part of Level 2. Council targets were set before detailed guidance was available and achieving the targets has proved to be unrealistic. Scoping work is being

undertaken to establish if Level 3 can be achieved by March 2005. Quarterly monitoring reports on progress have been provided to council members.

The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 237 The Supporting People programme has provided the council with essential resources to enable it to develop a range of new services to respond to a number of people whose needs for low level housing support were previously unmet. There are a range of small and innovative services now being commissioned using Supporting People grant funding which would not have been possible without the programme.
- 238 The Supporting People programme has also enabled some services to continue that would otherwise have come to an end, for example, a supported accommodation pilot project previously funded by the department of health promoting independence grant.
- 239 The commissioning body has recognised the need to strengthen the Supporting People staff team and focus its work so that it properly reflects the transition to the new phase of the programme. The new structure includes a senior monitoring and review officer, as well as the existing two service monitoring and review officers and a monitoring and information officer. The administration officer will become a full time post, and there will be a specific post responsible for service development and consultation. It is envisaged that the new structure will be implemented by May 2004.
- 240 The commissioning body identified some capacity problems existed in being able to meet demand in the council's tenancy sustainment team. Additional finance has been targeted to this area that has enabled an additional 2.5 posts to be funded and this now results in a more timely response to need.
- 241 In addition, the Supporting People programme has had a positive impact on improving the quality and focus of some existing services. For example a direct access hostel for the homeless offers support to help manage alcohol and drugs problems and it has put in place outreach services that enable people to continue to have the support they need as they move on into their own homes.
- 242 There are inter agency protocols in place that connect intensive therapeutic help with rehabilitation and lower level support and these provide a clear pathway for assisting people to become more independent and to have more control over their lives. The communities against drugs funding has also been used to meet the home furnishing costs of the accommodation being developed for young people. Further improvements to the range of services for adults with drug problems who offend are now being planned under the CJIO grant initiative to the Dudley DAT (£279,000) which will enable them to work with the probation service and other partners to enhance the capacity and partnership working across the borough.
- 243 The investors in people assessment report undertaken in July 2003 highlights the progress made by the housing directorate in prioritising the training and development of its staff. The report recognises that senior managers have been working hard to improve communication with the workforce and to enable front line staff to have a clearer understanding of their contribution to the performance of the council. The Supporting People team members have received specialist training from a number of providers, and other agencies/providers have been invited to participate in these events. All Supporting People team members have received an employment development review and they now have individual training plans identified.
- 244 The proposals to upgrade the Supporting People IT system later in 2004/05 should enable better management information, performance reporting capabilities and interface with the social services management information system.

- 245 The introduction of the new computerised assessment tool (OASys) will enable the probation service to provide more detailed information on offender needs, not only in respect of accommodation but also with regard to associated issues such as substance misuse, mental health needs, employment and training. The probation service in the region has been working with its local partners to strengthen its focus on offender management. A dedicated district manager will be appointed from September 2004 which will assist in developing an improved local response to the accommodation and support needs of offenders and ex offenders. This should provide a more robust approach to commissioning services and monitoring outcomes for people.
- 246 The council is taking steps to tackle the long waiting times for disabled facilities grants. The council has approved an additional £500,000 on top of last year's allocation from the housing capital programme, £300,000 from the single capital pot as well as additional revenue from social services. Investment is expected to reduce the waiting time from 3 years to between 1 and 1.5 years over the next 3 years.
- 247 The council's customer access to services project will fundamentally change the way council services are delivered and will enable consistency of access and service for all community members enabling them to have a local response to their requests for assistance.

Integration of continuous improvement into day-to-day planning

- 248 The Corporate Performance Assessment of the council in July 2002 rated the council as fair, with generally higher scores awarded for service delivery than for corporate governance. Areas of service performance that needed to improve included social care for children and housing. Performance management, organisational learning and future planning were areas that needed development at a corporate level. The council is now working to an improvement plan based on seven key priority areas.
- 249 The council has put systems in place to encourage the sharing of good practice. These include holding good practice events, developing a council database of good practice, investing in project management and holding 'making the difference' improvement groups. The Supporting People team have not yet included any positive practice on this database but intend to do so in the future.
- 250 The best value performance plan sets stretching targets in the priority areas. The council has embedded the European business excellence model into its daily activities. The council has also taken steps to improve its organisational capacity so as to enable a stronger focus on performance and risk management.
- 251 The council has made good progress in a number of areas highlighted in the joint review report of its social care services. The directorate improvement and modernisation plan has led to the implementation of a robust performance reporting system and improved response to complaints. There is now an effective recruitment and retention strategy and awareness and diversity training has been delivered. In addition, systems for encouraging user and carer engagement have been strengthened.
- 252 Probation services have used the opportunities provided by the Supporting People programme to ensure there is a wider range of services available to support offenders and those at risk of offending in all their areas of need.

'We are trying to look at the whole system to achieve best value- not just the Supporting People programme but all local players taking their part'. - Manager.

- 253 Good progress has been made to date in identifying the key issues that will need to feature in the five year strategy. The commissioning body and core group are

currently testing some matrices that aim to assist decision making to shape future priority setting.

- 254 Further research has been commissioned into areas where there is limited knowledge currently about the particular needs of some user groups including those from BME communities and others who may be perceived as harder to reach.
- 255 A programme of work is now being rolled out to upgrade the call alarm system in sheltered housing and to ensure accommodation is fit for purpose.
- 256 The council has taken steps to review the homelessness service in response to recommendations made within the January 2004 housing inspection report. Additional staffing and financial resources have been secured in order to strengthen the service and outcomes for service users. This includes the approval of an additional £50,000 from the general fund to make two housing advice officer posts permanent and increasing administration support for the team.
- 257 There is an urgent need to ensure that frontline staff in health and social care services have a proper understanding of the Supporting People programme. None of those who attended our focus group had yet received training on Supporting People. There is a sense that the liaison between senior managers involved in the programme implementation has not been properly communicated to them.

Summary

- 258 The commissioning body is committed to continuous improvement and has established some good partnerships with external agencies that have resulted in positive outcomes for vulnerable people. The council has taken seriously the findings of recent inspection reports and its own internal research and has been working hard to improve access to services. There is evidence of the council the commissioning body and the probation service shifting resources to some key areas where demand exceeds supply or where improvements in the quality of services are required, the council has strengthened its approach to performance and risk management and has improved its management and staff development systems.
- 259 However, there are some specific improvement areas that now need to be addressed in terms of the Supporting People programme. These relate in particular to joint working with local health and social care agencies so there is wider understanding and ownership of the programme, and so that those service users who are not yet able to access services can be appropriately included. There also needs to be a tighter focus on performance management and evaluation. The strengthened Supporting People team should enable additional capacity so that this work is achieved.

Appendices

The purpose of a best value 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. We have also included key demographic and performance information.

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Dudley Supporting People Shadow Strategy.
- ◆ Dudley Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Census Population report April 2001.
- ◆ Investors in People Assessment Report (Housing Directorate) July 2003.
- ◆ Best Value Performance Plan 2003.
- ◆ Risk Management Strategy and Implementation Plan.
- ◆ Dudley Council Plan 2003-07.
- ◆ Annual Audit Letters 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03.
- ◆ Housing Strategy 2002-03.
- ◆ Housing Service and Improvement Plan 2003-05.
- ◆ Housing Services Core Briefs for Employees.
- ◆ 'Home Affairs' Tenants newsletters 2002-03.
- ◆ Better Care: Higher Standards 2002.
- ◆ Community Plan.
- ◆ Competition Policy.
- ◆ Minutes of the Commissioning Body September 2003 - December 2003.
- ◆ Minutes of Core Steering Group January 2003 - December 2003.
- ◆ Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Strategy March 2001.
- ◆ Multi Agency Strategy for Children with Disabilities within Dudley 2004-2007.
- ◆ The Dudley Children and Young People's Strategic Plan 2002-2004.
- ◆ Children and families Divisional Business and Commissioning Plan 2003/04.

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:

- ◆ Observation of the Core Steering Group and Commissioning Body meetings.
- ◆ Visits to the following providers:
 - ◆ Dove Integrated Living Team for adults with a physical or sensory impairment.
 - ◆ Langstone Society for people with learning disabilities.
 - ◆ Dudley MBC managed sheltered housing- Jack Newell Court.

- ◆ Dudley MBC - Homecall Centre.
- ◆ Sanctuary HA - Warwick Court for older people with support needs.
- ◆ Dudley MBC patch based warden scheme.
- ◆ Dudley MBC - Church View Housing with Care.
- ◆ English Churches Housing Group- Stamberhill House for older people with support needs.
- ◆ Halas Homes for people with learning disabilities.
- ◆ Heantun HA specific supported accommodation project for young offenders.
- ◆ Halesowen Women's Refuge.
- ◆ Dudley African Caribbean Befriending/Nehemiah specific schemes for elders.
- ◆ Beacon centre for the Blind.
- ◆ Tenancy Sustainment Team.

List of people interviewed

Bill Baker	Assistant Director of Finance Dudley MBC
Jill Bate	Acting Head of Mental Health Services, Dudley MBC
Val Beint	Assistant Director, Older People and Physical Disability Dudley MBC
Diane Blower	Finance Officer, Supporting People Team, Dudley MBC
Nigel Byford	Assistant Chief Probation Officer, West Midlands
Richard Carter	Assistant Director Learning Disability and Mental Health Dudley MBC
Councillor D Caunt	Leader of the Council
Gurbi Cox	Best Value and Information Officer (seconded to the Supporting People team)
Ann Crook	Dove Integrated Living team
Glyn Dainty	Contracts and Review Officer Supporting People Team (seconded from Probation Services)
Jenny Evans	Housing Services Manager, Nehemiah Housing
Councillor M Evans	Lead Member for Housing
Joanne Forbes	Principal Corporate Services Policy Officer, Dudley MBC (seconded to the Supporting People team)
Pam Harris	Senior Co-ordinator, Supported Housing, Dudley MBC
Hilary Jackson	Assistant Director Business Services Social Services
Paul Jaunzens	Chief Executive, Langstone Society

Lorraine John	Principal Supported Housing Co-ordinator
Louise Lawton	Regional Officer, National Care Standards Commission
Simon Manson	Corporate Lead Officer on Equality, Dudley MBC
Alan Marsh	Commissioning Manager, Dudley Beacon and Castle PCT
Nicola Martin	5 Year Strategy Consultant
Anna McEwan	Community Support Manager, Langstone Society
Pat Merrick	Supporting People Team Manager, Dudley MBC
Councillor P Miller	Lead Member for Social Services
Sue Morris	Assistant Director, Business Services, Dudley MBC
Tim Nash	Senior Probation officer, West Midlands
Iain Newman	Principal Finance Manager, Dudley MBC
John O'Neill	IT Manager, Dudley MBC
Ann Parkes	Head of Learning Disabilities, Dudley MBC
John Povey	Social Services Commissioning Officer, Dudley MBC
Liz Ralph	Housing Benefit Officer, Dudley MBC
Richard Rogerson	Head of Partnership and Regeneration Dudley South PCT
Christine Seaton	Investment Manager, Housing Corporation
Mike Short	Senior Probation Officer, West Midlands
Ron Sims	Assistant Director Housing Strategy and Accountable Officer Dudley MBC
Paul Southan	IT Officer, Supporting people team, Dudley MBC
Andrew Sparke	Chief Executive, Dudley MBC
John Stevenson	Principal Housing Services Officer, Dudley MBC (seconded to the Supporting People team)
Linda Warren	Director of Social Services, Dudley MBC
Service User Focus Group	
Focus Group frontline staff	Representatives from Carr Gomm Society, Dudley MBC Housing, Accord HA, North Birmingham Fellowship Trust, Edge View Homes, African Caribbean Befriending Service, Halas Homes, Victory Outreach, Bromford Housing group, Camphill Houses

Focus Group frontline managers

Representatives from Carr Gomm Society, Dudley MBC, North Birmingham Fellowship Trust, Halesowen Women's Refuge, Edgeview Homes, African Caribbean Befriending Society, Carlton care group, Victory Outreach, Bromford Housing Group, Anchor Trust, Camphill Houses

Demographic information

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

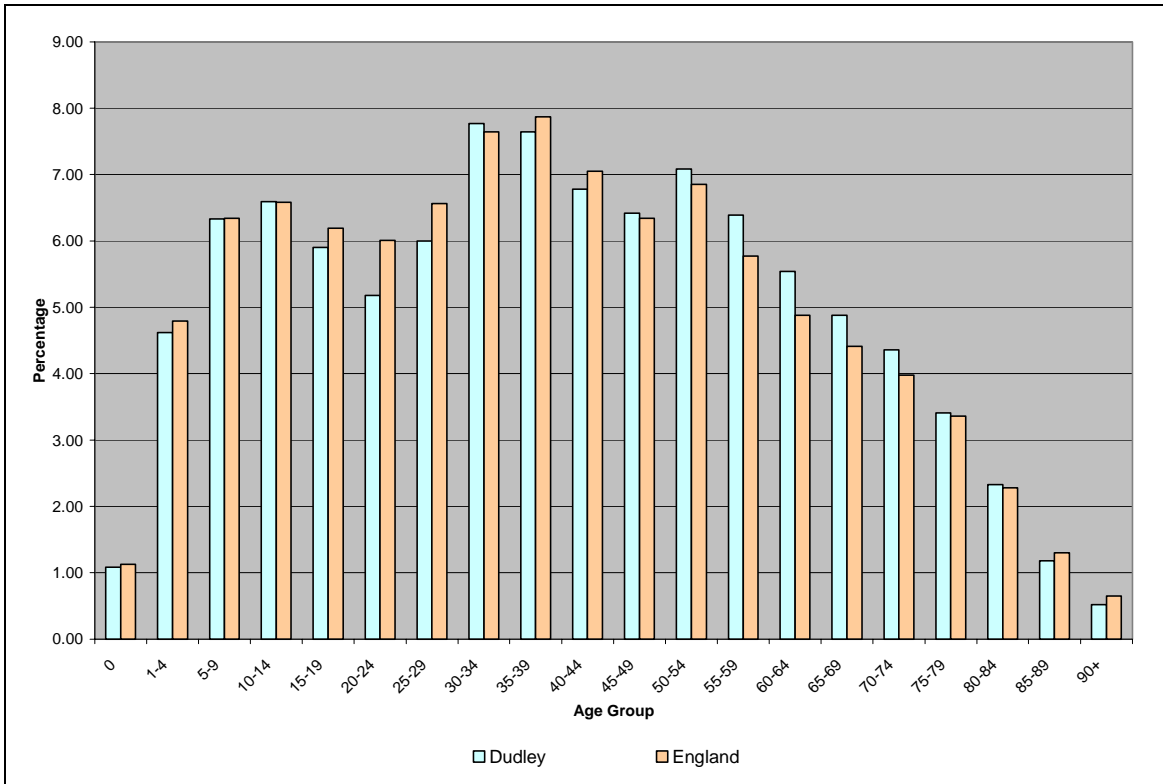
Measure	Dudley	England
Population (mid-2001)	305,155	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	16.68	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	7.5	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	3.2	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ²	142	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ³	2 of 24	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁴	0 of 24	-

² Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

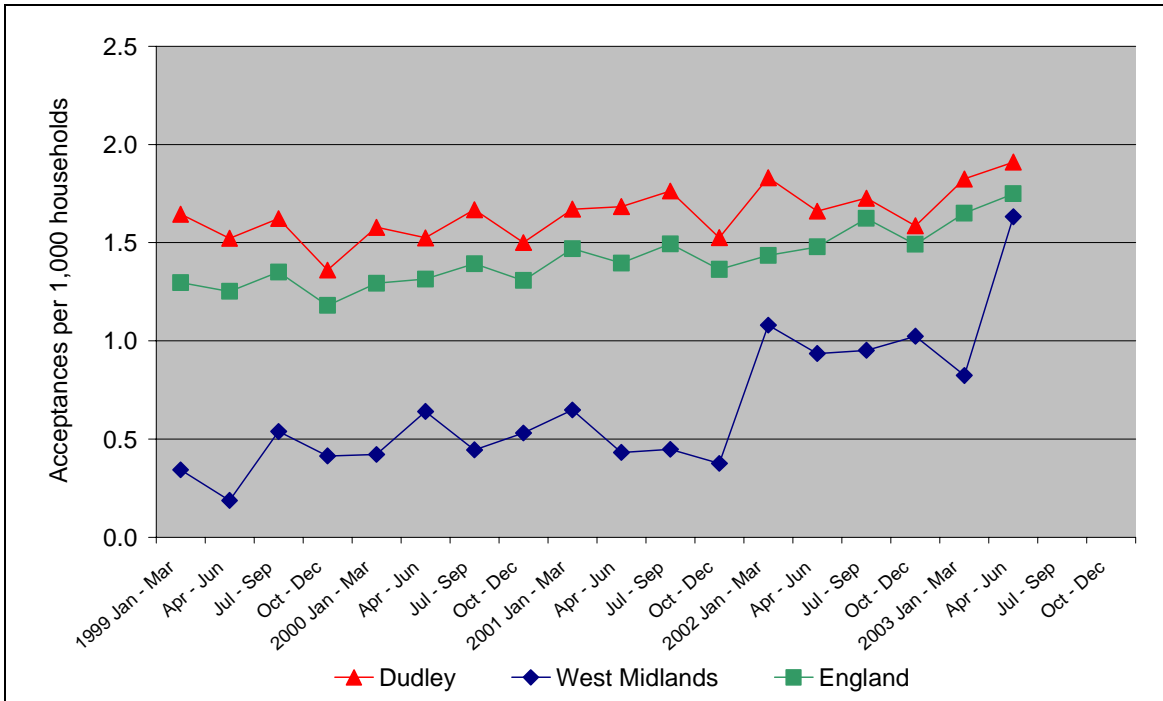
³ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

⁴ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



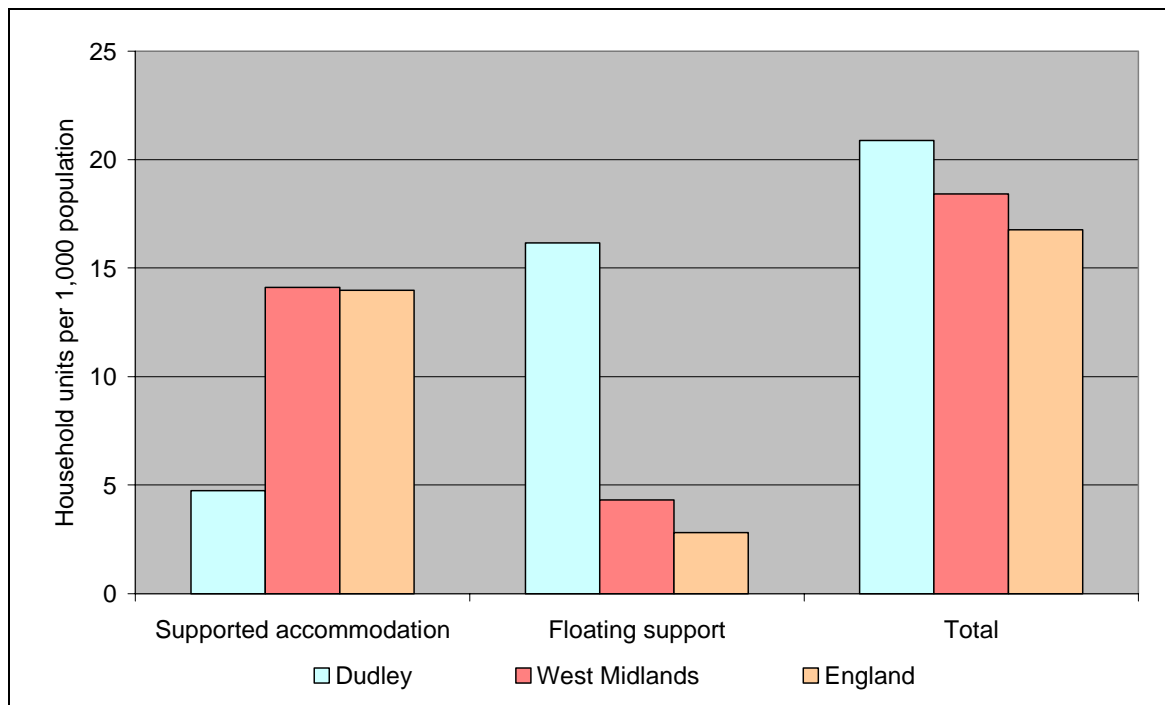
Performance information

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

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

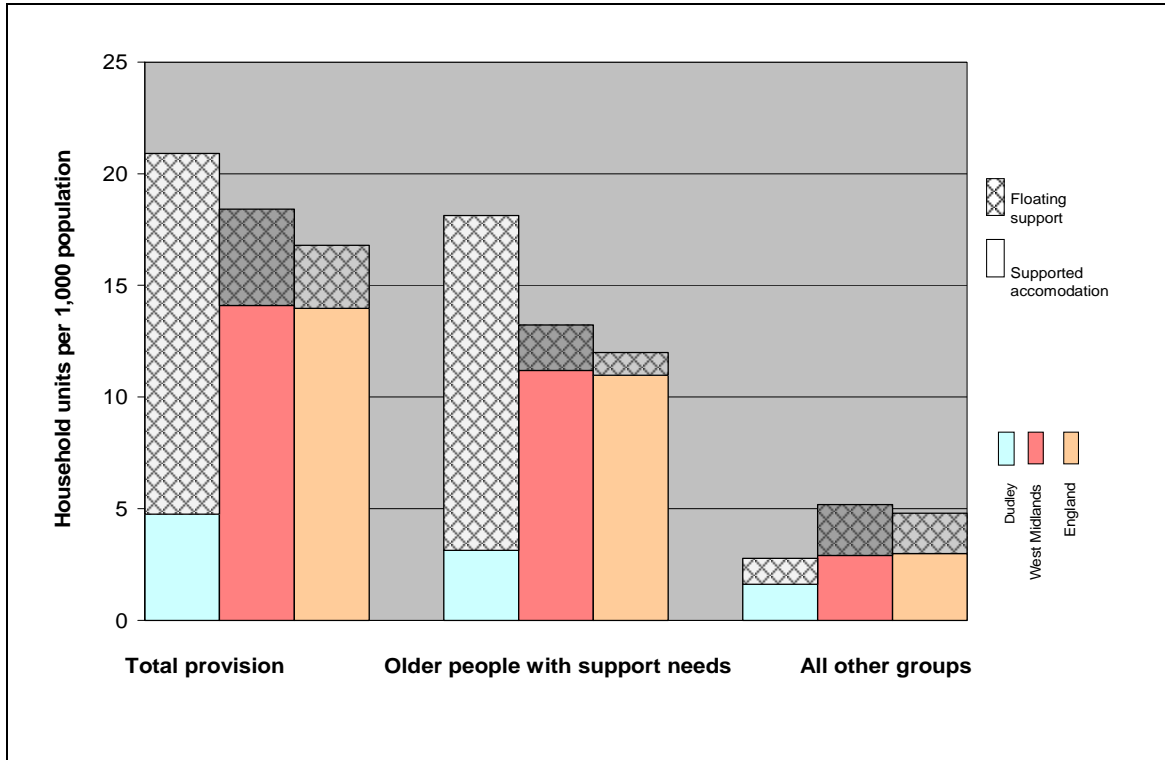
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁵

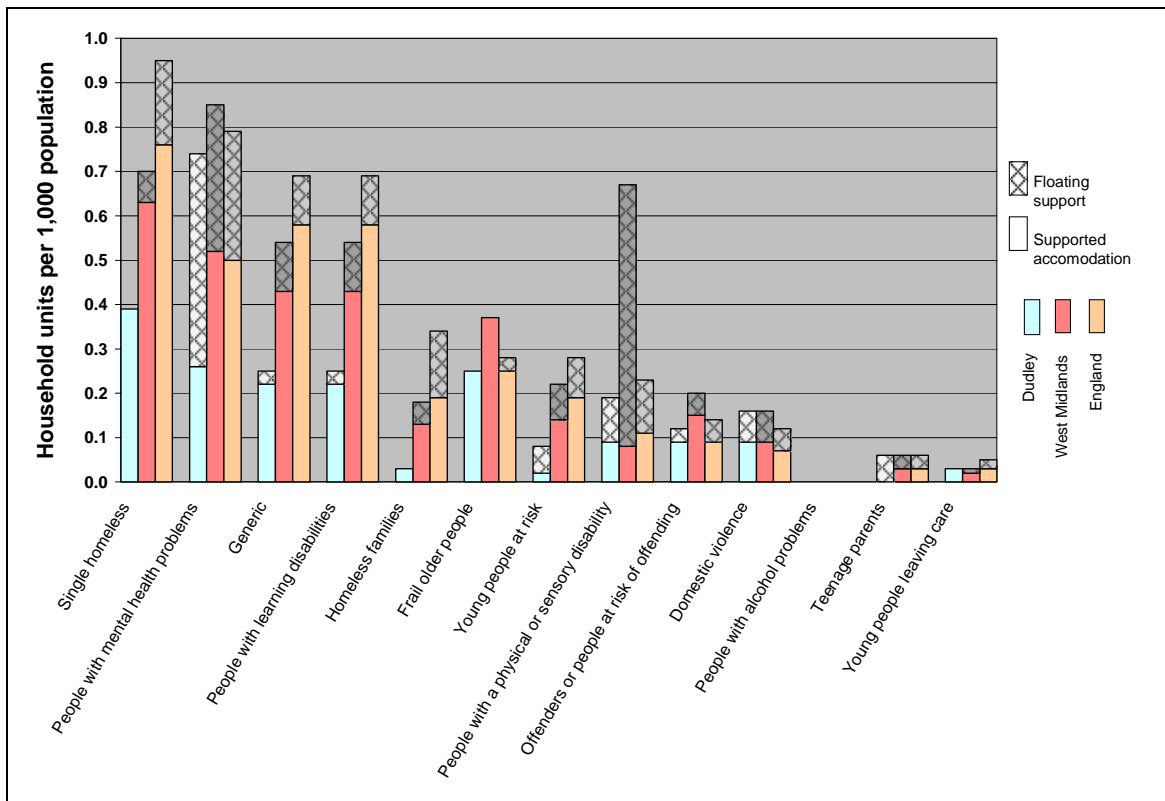


⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁶



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁷



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

⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

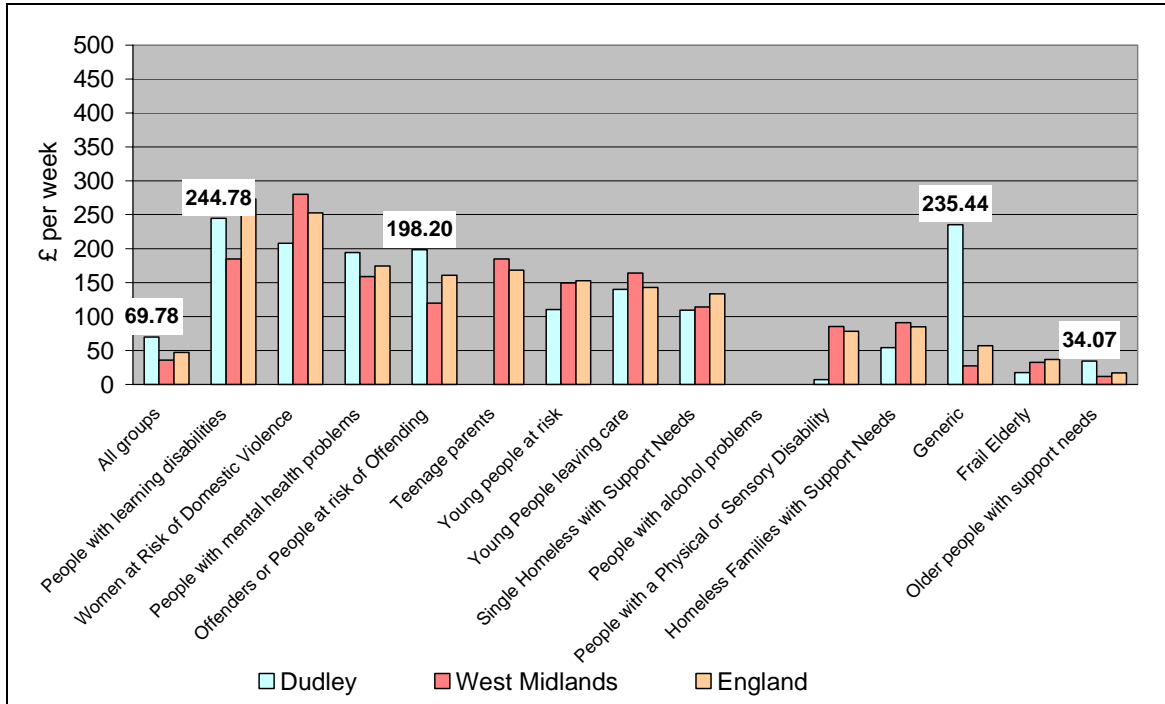
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Dudley	£ 6,517,598	£ 54,287	£ 224,143.32

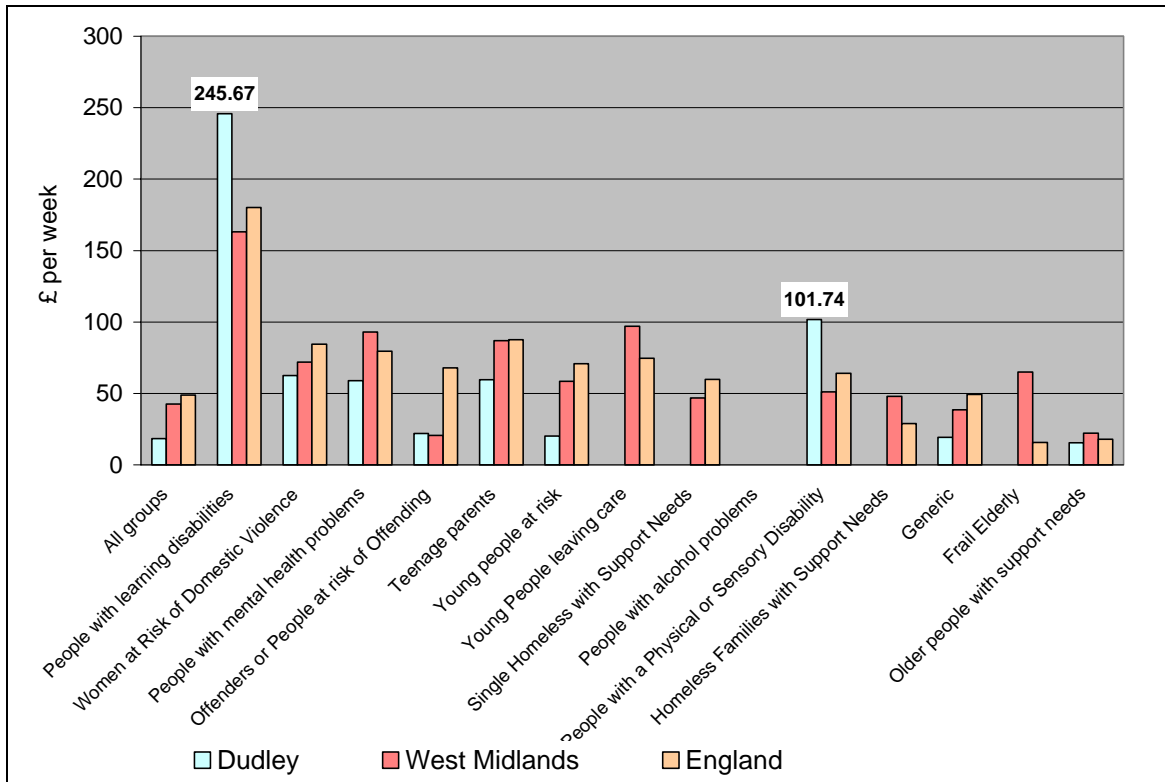
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Dudley	£ 0.41	£ 18.36	£ 18.36	£ 66.08
West Midlands	£ 0.62	£ 23.18	£ 28.17	£ 63.88
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

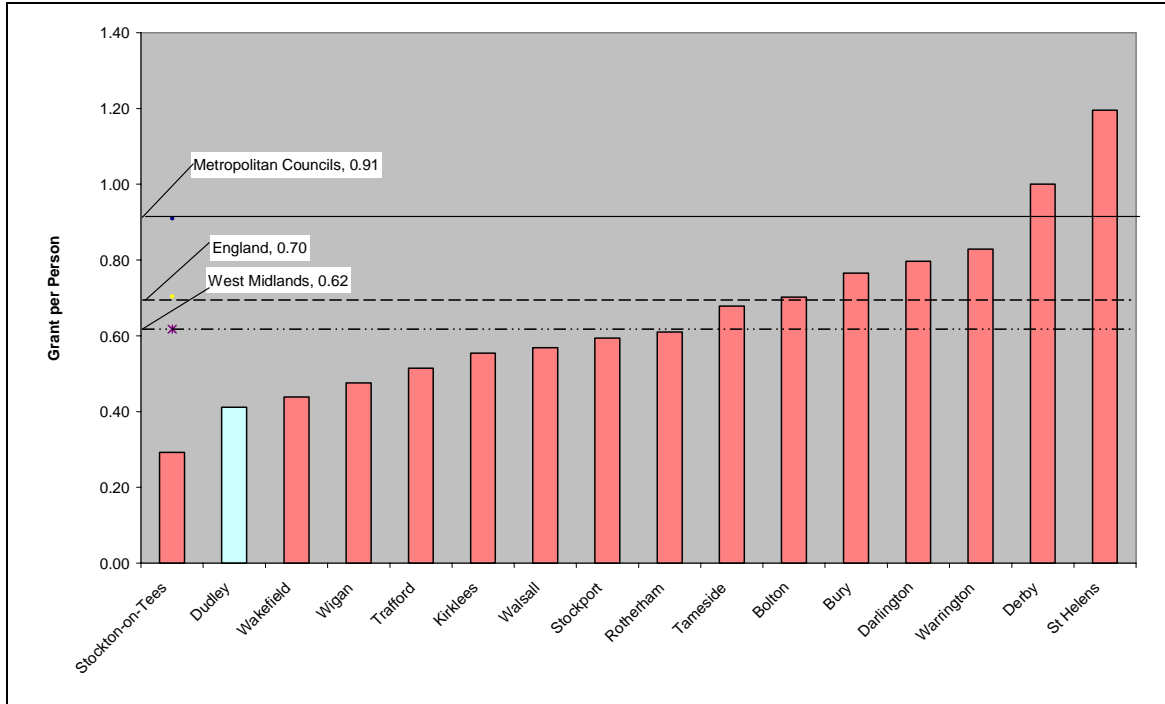


Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)

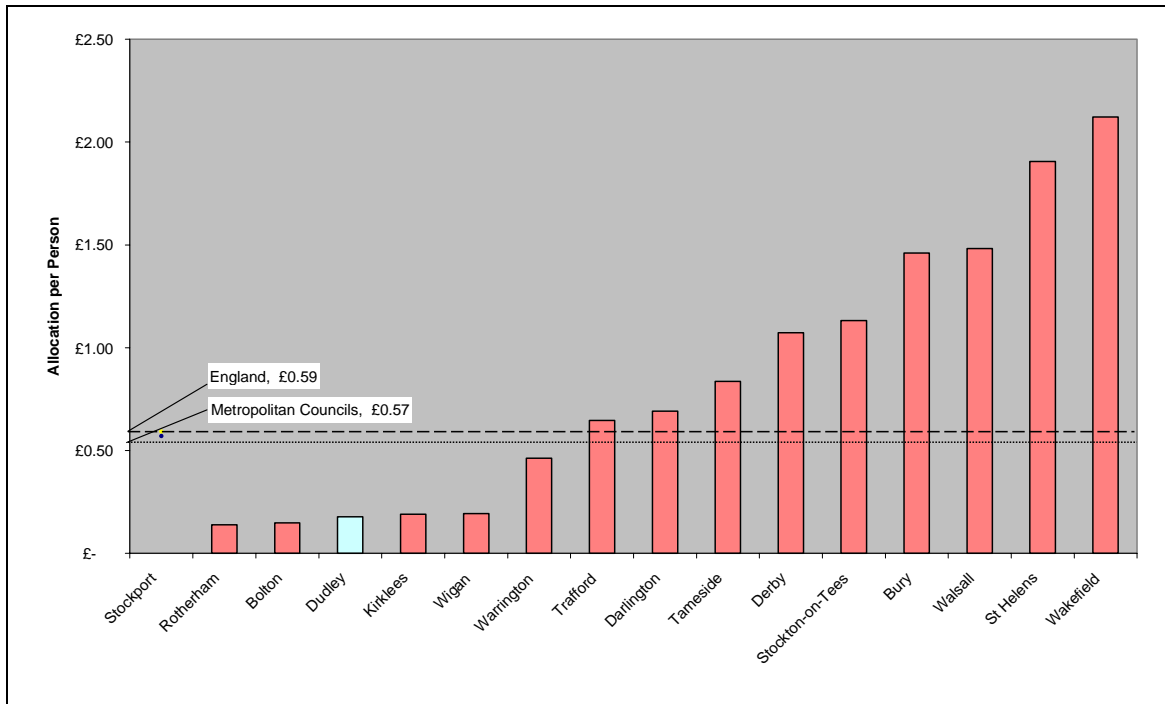


⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours⁹, all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils (2003/04)

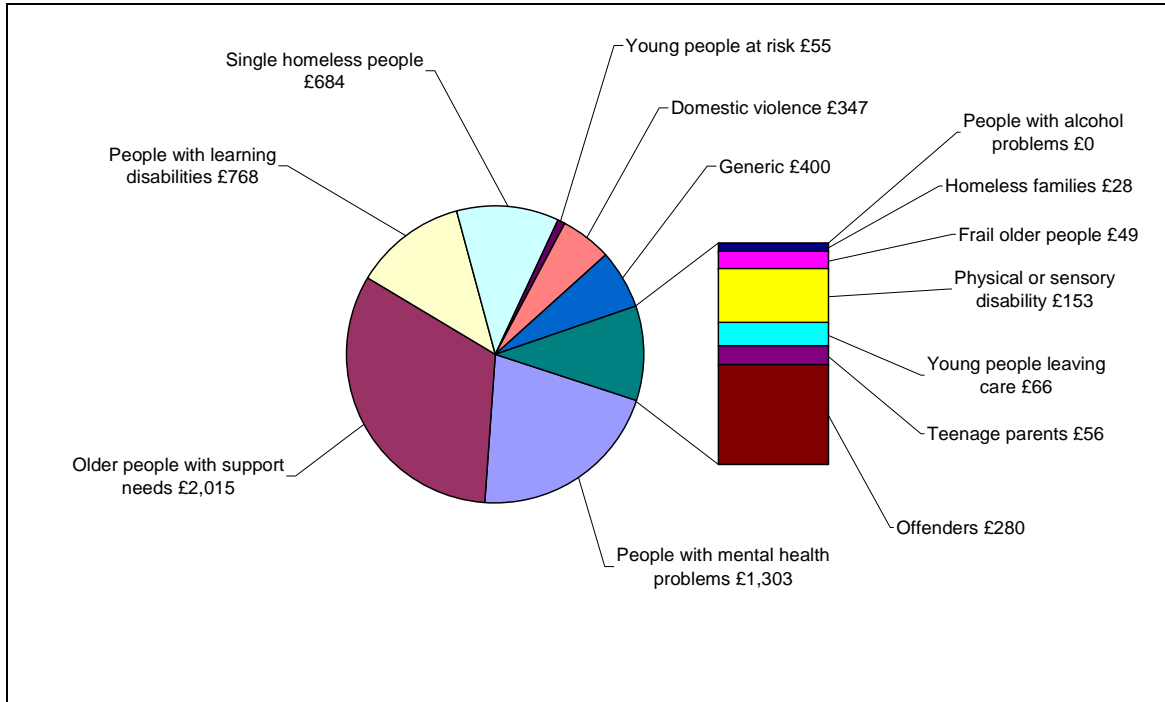


Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils.

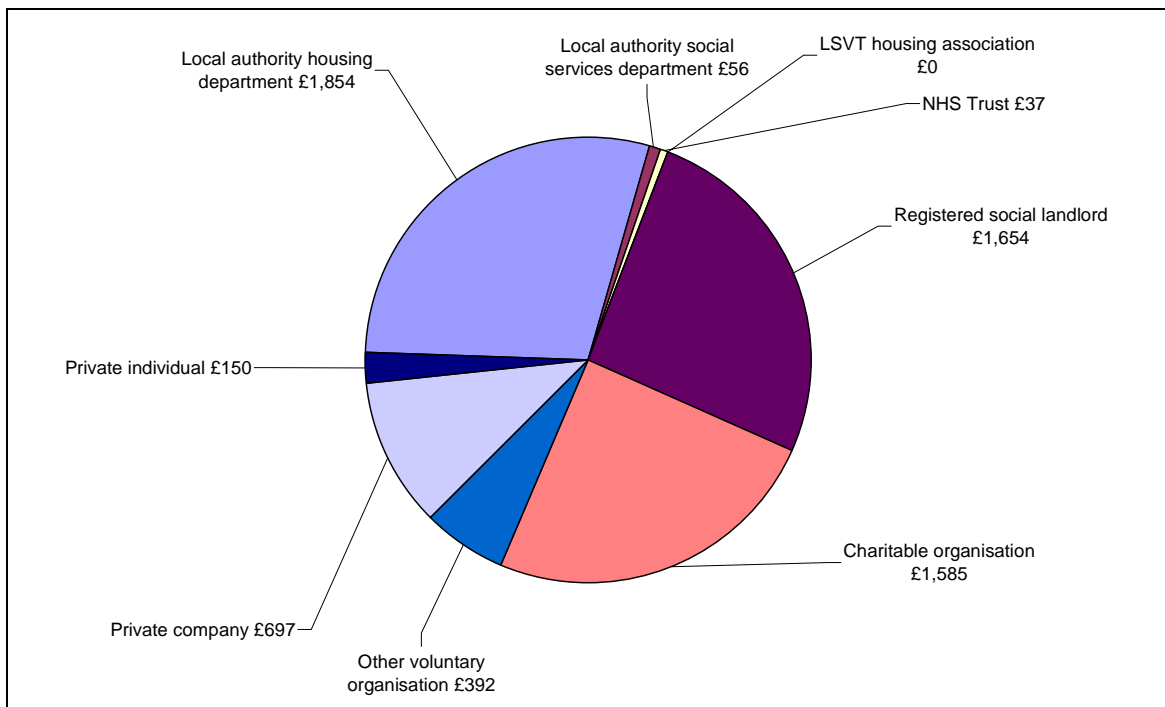


⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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	Promising	☆☆
Children's Services	Some	Promising	(3)

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

Dudley	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)
Above average (★★★)	Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27) Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33)
Average (★★)	Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within 3 weeks (D38) Delayed discharges for older people (D41) New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43)
Below average (★)	Employment, education & training for care leavers (A4) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)
Significantly below average (●)	

Best value performance indicators**Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with metropolitan boroughs**

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

Dudley	
Within the best 25 per cent	<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>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a)</p>
Average	<p>The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2)</p> <p>Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b)</p>
Within the worst 25 per cent	<p>Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63)</p> <p>Racial incidents recorded by the authority (BV174)</p> <p>Racial incidents that resulted in further action (BV175)</p> <p>Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)</p>

Supporting People – Housing related support services

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

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase; the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (ALA).

Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

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

The programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a local strategic context. For example:

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

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

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).

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. This appendix summarises areas of positive practice found during the inspection of the Supporting People programme at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council in February 2004.

Item 1 - Creative ways of engaging people with learning disabilities so that they understand agency policies and procedures that aim to safeguard them from risk

- ◆ One provider we met has an innovative approach to helping learning disabled service users to be aware of and contribute to the development of key agency policies and procedures relating to the protection of vulnerable people. This involved a trainer engaging the service users in role plays so that there was a better understanding of risk and they were able to give feedback on what works and share their understanding of the issues. This has resulted in people feeling more aware and able to identify and report abuse. The organisation is now looking to make the harassment policy meaningful in a similar way.

Item 2 - The housing with care schemes provide positive examples of joint working that have led to a strong focus on prevention and the promotion of independence

Service User Group: Older People with Support Needs and Frail Elderly

Type of Service: There are 11 Housing with Care schemes that provide support to people with low, medium and high support needs. Tenants range in age from 62 to 105 years. Admissions to the accommodation is managed on an inter agency basis to ensure that at any time there is an appropriate balance of need and that this is sustainable within available resources. Referrals are received from social services, health and the police. The core aims of the service are to promote safety and encourage personal independence.

Key Players- The key players include the scheme co-ordinator and individual wardens, home carers and social work staff, a range of health professionals and the police. There is effective partnership working and this has led to increased collaboration and team working, and a joint approach to assessment and service provision. This allows for flexibility in the way services are delivered so as to accommodate to changing needs. Individual support plans are in place for each tenant and incorporate both care and support, and are reviewed regularly.

Action taken- The council's Housing with Care Initiative coupled with complementary projects such as Good Health campaigns (largely funded by local health services) and the Security and Care Scheme enable a holistic approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable older people. In some schemes a community nurse runs monthly well being sessions and there are exercise classes each week to encourage mobility. Housing Revenue Account resources have been used to create stronger links with local health agencies and to address hospital discharge needs. There is a borough wide handyperson who works with Age Concern locally on personal safety and accident prevention and undertakes tasks to make homes safer for older people. The Supporting People funding that underpins the Housing with Care schemes is seen to have been a key component in modernising services and supporting effective partnership working. It now means that many more people can live independently in

their homes.

Outcomes for service users

'It's the best of both worlds- we have housing and social care in one place'

Item 3 - The council's carer emergency card scheme

- ◆ The council's carer's emergency card scheme is a positive example of proactive work being undertaken to manage risk to the carer of a vulnerable person and to ensure there are robust systems of support for them and the vulnerable person they care for. The council's call centre is alerted and an agreed plan of action followed. It is now intended that the scheme will be extended to include the carers of people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people

Item 4 - Recognising and building the language skills of frontline staff

- ◆ The housing directorate has developed its own interpreting service based on the ability of its workforce to converse in the local community languages. A number of employees have volunteered to provide interpreting services in a range of languages including Urdu, Mirpuri, Punjabi, Gujarati and British Sign Language. A local college has given accreditation to the registered interpreters.

Item 5 - Comprehensive Supporting People Risk Management Matrix

- ◆ A comprehensive risk management matrix now exists that covers in detail issues relating to contracting, charging, governance, service reviews, HR, finance and IT. Risks have been graded in terms of their impact and key actions have been identified to appropriately manage risk in most cases. This is linked to the council's emergency plan and with social services protocols for handling risks to vulnerable people.