

Inspection report

November 2004

Supporting People Programme

Halton 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 Halton Borough Council volunteered to take part in the initial inspection as one of four 'pathfinders'. The purpose of this process was to test both the way the inspections would be carried out and to examine how the authority had set up and implemented the programme.
- 5 The agreement for taking part in the pathfinder was that the council would be inspected in May 2003 and would then have a period of grace to act on the recommendations made in the draft report presented to the council in June 2003. In January 2004, the inspection team made a reassessment of performance, updated the report to reflect progress and amended the scores if significant progress had been made.
- 6 Halton Borough Council was subject to a further inspection in March 2004, with further revisions in July 2004, as one of the 19 administering local authorities considered by the ODPM to have the highest service costs. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Background

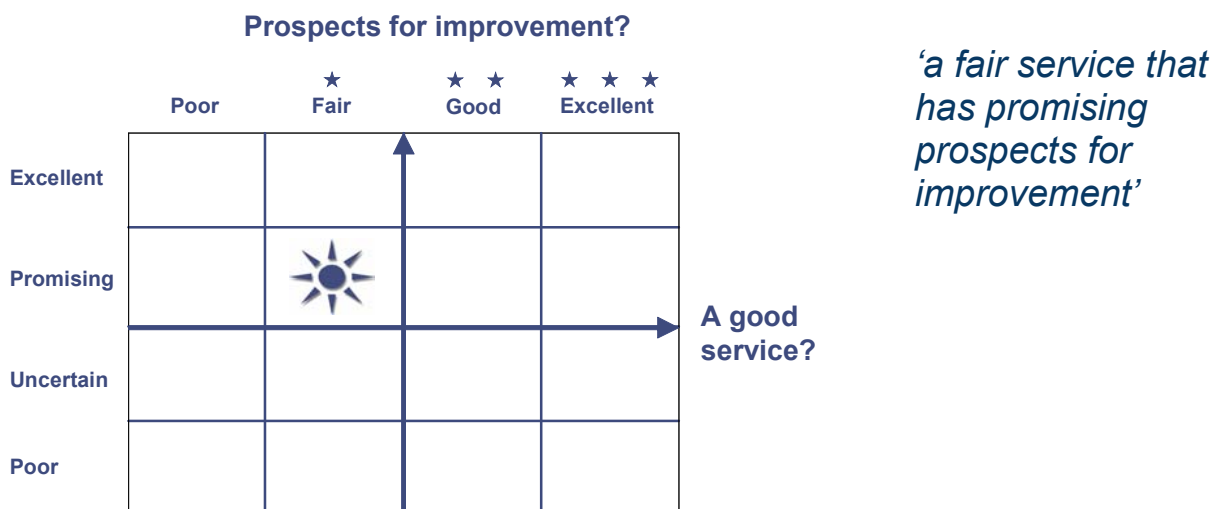
- 7 Halton has a population of 118, 216 which is set to decline to 115,000 by 2011. In 2001, 2.38 per cent of the population were from black and minority ethnic communities compared to a national average of 12.5 per cent.
- 8 Halton is ranked as the 18th most deprived council area out of 354 in England. 10 out of 21 of its electoral wards are among the 10 per cent most deprived nationally. It also has very poor health statistics, having amongst other health issues, the highest standardised mortality ratio in England.
- 9 The borough has a high unemployment rate especially amongst young people at 4 per cent which is higher than the national average of 2.6 per cent.
- 10 Halton has very few properties that are deemed to be low demand properties. However, 25 per cent of its stock fails to meet the Government's decency standards compared to only 2 per cent levels of unfitness within the private sector.

- 11 The council is under labour control and in January 2000 adopted a cabinet style of corporate governance. In October 2000, the council carried out a restructuring of its management and service delivery functions and has a chief executive and five directorates each with a clear strategic role. The council employs 5,500 staff and its net revenue budget for 2003/04 is £144.0 million.
- 12 Halton Borough Council received a Supporting People grant of £8.5 million in 2003/04. The gross revenue budget for Supporting People administration in 2003/04 was £185,511. The council received £8.53 million in grant for 2004/05 and £160,820 towards its administration costs.

Scoring the service

- 13 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: Halton Borough Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 14 We believe the service is fair because it demonstrates a number of positive features:
- ◆ There have been some positive outcomes for service users, most notably, the promotion of independent living amongst adults with learning disabilities and some other client groups.
 - ◆ The council worked well with service providers to produce the shadow strategy to help them prepare for Supporting People and is continuing this work in the production of the five year strategy.
 - ◆ There are very good relationships between the Supporting People team, providers and partner organisations.
 - ◆ There is a wide range of services already in place in Halton and the council has used Supporting People to build upon this by developing new services and improving existing services.
 - ◆ Supporting People is an integral part of a number of social care commissioning strategies and plans such as the accommodation strategy for adults with a learning disability.
 - ◆ Although starting from a low base, partnership working with both health and service users is now developing. There is now a local multi-agency vulnerable people's task force in place and there are some good partnerships evident in older people's services.

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.

- ◆ The council has made considerable efforts to inform its own staff and service providers about Supporting People and clear information has been provided to all service users affected by the grant programme.
- ◆ The Supporting People team has carried out a programme of work to raise awareness of Supporting People. This has included being represented on a number of local strategic partnership (LSP) sub-groups and other groups such as the housing forum and internal working groups.
- ◆ There is a core strategy group and commissioning body in place and there are clear links with representatives sitting on the LSP sub-groups and feeding back into the main boards. The membership of the commissioning body has also enabled greater strategic links into other bodies and groups.
- ◆ The Supporting People charging policy has been developed by a working group which included welfare rights, service users and carers as well as council staff and councillors and is now in place.
- ◆ There is a multi agency protection panel agreement (MAPPa) in place to prepare plans for a number of individuals who pose a risk to public safety. Providers have received training in risk assessment.

Areas for improvement

15 However, there remain a number of significant areas for improvement:

- ◆ The council's approach to diversity and equalities is underdeveloped at present as the corporate approach to equalities, despite the introduction of recent training, has yet to firmly embed within the organisation.
- ◆ The council has not consulted its black and minority ethnic communities (BME) and as a result the Supporting People shadow strategy does not include specific objectives to improve services for these groups.
- ◆ Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure linkages between Supporting People and health commissioning strategies. The council has started to make some progress in this area but further work is needed.
- ◆ Provider involvement is not representative on the core strategy group as only one provider sits on the group and user involvement is weak within the core strategy group.
- ◆ Performance management arrangements need further development as current service specification schedules only include minimum information. There are no local performance indicators and outcome measures and no strategic targets have been set for the Supporting People team.
- ◆ The outcomes of the service review process need further development to ensure a strong focus on value for money and the strategic relevance of services. There are some services that the council could provide more cost efficiently through encouraging co-operation across providers and with other local councils.
- ◆ The Supporting People programme is funding services that are not housing related support and the council has not taken a sufficiently rigorous approach to challenging these.
- ◆ There are some considerable financial risks to the council where some services previously funded by social services budgets have been inappropriately transferred to Supporting People and further work is required to identify how this will be managed in the light of the councils' revised Supporting People grant eligibility criteria.

What works well

- 16 We consider that the service has promising prospects for improvement:
- ◆ The council can demonstrate that they have proactively pursued solutions to the weaknesses raised in previous draft inspection reports and can demonstrate improvements to the programme as a result of these.
 - ◆ There has been corporate ownership of the weaknesses which came out of CPA and as a result funding has been channelled towards key services. Problems are owned by the Supporting People partners who are working collaboratively to resolve them.
 - ◆ Staffing structures within the social care, housing and health directorate have undergone radical change to enhance capacity and secure a performance culture and continuous improvement.
 - ◆ The corporate strategy and associated plans have clear priorities that are widely owned and shared to secure a sustained focus, with Supporting People linking well with other overarching strategies.
 - ◆ There is a progress plan in operation which is monitored by the core strategy group and internally by senior management team (SMT) and a number of key corporate initiatives are now in progress including a corporate performance management framework and a draft communications strategy.
 - ◆ The council has added to the capacity of the Supporting People team by making use of staff with experience in housing benefits, IT and contracting from other departments. Increased resources have been provided to improve human resources and other capacities across the directorate.
 - ◆ The council and its partners are implementing a wide range of proposals to improve services and a number of these changes are already in place.
 - ◆ The corporate approach to risk management has been improved and there is a draft directorate risk management policy.

Areas for improvement

- 17 However, there remains a number of barriers to improvement:
- ◆ There are plans in place for how users and carers can have better information and easier access to the range of services available but these have yet to realise any clear outcomes. It also remains unclear how users and carers will be represented in the Supporting People partnership arrangements.
 - ◆ There are serious concerns about the value for money presented by the programme and the appropriateness of the Supporting People funding awarded to some services where it is clear that the nature of some aspects of services cannot be described as housing related support.
 - ◆ There are financial implications for the council once the value for money and appropriateness of some of the existing Supporting People funded services start to be addressed and this will impact on other service areas, most notably, social services.
 - ◆ Corporate ownership of Supporting People both internally and at a senior level with partners and providers needs to be made more explicit within the council's corporate documents.

Recommendations

- 18 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team feels that the council should now take action to resolve a number of general, political, managerial and partnership issues.
- 19 We recommend that the council should:
 - ◆ Improve the quality of access and customer care to the service by:
 - ◆ developing a clear plan for communications about the service and ensuring that the council and its partners regularly provide information for frontline staff and service users about Supporting People;
 - ◆ involving users and carers and their representatives in the production of newsletters, information and publicity materials by November 2004; and
 - ◆ developing a range of clear service standards for users.
 - ◆ Enhance user participation in Supporting People strategy and service development by:
 - ◆ ensuring that users and carers are effectively represented in the inclusive forum, task groups, conferences and training events;
 - ◆ set out clearly how user and carer views will be represented on the core strategy development board;
 - ◆ working with providers to ensure that users are regularly consulted and developing mechanisms for feedback and response to their views;
 - ◆ ensuring that carer and users views are used to inform priorities in the five year Supporting People strategy;
 - ◆ developing a clear role for users and carers involvement in the review process for Supporting People services; and
 - ◆ developing the user and carer representation structure, including arrangements for those who do not want to engage with more formal mechanisms by November 2004.
 - ◆ Ensure that the Supporting People strategy and services are informed by a clear understanding of the needs of all sections of the community by:
 - ◆ increasing customer involvement from black and minority ethnic and other hard to reach groups through the development of flexible and innovative approaches by December 2004; and
 - ◆ ensuring all councillors, staff and carers/users representatives are trained on equality and diversity issues.
 - ◆ Improve outcomes for service users through:
 - ◆ development of robust links between social services and health commissioning strategies; and
 - ◆ development of a robust framework for recruitment and selection of Supporting People contractors that is transparent to both users and providers and is consistently applied and is outcome based.
 - ◆ Improve its performance management capacity by:
 - ◆ developing local performance indicators and outcome based measures of performance for Supporting People;

- ◆ ensuring that targets set for the service are SMART and challenging in order to achieve top quartile performance;
- ◆ developing clear mechanisms to ensure that the outcomes of reviews influence the strategic development of Supporting People services; and
- ◆ to provide comprehensive performance information to councillors to allow effective monitoring of performance by date October 2004.
- ◆ Develop a stronger focus on value for money by:
 - ◆ developing systems in partnership with service providers to determine the overall value for money of services that are currently jointly funded so that the quality of outcomes delivered and cost effectiveness are evaluated in the context of the total resources a service receives for supporting vulnerable people;
 - ◆ critically evaluating the previous funding sources and amount provided prior to transition to THB and ensure any increase in costs is appropriate and is delivering better quality outcomes;
 - ◆ reviewing its floating support schemes to ensure they are adequately robust and are appropriately aligned with the supported housing services to encourage move on and to generate some capacity for new users;
 - ◆ clearly identifying those specialist services that may be more cost effectively commissioned on a cross authority or inter provider basis;
 - ◆ critically analysing the input of the service provider's support team to determine the appropriateness of individual routines and activities and the outcomes achieved;
 - ◆ undertaking further work on the risk associated with the management of voids particularly in the small specialist schemes;
 - ◆ critically evaluating the way providers are calculating their overhead costs and in particular non staff costs and assess the costs per hour of support provided;
 - ◆ developing a better understanding of the risks to the lower cost service providers over the next twelve months given the lack of inflationary uplift and develop contingencies to assist providers who are facing hardship in delivering the service to the specified standard;
 - ◆ ensuring a high standard of maintenance and prompt attention to faults and repairs in peoples' homes; and
 - ◆ take action to address all other weaknesses identified in the report.

20 We would like to thank the staff of Halton Borough Council, particularly Dwayne Johnson and Angela McNamara and the Supporting People team, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

The locality

- 21 Halton Borough Council is located in the North West of England and its main towns of Runcorn and Widnes are joined by a bridge over the river Mersey approximately 15 miles from Liverpool. The borough is the most densely populated area within Cheshire and has a total population of 118,208 living in 51,148 households.
- 22 Historically the main sources of employment have been large chemical companies but in recent times these major companies have either closed down or moved from the area resulting in high unemployment, pollution and contaminated land. The council has put in place a number of strategies to tackle this legacy.
- 23 Unemployment at 4 per cent is above the national average of 2.6 per cent and the borough has the second highest unemployment amongst the under twenty-fives in the country.
- 24 Halton also has a high level of deprivation and is ranked the eighteenth most deprived area in England and the fourth most deprived within the North West. Health is particularly poor, with people 30 per cent more likely than the average to die prematurely which is the second worst of all local authorities in England. It also has the overall highest standardised mortality ratio.

The Council

- 25 Halton became a unitary authority in April 1998 and has 21 wards and 56 councillors and is under Labour control. The Labour group has 47 councillors. The council adopted a cabinet style of corporate governance in January 2000 with a leader and eight portfolio holders and seven policy and performance boards whose role is to consider council policy and scrutinise the executive. The council has also set up a number of area panels which are open to the public and meet quarterly.
- 26 The council's revenue budget for 2003/04 is £144.0 million (net) and it employs just over 5,500 full time equivalent staff. The council is structured into five directorates with Supporting People being part a combined social care, housing, and health directorate.
- 27 The council owns 7,200 rented homes which is approximately 14 per cent of the total housing stock in the borough, while the registered social landlords (RSL) sector collectively own 16 per cent but there are no leaseholders within the council stock.
- 28 The council and partner organisations have formed a local strategic partnership and have produced a new community strategy. The Halton forum community strategy 2002-2006 has five main themes including:
 - ◆ improving health standards;
 - ◆ promoting urban renewal;
 - ◆ enhancing life chances and employment;
 - ◆ tackling poverty and deprivation; and
 - ◆ ensuring safe and attractive neighbourhoods.

- 29 The housing strategy for 2002-2005 includes relevant objectives such as:
- ◆ introduce a homelessness strategy by April 2003; and
 - ◆ implement the private sector housing strategy and the decent homes strategy to improve people's homes.
- 30 The section on care and support in the housing strategy includes a range of commitments relevant to Supporting People, with the main aim of improving access to and provision of special needs housing for vulnerable groups. These include:
- ◆ the development of a residential and training centre for young people;
 - ◆ the development of housing and various small schemes for people with learning difficulties in partnership with an RSLs and social services; and
 - ◆ the development of accommodation for people with mental health problems.

Supporting People – ODPM framework for delivery

- 31 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drives 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.
- 32 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority (ALA), the local health services, one representative from each primary care trust, and the area probation service. In two tier ALAs each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named organisation has one vote although the ALA has a veto where it can demonstrate a financial risk to the ALA.
- 33 The Supporting People inspection assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ Governance of the programme.
 - ◆ Delivery arrangements including strategy and needs assessments.
 - ◆ Financial monitoring and management of the grant.
 - ◆ Service reviews carried out by the administering authority.
 - ◆ Value for money.
 - ◆ User involvement.
 - ◆ Partnerships.
 - ◆ Customer care, access to services and information.
 - ◆ Diversity.

- ◆ Outcomes for service users.

Supporting People – housing related support services in Halton

Governance Arrangements

Commissioning Body

- 34 In May 2003, the commissioning body and core strategy group operated jointly. Both health and probation, as key partners, are represented at a senior level with full delegation. The representation on the commissioning body and core strategy group from the PCT and health is deemed to be positive, even though the PCT was only set up 24 months ago and is currently going through tremendous change. Senior PCT officers are also kept abreast of progress resulting from the commissioning body and core strategy group.
- 35 A separate commissioning body has been established and had its first meeting in November 2003. It is chaired by the executive director, social care housing and health. The other 2 voting members are the director of modernisation and primary care from the primary care trust (PCT) and the assistant chief officer from the Cheshire probation service. Although this group has been formed for a relatively short time, we observed a meeting in January 2004 and were impressed with the maturity of the relationships and the level of knowledge and commitment to the programme. This commitment has been sustained over the last six months although attendance at meetings from all the key partners has not always been evident.

Core Strategy Development Group

- 36 A separate core strategy development group was also established in November 2003. This has resulted in a larger group as the membership has expanded to include the relevant social care managers. This change has enabled Supporting People to be part of other agendas across the social care, housing and health department as well as partner agencies.
- 37 Meetings will be task orientated to allow members to target their participation and contribution. The provider representative is also the chair of the housing sub group on the LSP and therefore has a clear and appropriate vehicle to feedback to and to ensure that a broad strategic view of housing issues is taken when developing the housing and other closely linked strategies.
- 38 There are clear links with the Supporting People team and commissioning body and core strategy group with many of the team sitting on the LSP sub-groups and feeding back into the main boards. There are examples where the sub-groups have influenced strategic policy such as homelessness and there have been pipeline funding bids submitted through the LSP from the sub-groups.

Delivery Arrangements

- 39 The council's Supporting People team is made up of seven full time staff, a manager, responsible for strategy and commissioning, a deputy manager with a more operational brief who is also responsible for service development. Two service review officers and three IT and admin support, with one administrative post having a supervisory role for IT systems and monitoring. There is a role for all the team in service review which is seen as an integral and important aspect of the Supporting People programme and therefore has been included in all job descriptions.

- 40 The team report to the operations director of policy and support in social services, who is also the accountable officer for Supporting People². The Supporting People team's responsibilities include:
- ◆ producing the Supporting People strategy;
 - ◆ identifying existing housing related support services;
 - ◆ planning how to address unmet needs;
 - ◆ agreeing contracts with service providers;
 - ◆ making payments to service providers;
 - ◆ setting the policy on charges for service users; and
 - ◆ reviewing the quality of services.

Strategy

- 41 The shadow strategy set out the context for Supporting People in Halton and provides guidance as to the intentions of the programme in the first year of operation. The ODPM assessed the Supporting People shadow strategy as good. This reflected the clear and consistent view that the priority for Supporting People in Halton should be a co-ordinated response to the problems of ill health in the borough.
- 42 The strategy reads as the product of a well designed planning process that promises to be effective in implementing the new programme. The council is now in the process of developing the five year strategy due for submission to the ODPM in March 2005 and is taking a rigorous approach to its production.

Services and budget

- 43 The council has identified 577 units of supported housing in Halton with an additional 2,777 units identified as suitable for people with additional needs. In addition there are 1,422 units designated for older people and 10 units providing very sheltered/extra care and 182 units identified for cross-authority referrals. It is also estimated that 1,423 people use the floating support services that are available.
- 44 The supply mapping carried out by the council to inform the shadow strategy, highlighted that accommodation based provision for people with learning disabilities, at 131 units, is currently above the ODPM range. Homeless families' provision, both accommodation based and floating support, is also above the ODPM range, with lone teenage parents accounting for a high proportion of the service users in the council owned homeless hostel.
- 45 There are a number of services which assist people to remain in their own homes such as the care and repair, the vulnerable tenants scheme and the handyperson scheme. The care and repair agency also assists homeowners with obtaining renovation and disabled facilities grants and carrying out adaptations.
- 46 However, the supply mapping also identified a number of gaps in provision including that there is no extra care sheltered housing in Halton and only ten units of very sheltered housing suitable for frail older people. The council is actively pursuing the development of additional very sheltered housing to meet the needs of frail older people.

² The accountable officer is corporately responsible for the implementation and delivery of the council's Supporting People programme.

- 47 There is also low provision of supported accommodation for people with mental health problems, people with a physical and sensory disability and for people with drug problems.
- 48 There is no direct access or night shelter provision for single homeless, young people at risk or leaving care, rough sleepers and no specific services for young people with complex needs.
- 49 The council received an estimated Supporting People grant of £8.5 million in 2003/04 to pay for the costs of housing related support services. This includes £279,784 for pipeline schemes. The gross revenue budget for Supporting People administration in 2003/04 is £185,511. The grant received for 2004/05 was £8.53 million with an administration grant of £160,820.

Supporting People Strategy

- 50 The council produced a Supporting People shadow strategy in July 2002 setting out aims and priorities for developing services in 2003/04.
- 51 The strategy set out the following vision for housing related support services:

'To improve the quality of life of vulnerable adults in Halton by offering diverse and flexible housing support services which respond to their needs and aspirations enabling them to reach their potential for independent living and ensuring their health and well being'.

- 52 The aim of the Supporting People strategy in Halton was to underpin the delivery of a wide range of national and local strategies to include amongst others, the NHS plan, the borough's community and neighbourhood renewal strategy, the Cheshire probation plan, the government's white paper 'valuing people' and the national service frameworks for older people and people with a mental health problem.
- 53 The Supporting People objectives clearly reflect the council's overarching aims within their community plan and there are implicit links with other strategies such as the housing and neighbourhood renewal strategies.
- 54 The shadow strategy has been instrumental in raising awareness and making the links clear to a wider group of stakeholders and sets the context for the development of the five year strategy.
- 55 The Supporting People strategy under development includes proposals to expand the floating support services to cover a wide range of client groups (particularly older people), to increase the provision of very sheltered/extra care housing for older people and to develop supported accommodation for people with mental health problems.
- 56 The Supporting People team is represented on a range of groups including LSP sub groups to further develop this. Some targets have been set for the Supporting People team but as yet, these are not strategic targets. However, there is awareness that this is a development need and plans are in place to address this within the five year strategy.

Financial monitoring arrangements

- 57 We found that the council had made good progress with most of the practical preparations for Supporting People which needed to be completed by 1 April 2003. There has been close working between the Supporting People team, housing benefits staff and staff from the contracting and IT functions in social care, housing and health directorate.

- 58 In May 2003, the IT system for Supporting People payments was not operational and provision has been made for payment to providers to be made manually in accordance with the IT contingency arrangements. The IT system went live in December 2003 and an action plan has been developed to deliver the rest of its functionality. This is now operating efficiently and will be developed further as part of a department wide IT development.
- 59 The Supporting People charging policy is in place and copies have been distributed to providers. The fairer charging policy was developed by a group which included welfare rights officers, service users and carers as well as council staff and elected members. The corporate debt recovery policy is in draft at present.
- 60 Providers have received contracts and all were met on a one to one basis with members of the Supporting People team to discuss their contract.
- 61 The Supporting People team has carried out a programme of work to raise awareness of Supporting People. This has included individual visits to providers, meetings with groups of users and carers, provider training workshops, attending meetings of the LSP and being representative on a number of LSP sub-groups and other groups such as the housing forum and internal working groups.
- 62 For providers this work has been successful. All the providers we met praised the Supporting People team. Providers told us that the team is easy to contact, provides a quick response to queries and has worked together with providers at each stage to help them prepare for Supporting People. Larger providers told us that preparations in Halton are well ahead of those in some other areas in which they work.
- 63 Although planning had focussed on practical preparations for the 1 April 2003 there is a project plan setting out goals and tasks beyond this point as well as an action plan produced to deal with the issues raised by this inspection.
- 64 However, there were weaknesses in some of the practical preparations. These include the missed opportunities that arose from the lack of a corporate project plan making clear the responsibilities of each department. The Supporting People team has carried out some key tasks such as producing the Supporting People shadow strategy, rather than these being shared across departments.

Partnership Working

- 65 We found evidence of good and effective partnerships emerging and examples of progress in developing partnership working on Supporting People. There is also a good representation of providers on the inclusive forum.
- 66 We were informed that the relationship between the council and its service providers has vastly improved in the last 12-18 months. Providers told us that they felt fully involved in certain areas such as supply mapping to identify existing service provision and gaps in service. The inclusive forum has been very useful in helping to focus on the issues and to give a better understanding of what each other does, which in turn has led to an appreciation of partnership working to achieve outcomes.
- 67 The housing partnership forum meets every two months and their remit is to develop the strategic thinking and identify ways of joint working, which links into multi-tenure provision and informs corporate and strategic objectives. Some members of the forum sit on the core strategy group including the Supporting People manager. However, it is not clear how decisions made at the forum link into Supporting People.

- 68 Although starting from a low base, partnership working with both health and service users are now developing. There is now a local multi-agency vulnerable people's task force in place and there are some good partnerships evident in older people's services. Social care managers are key members of the core strategy development group. Probation is heavily involved although it is the youth offending team who deals with young people. The primary care trust (PCT) is still in its infancy which has slowed partnership working but some very good individual relationships have been established.
- 69 Halton is a member of the Greater Merseyside cross authority group and the Cheshire cross authority group. There are examples of joint working between councils on Supporting People, such as establishing links with Supporting People teams throughout Merseyside and Cheshire, commissioning a Merseyside cross authority survey in 2001 and agreeing a joint statement for inclusion in shadow strategies. Halton have also identified 182 units of accommodation accepting referrals/applications from clients not living in the borough.
- 70 The council recognises that partnerships with users need to improve. User involvement has been mixed particularly in relation to homeless people and BME communities but there are clear attempts to link into existing user groups. These include the 'Halton open' which is seen as a robust consultative forum for older people, the mental health local implementation team and the mental health accommodation sub-group.
- 71 Since May 2004, work has been undertaken to improve this and we were pleased to note that consultation had improved. Users have been consulted through the development of commissioning and accommodation strategies and the homelessness forum will be used by the team to access hard to reach groups.
- 72 Although past meetings have concentrated on improving service user representation, user representation remains low in the Supporting People inclusive forum. The council has worked at different ways of including users and has tried to encourage user representation on the core strategy development group. A questionnaire has been devised, in conjunction with users, to go out to all users to ask them how they want to be involved in the programme.
- 73 Supporting People is struggling to be seen as part of mainstream health agenda. The PCT has had internal problems, including financial problems. The council has made all the appropriate approaches to the PCT, but the health trust has not always been able to respond. There are, however, clear examples of good partnership working and pooled budgets to address areas of service across the council and the PCT, and jointly funded posts in older people and adults with learning disability (ALD) services.
- 74 The mental health trust was only established in 2002 with major internal issues to address which has slowed down the progress of partnership working. Although the trust still needs to mature, some progress is being made.

Risk Assessment and Contingency Planning

- 75 Planning for Supporting People should include the assessment of risks and development of contingency plans, for example if a service provider fails or if an emergency occurs that could affect the services provided. Councils and their partners should also have safeguards in place concerning the housing of high risk groups such as sex offenders and people with severe mental health problems.
- 76 Work has been undertaken with providers concerning risk, for example in relation to ensuring insurance cover is adequate. We were informed that risk assessments are undertaken by providers on individual service users prior to

service commencement. Providers have been issued with self assessment forms and these were returned in August 2003 with appropriate information.

- 77 There is a multi-agency protection panel agreement (MAPPA) for partner agencies to meet and assess the risks of a number of individuals who pose a risk to public safety. Since the inspection, probation have completed work on mapping the links between Supporting People and MAPPA procedures, especially in relation to information sharing and how that information is fed back into MAPPA. This has increased awareness and understanding of these processes along with the multi-agency strategic information sharing group which is driving policies for sharing information between partners.
- 78 During our inspection in May 2003, it was evident that risk assessment has not been fully addressed and that there is an absence of a clear and robust approach for ensuring that risk assessments are carried out and monitored for their effectiveness. The general approach to risk assessment and contingency planning within the council was also weak.
- 79 We were pleased to note, however, that this was generally accepted by the council and that steps are already under way to develop a corporate approach to address this key area. During our reassessment in January 2004 we could see that this area has progressed and there is now a corporate risk management group, a draft directorate risk management policy and that providers have attended risk management training. Further progress was noted in May 2004.

Service Reviews & Monitoring

- 80 Under Supporting People grant conditions administering local authorities are obliged to monitor contracts and carry out service reviews of all providers within the first three years of the introduction of Supporting People on 1 April 2003. The ODPM has specified three performance indicators which all Supporting People providers are required to produce in 2003/04. From 2004 providers will need to produce a wider range of performance measures.

Service Reviews

- 81 The council has made progress with planning service reviews and a programme is in place for reviews. A risk matrix has been used to determine the timetable so that although the reviews are broadly client group based, high risk services will be reviewed in the first two tranches of the programme. Services which have had recent changes and those where there is little existing information along with high costs and any concerns identified as a result of monitoring will have an early review.
- 82 The capacity to conduct early reviews on 'high risk services' has been built into the three year review programme. Capacity to conduct early reviews will also be built into each tranche of the programme as part of the teams approach to risk management.
- 83 However, the council has not yet been able to make the progress it previously intended in undertaking service reviews. Sheltered housing was scheduled early so that it could fit with the council's best value review of its services for older people. To date, however, only the small and low cost sheltered housing schemes provided by the independent sector have been reviewed. This has not allowed for any savings to be made. The floating support services for older people provided by the council are not now scheduled until 2005. The council also intended to include some new high risk services in its year one programme, but due to the late start of the service reviewing process (September 2003) only two other service reviews have yet been commenced.

- 84 The arrangements for carrying out the reviews have not yet been fully developed. Stakeholder agencies have been informed that they will be actively involved in monitoring and service reviews, however, it is not clear how service users will be involved. It is not clear how the council will ensure that the outcomes of service reviews will inform the shape of future service delivery or development of the five year Supporting People strategy. Although the council has very firm ideas of the direction they wish to take, it is not clear how it will ensure that the review process will be even handed and independent for services provided in-house.
- 85 The process of the reviews undertaken to date shows that they currently lack depth and challenge. They are not yet sufficiently aligned with the overall strategic relevance of the Supporting People programme nor connect with the wider social and health care change agenda. Service providers have not been challenged in terms of their capability to provide value for money, and services that deliver a similar offering but at a higher unit cost have not been adequately analysed. There are no draft action plans yet developed for the services that have been reviewed.
- 86 The council needs to develop an action plan to ensure a more robust approach is taken to future service reviews. This will include appropriate training of its review staff and the sharing of expertise across services in order to adequately assess the effectiveness of each service and to create the catalyst for driving sustainable future service delivery. The draft reviews show that there has been no exploration of the needs of people entering sheltered accommodation, and whether they really need this, nor is it easy to grasp the outcomes being achieved. This is particularly important given the lack of extra care provision in the borough. There are overly similar details and judgements made in the review reports about the different service providers. Diversity issues are not being effectively challenged with the providers. None of the support plans we viewed in the services visited had any provision for noting peoples' religious or cultural needs.
- 87 Some of these shortfalls have been recognised by the council and further work has now been identified. The chair of the commissioning body has agreed additional resources so that the team can access the external expertise it needs and the involvement of advocates so that the views of service users are fully considered. There is a named specialist for each Supporting People user group within the PCT or council who is available to advise, but no clear plans yet about how the future joint approach will be implemented.
- 88 The review timetable has now been revised to allow all Supporting People learning disabilities services to be reviewed during 2004/05. However, it is clear from the mapping work undertaken to date that there is too little capacity within the existing service review workforce, a shortfall of in excess of 360 working days. This does not include the time needed for agreeing and following up on action plans, contract re-negotiations or resolving disputes with providers. The council is committed to purchasing external support to meet this deficit.
- 89 In recognition of the fact that smaller providers would not be as aware of the reviewing process as some larger providers or RSLs, the council arranged for the national housing federation to deliver training on the Supporting People review process to small providers.

Performance Management

- 90 Current contracts are interim measures and the 'steady state' contracts which will replace them will include objectives and targets and performance against strategic aims will be monitored. The current contracts include the requirement to produce the three national performance indicators. We found that providers are

aware of these requirements and some had already put in place the recording systems needed.

- 91 An information pack was issued to providers in April 2003 which contained details of the quality assessment framework, an interim performance workbook which has to be completed by providers on a bi-monthly basis, client record forms and monthly changes report. This also contained a letter advising providers when returns needed to be made. The council plans to meet with providers individually every three months to discuss this performance information, which will be reported to the commissioning body.
- 92 We found that performance management arrangements need further development. Although there are service specification schedules in place, they only include minimum information and therefore do not set out the aims of the service and desired outcomes such as user choice, privacy, income maximisation and access to education, employment and health services. There are no local performance indicators and outcome measures which would give useful information and which could help the council and the provider to monitor success. Nor are there any developed service standards.
- 93 Some targets have been set for the Supporting People team, but as yet they are not strategic targets, however, there is awareness that this is a development need and plans are in place to address this within the five year strategy.
- 94 Councillors will receive monitoring information through quarterly reports but it is not clear how robust this is at present given the current stage of development of the corporate performance management framework. It is, however, clear that service plans will include clear targets for individual staff.
- 95 Overall we found that the council has made some progress in developing a performance framework which will include the full range of performance indicators specified by the ODPM, which are due to be introduced from 2004. They have also undertaken some work to identify how Supporting People will be included in the council's corporate performance management arrangements. However, it is not clear what form this approach will take and the council has yet to decide how it will use feedback from users and carers to monitor and improve services.

Value for Money

- 96 The additional inspection work undertaken by the Audit Commission in March 2004 aimed to gain a proper understanding of how support costs have been configured and to determine their appropriateness of this in the light of the revised ODPM eligibility guidance. Our fieldwork concentrated primarily on the four key service user groups; services to older people, people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities and homeless people that were identified as areas for particular scrutiny in the recent independent review of the Supporting People programme.
- 97 The council has significantly improved its capacity to deliver a range of supported housing services for adults with learning disabilities. This has been achieved through creative use of the Single Regeneration Budget grant alongside the Supporting People grant. Approximately £400,000 capital funding has been secured to develop 20 new units of accommodation.
- 98 All providers spoken to said they were able to manage to deliver services to the required standards within their available allocation during 2003/04. However, some of the lowest cost providers highlighted that this will be more difficult to achieve during 2004/05 given the lack of inflationary increase.

Learning Disabilities

- 99 Halton Borough Council ranks as amongst the highest in the country in terms of the contribution the Supporting People grant is making to the running costs of its supported housing services. Lengthy negotiations took place with providers who had costed their own model of support based on achieving the desired outcomes highlighted in the valuing people strategy. The cost of support was reduced in a number of cases. Halton Borough Council has a total of 35 different schemes and only one of these has a Supporting People unit cost of less than £260. There are:
- ◆ 8 schemes with a Supporting People unit cost of between £300 and £500;
 - ◆ 10 schemes with unit costs falling between £500 and £700;
 - ◆ 9 schemes with unit costs falling between £700 and £800; and
 - ◆ 7 schemes with unit costs falling between £800 and £900.

This compares with regional unit costs of £324 and national unit costs of £270.

- 100 The inspection team visited a number of these supported housing schemes and found that they offer high quality, intensive and individualised support to people with very high levels of need including those who were previously resident in specialist hospitals, residential and nursing homes. A number of these services were previously fully funded by health or social services. A number of the tenants living in the high cost schemes do not receive any day time support from the statutory services and are therefore reliant on full time support in their own homes.
- 101 Local care management and specialist health staff were engaged to assist in reaching consensus about the appropriate costing of services relative to need. Personal care tasks have been identified in all cases in line with the ODPM definitions of personal care and are funded from mainstream community care resources. However, compared to other areas, Halton Borough Council has taken a wide interpretation of support. It has interpreted tasks such as prompting and ongoing supervision/support to keep the individual safe as falling within the remit of the Supporting People grant. The tenants we met have very high support needs and most are likely to continue to require 24 hour support day and night to maintain their household routines and personal safety. They would be unable to maintain their tenancies without intensive support from staff to ensure they were prompted and motivated to undertake the basic activities of daily living.
- 102 In many cases the contribution made by the statutory services is less than the Supporting People contribution. We found different levels of funding in different schemes relative to the amount of actual personal care each person required. For example one scheme that supports 4 people has a Supporting People grant contribution of £824 per person per week. Legacy health funding equates to an additional £550 per person per week. In another 2 person scheme run by the same provider the Supporting People grant element was £689 per person per week with legacy health funding equating to £597 per person.
- 103 We analysed the breakdown of how another provider was previously funded. Tenants in this service are now funded by the Supporting People grant to the amount of £750 per person per week, with a contribution from health of £515 per person per week. In the 12 months prior to 31 March 2002 this long established scheme for 3 people received £124,343 per annum via the Section 64 health grant (a contribution of £797 per person per week). A total of 16 hours per person per week is targeted to cleaning tenant areas, and there are 170 hours per person per week attributed to general counselling and support. In another small scheme supporting 3 adults with learning disabilities Supporting People legacy funding is meeting the costs of waking night staff for 41.5 hours each week

(compared to 8.5 paid out of the community care budget) and 7.5 hours per week of a handy person's time.

- 104 The highest cost scheme has a unit cost of £900 per week. This scheme is for two adults with specialist behavioural and support needs. Community care funding provides an additional £657 per week. At times, there is support from two staff to ensure the safety of the individual and others. The council has been closely monitoring this situation given the risks involved and other more appropriate models of support are being considered
- 105 The council has taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the Supporting People grant to modernise its own service provision. A former 'pay as you eat' designated hostel has been reviewed. Some residents continue to fall within the residential care criteria and continue to be fully funded by community care funding. The majority of the previous residents have been identified as benefiting from supported housing and some will continue to require community care base funding alongside the Supporting People grant estimated at £576 per week.
- 106 There are just two small floating support schemes for adults with learning disabilities in the area and the unit costs are £241 and £61 per week respectively. The higher cost scheme was previously funded from the community care budget. Currently the floating support services are provided by a number of different service providers with the finances channelled through the care management team. This is an area for review in order to ensure consistency and appropriate monitoring of the schemes.
- 107 The commissioning body as a matter of urgency needs to review its interpretation of support in the light of the ODPM's primary focus on housing related support. This is likely to lead to a situation of considerable financial risk for the council and it will need to negotiate how the re-modelling of its services to deliver improved outcomes for people can be sustained.
- 108 The council in consultation with its health partners has now begun to assess the expenditure and budget forecasting of its two main independent sector providers. It is tracking changes in funding between the different regimes and is beginning to assess and benchmark staffing and non staff related costs. Particular attention is being paid to management charges and voids. Providers are preparing a detailed account for each scheme identifying all sources of income. This work will underpin the future service reviews of the learning disability services, and this approach will be followed for all reviews of other high cost providers.
- 109 There still remains some unmet in the area and the council has little capacity to continue to develop its supported housing services within existing resources. It has estimated that there are 57 people who need support in the next five years. Five people are currently designated high priority, two of whom currently are placed in a mental health assessment unit, and 14 people have been accorded a medium level of priority.
- 110 Savings achieved from transferring costs to transitional housing benefit have been used to offset the higher operational costs of the new supported housing models given that higher levels of staff have been employed to ensure a more individualised programme of support. In addition, some resources previously invested in residential care services have been targeted to support additional respite care services for those people who are living in vulnerable family carer situations.
- 111 The inspectors found different practices in terms of the cost allocation and the perceived risks associated with voids in some of the smaller specialist schemes. This is an area where the commissioning body needs to develop clear guidance so that the service review team and providers are clear about future expectations

and to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of tenants. For example one independent sector provider has charged a void level of 10 per cent to the Supporting People grant, this compares with a 5 per allocation in a local authority scheme.

- 112 The council needs to probe the management and staffing costs associated with the different service providers. Some of the services we visited showed in excess of £1 per hour pay differential between providers. This needs to be evaluated so that the added value of higher costs is clearly recognised and approved and is appropriate in the context of housing related support. The council also needs to ensure that the relevant allocations for central overheads can be benchmarked with other similar organisations.

Mental Health

- 113 In contrast with the significant expansion of supported housing for adults with learning disabilities, the council has only 4 supported housing services for adults with mental health problems, and this includes two schemes that were previously registered as care homes. Supported accommodation unit costs vary across providers (in accordance with levels of need and risks to personal safety). The two services previously run as registered care homes have the highest unit costs. These services were previously fully funded by health. The full cost for each tenant in one scheme is £1,359 per person per week. The Supporting People grant meets 73 per cent of these costs and the balance is made up from Section 64 health funding. The other service is fully funded by the Supporting People grant, and has a unit cost of £725 per person per week.
- 114 Costs in service delivery increased at the point of cancellation of registration. The service provider reported that this related to the need to increase staffing levels from 3 to 6 to enable one to one support for tenants. The provider has also raised its pay rates to attract better motivated and trained staff and pays a premium for staff with qualifications. This investment has enabled significant improvements in the quality of life of the individuals concerned. Staff are now able to spend far more time with each tenant, talking, encouraging and prompting them to do things for themselves.
- 115 There are also variations in the amount of void allocation that have been charged for in the initial THB claims in the services that were previously run as registered homes. One has a void charge per person of £13,000 per annum, with the other scheme charging £1,500 per person per annum. The service provider themselves was unclear as to the reason for this except that the low claim was an earlier one and they now thought the amount calculated for the later scheme was not adequate.
- 116 A new supported housing service was developed for 6 people to add additional capacity. Its Supporting People unit costs are £398 per week. The lowest cost supported housing service for adults with mental health needs is a well established service that has a unit cost of £106. The scheme appears to represent good value for money and allows vulnerable tenants to maintain their accommodation and reduces the risk of hospital admission.
- 117 In one scheme we questioned the appropriateness of how staff are currently being deployed. One tenant attends a day centre and his support worker remains there with him until the end of the session. The reason given for this was that the support provided added value to the tenant's experience and participation in activities at the day centre. This was not an appropriate use of the Supporting People grant and this has been addressed by the council following our inspection. Additional community care funding has been allocated to service users requiring additional personal care.

- 118 Each resident's housing support needs have been individually assessed and individual support plans have been drawn up to support the submission of THB claims and to determine the staffing needs within each house. Tenancy agreements have been developed and these were explained to residents using a range of written and pictorial formats so that they were aware of their responsibilities as tenants. All tenants continue to have their needs reviewed under the care programme approach (CPA) and there is close working with local specialist mental health teams. The tenants we met have very high support needs and would be unable to maintain their tenancies without intensive support from staff to ensure they were prompted and motivated to undertake the basic activities of daily living. Whilst support staff do not provide any element of personal care as defined by the ODPM, these individuals would be unlikely to be able to go to the shops, prepare food, maintain hygiene and clean their homes adequately without the daily and nightly attention and prompting of a support worker.
- 119 There are 2 floating support schemes for adults with mental health needs. Both are small and have very low costs with unit costs of £22 and £28 respectively.

Older People

- 120 The supported accommodation schemes for older people in the area are generally small and costs are comparative to others providing low levels of support in the region and nationally. As highlighted in the earlier section on service reviews, the council has more work to do to understand the contribution these services are making to prevention and the promotion of independence.
- 121 There are three different floating support schemes for older people which all run by the local authority. The biggest scheme consists of mobile wardens and they offer support to more than 800 sheltered housing units at a unit cost of £8.50. However, the two other small schemes have unit costs of £178 and £114 which is significantly higher than the local, regional and national equivalent estimated at £18.

Homelessness

- 122 There has not been a significant growth in the range of supported housing available for homeless people, but there has been a clearer focus and investment in developing outreach and resettlement services. Waking night support is available in all services.
- 123 The provision in Halton for homeless families has unit costs of £118 which is lower than the regional equivalent of £203. There are two housing providers that primarily respond to the needs of young homeless people and these have the highest Supporting People unit costs at £310 (with support costs per hour averaging £22) and £272 respectively (significantly higher than the national and regional comparators). A number of young people have multiple needs. One service provider supports five care leavers/children at risk and social services fund an additional £50,000 of the service costs. Another much larger provider supports homeless people across the age range and has relatively low unit costs at £110 per week.
- 124 The council needs to probe and benchmark the unit costs of these service providers. The highest cost service currently has training costs of £15,490 per annum. There is a full time project manager attached to the project and in addition there is £26,000 charged to central management costs and £19,500 per annum to regional management costs. This service carries a void premium of 10 per cent. Although the service provider does not own the property there is a substantial budget allocation in excess of £33,000 per annum targeted at property repairs. This service also has high levels of staff and their deployment

needs review, as a number of staff are timetabled to work during the day at which time most of the young people are out at school, college or work.

Services for adults who misuse substances

- 125 The supported accommodation scheme for adults who are substance misusers is small and has high unit costs at £415 per person per week (more than double its regional and national equivalents). Staffing levels are fixed and do not alter as peoples' dependency levels reduce. There is a risk that the tenants may therefore find it difficult to move on from this 24 hour supported environment to one that offers much lower levels of support in the future. The provider is currently using some of its spare capacity to identify tenants who may replace those who are now ready to move on. This work is not included on their contract specification. The council would benefit from re-negotiating the contract with the provider to allow greater flexibility and capacity so that additional outreach could be offered or slightly increasing the number of tenants supported to allow greater economies of scale.
- 126 There is a small floating support scheme for adults who misuse substances. It has weekly unit costs of £131 per week, higher than the regional equivalent estimated at £80.

Supported Accommodation for other groups

- 127 There is limited provision for offenders and ex offenders in the area and the supported accommodation unit costs are low relative to other providers in the region. However, this provider has very high central overhead costs calculated at £44,000 per annum. This in turn results in very high unit support costs per hour, estimated at approximately £32.
- 128 The supported housing costs related to provision for travellers compares well with regional and national costs.
- 129 The council as stated elsewhere in the report has only a limited number of floating support schemes and some of these are relatively small in size. Five deliver support to people with generic needs and have unit costs ranging from £34 to £92. One of these schemes has costs that are higher than the local authority, regional and national equivalent services. Social services contribute £50,000 to the running of these schemes. The council's provision is higher than that found in some comparable councils.

Value for Money - Management Issues

- 130 There are a number of areas that require detailed scrutiny by the council and its partners as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that the services currently provided deliver value for money and are cost effective. These are highlighted below and include:
- ◆ The council and its agency partners must develop systems in partnership with service providers to determine the overall value for money of services that are currently jointly funded so that the quality of outcomes delivered and cost effectiveness are evaluated in the context of the total resources a service receives for supporting vulnerable people.
 - ◆ The council must critically evaluate the previous funding sources and amount provided prior to transition to THB and ensure any increase in costs is appropriate and is delivering better quality outcomes.
 - ◆ The council must review its floating support schemes to ensure they are adequately robust and are appropriately aligned with the supported housing services to ensure a whole systems approach to encouraging move on and to generate some capacity for new users.

- ◆ The five year strategy should clearly identify those specialist services that may be more cost effectively commissioned on a cross authority basis. There is the potential amongst existing providers also for closer collaboration so that some key roles such as training and resettlement are shared across a number of providers and so that economies of scale may be achieved.
- ◆ The council when undertaking service reviews needs to critically analyse the input of the service provider's support team to determine the appropriateness of individual routines and activities and the outcomes achieved.
- ◆ Further work is needed on the risk associated with the management of voids particularly in the small specialist schemes where providing that an individual's needs do not substantially change and the matching of tenants is effective; it is unlikely that there will be voids that need to be consistently charged for.
- ◆ The council needs to critically evaluate the way providers are calculating their overhead costs and in particular non staff costs and assess the costs per hour of support provided.
- ◆ The council must develop a better understanding of the risks to the lower cost service providers over the next twelve months given the lack of inflationary uplift and develop contingencies to assist providers who are facing hardship in delivering the service to the specified standard.
- ◆ Some of the homes visited by the inspection team need a higher standard of maintenance and prompt attention to faults and repairs.

Access to Information & Services

- 131 The ease in which customers or potential customers can access information about a service and get access to that service is key to providing a good service. We found that the council has made considerable efforts to inform its own staff and service providers about Supporting People. Clear information has been provided to tenants in sheltered schemes. The Supporting People team have provided useful information and been approachable and helpful to service providers. Care staff have received information about Supporting People and social workers and councillors have received both the information and training.
- 132 We found that staff generally seemed well informed and positive about the Supporting People programme and could identify service changes or additional services as a result. Internally and externally the Supporting People team were found to be helpful. Staff felt there had been good communication with users about Supporting People through leaflets but the availability of these has not been widely publicised.
- 133 The council has produced a number of other booklets, for example Supporting People sheltered housing schemes and Supporting People long term supported accommodation. Both of these booklets introduce the new Supporting People policy to customers and give information about the changes in service provision and funding.
- 134 The council in association with the primary care trust has produced a better care, higher standards document for 2002/03. This is a local charter for people who need long-term care and support and is targeted at people who are aged 18 and over and for carers. This is a well written charter, which is clear and concise, and a good handbook for users and their carers to access information and advice and understand procedures. This can be made available in different languages.

- 135 During our reassessment, we found that the team is in the process of finalising a directory of all the Supporting People services available in the area. This will be widely available in hard copy as well as electronically.

Diversity

- 136 In May 2004 we could see that the council's approach to diversity and equalities was underdeveloped. This was acknowledged by the council and some work is underway. Corporate training for staff on equality and diversity issues has been established. A corporate approach to equalities is being developed but is not yet firmly embedded in the culture of the organisation.
- 137 The housing department is working towards the CRE code of practice for housing and has started to carry out monitoring for their waiting list.
- 138 Although the council has a good understanding of the gypsy site which they manage and of the needs of this community, there is very little information known or available on people from other black and minority ethnic communities and this is evident in the lack of detail within the Supporting People shadow strategy. Since May, the council has improved this situation and a baseline report has been produced on the black and minority ethnic population in the area and LSP funding has been identified to take this work further.
- 139 In relation to the gypsy site, partnership working is evidenced on an operational level with clear benefits to service users. There is a good level of awareness regarding the cultural sensitivities of the user group and this awareness is carried through to service delivery considerations. The liaison officer has attended the inclusive forum and his line manager is a member of the forum. This has helped to bring gypsy/traveller issues onto the agenda.
- 140 The council recognises that there is scope to further improve its response to equalities and diversity.

Outcomes for Vulnerable People

- 141 The council has used Supporting People to make significant changes to services. We found that providers generally support these changes and are positive about the work done by the Supporting People team to bring them about. The changes include some new services funded through transitional housing benefit and improvements to existing services.
- 142 The council has worked in partnership with a number of providers and in 2004 received confirmation of the following successful service developments:
- ◆ 41 additional extra care housing units of accommodation.
 - ◆ Floating support service for 136 older people.
 - ◆ 6 additional places for young people at risk.
 - ◆ Additional funding from ODPM to re-model the home improvement agency service for frail older people and people requiring support with adaptations.
- 143 Service users spoken to who were previously living in residential care reported a significant improvement in the control and choice they have in their daily lives.

'We can say who comes into our house and say no if we don't want them there. We can smoke where we want to and when. We can pick what we want to eat and when. We have some responsibilities for the house and for ourselves now'. – Service users.

- 144 We found some positive outcomes for service users, most notably, the promotion of independent living amongst adults with learning disabilities. The council's

medium term plans will involve assessing the first year's impact of the programme to ensure that there have been clear outcomes and that they have met the priority needs identified.

- 145 Supporting People has been used to help with the major service re-configuration of learning disability residential care, changes to supported living and improved outcomes for some older people.
- 146 Other early outcomes for providers and service users relate to securing continued funding to enable continuation of existing services for clients. For service users, the increased security and greater independence now available is welcomed.
- 147 Members of the inclusive forum that we spoke to felt that the impact of Supporting People has been largely positive. This is especially so for service users where independent living has been promoted and where they manage their own money and affairs with support and have more rights through tenancy agreements. Positive outcomes for users include the sense of increased independence both socially and financially. Also, in relation to floating support, service users in general tenancies can for the first time access services and help that they did not have before.
- 148 Other anecdotal evidence of early visible outcomes from Supporting People includes a reduction in the number of failed tenancies although this has not been fully evaluated. Service users are already benefiting from the increased level of support to homeless families and the ability to continue support in the community through the tenancy floating support scheme.
- 149 Within the council it is recognised that there is a need to secure resources for owner occupiers and therefore a number of plans are in place to provide this. New clients are now receiving services that they had never received before.
- 150 Within Halton, Supporting People has been seen as one of the main drivers in getting social workers to devise more creative care packages for service users. From probations view there has been very little immediate change observed, however, it is anticipated and expected that offenders will be able to access more services from Supporting People than previously.
- 151 However, we found several areas for improvement. The council has not set out clearly how the changes fit in to its overall objectives and the results it wants to achieve for service users. There remained key areas of unmet needs and under provision. At this early stage of the Supporting People programme there is not enough information from performance measures and user feedback to judge the benefits achieved. Nor has user involvement in the programme translated into working practices, for example user involvement in the review process has not been developed.

Summary

- 152 Overall we judge that Halton is delivering a fair, one star Supporting People programme. We found that the implementation of the Supporting People programme has been well managed. The Supporting People objectives clearly reflect the council's overarching aims within their community plan and there are links with other strategies.
- 153 During our inspections we found that all critical deadlines had been met and mapping of services and needs have been completed. There has been close working between the Supporting People team, housing benefits staff and staff from the contracting and IT functions in social care, housing and health directorate. There has also been good work with providers which has enabled them to contribute to developing the strategy and to prepare for Supporting

People. There is evidence of good and effective partnerships emerging and examples of some progress in developing partnership working on Supporting People. There is also a good cross representation of providers on the inclusive forum.

- 154 Service user involvement is improving and a questionnaire developed in conjunction with users will provide information on how people want to be involved with and informed about the programme. However, user involvement has been mixed with no clear mechanism for ensuring users can influence decisions made by the council and partner organisations. The council's approach to diversity and equalities is also underdeveloped at present. Some service user groups do not have access to housing related support services and it is not clear how these needs will be addressed in the future.
- 155 There are opportunities that have yet to be capitalised on for rigorous analysis of Halton's costs compared to its neighbouring councils and family group comparators. There is also the need to develop systems for close scrutiny of costs across the sector and within particular service user groups. The council, as a priority, needs to review its interpretation of housing related support.
- 156 The major weakness in the current service is the lack of outcomes from work that is seeking to address the value for money secured by the programme. It is also clear that the council is funding some ineligible services. The council can demonstrate some outcomes of work that is starting to secure value for money from the Supporting People programme but considerable challenges for the council remain.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 157 The corporate assessment carried out in 2002 as part of the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) found that there are a number of key building blocks in place to support the council in delivering its future agenda.
- 158 There has been corporate ownership of the weaknesses which came out of CPA with funding channelled towards social services and corporate strategies and plans being produced. The stakeholders we spoke to have confidence in key partners owning problems and working collaboratively to resolve them and further evidence of willingness to take ownership of problems shown by the £3 million additional funding into social services following a number of concerns highlighted by the joint review team in 2002.
- 159 In December 2003, the CPA was refreshed and the council was judged to have made significant improvements in social services and were judged to have the potential to significantly improve the way it works and the services it provides.
- 160 The council displayed an open approach towards the pathfinder inspection with managers willing to acknowledge areas for improvement. Providers and partners were very positive about the council's commitment to improving services and ability to deliver improvements. The council's open approach has continued throughout the further stages of Supporting People inspection and they have been able to demonstrate progressive improvements at each stage.
- 161 There is evidence of the council inviting and welcoming external challenge. For example the council commissioned an early IDe&A review. Reports such as inspection reports are welcomed as a useful tool to drive improvement. Members are willing to change and the council has made changes to drive improvement, for example through restructuring. The elected member with the portfolio for Supporting People sits on the local strategic partnership and there is clear commitment at a senior level to tackle key areas of concern.
- 162 Staffing structures within the directorate have undergone radical change to enhance capacity and secure a performance culture and continuous improvement. The comprehensive performance assessment carried out in 2002 has been a catalyst for improvement which has led the council to address the key weaknesses identified and agreed five key areas for development, including performance management, procurement and recruitment and retention and to adopt a corporate approach to risk assessment and contingency planning. A new performance management framework has been adopted to drive forward improvements and a working group has been set up to address risk and contingency planning.
- 163 The council has acknowledged weaknesses in its approach to equalities and has started to address this and to raise organisational awareness at member and senior officer levels and within frontline services and the council has recognised the need to improve user and carer involvement in Supporting People.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 164 The corporate assessment found that the council has a clear set of priorities, based on excellent information about its area and good consultation. They reflect local and national priorities.
- 165 We found that the Supporting People team has focussed most of its efforts on practical preparations. The council has succeeded in carrying out most practical preparations for Supporting People on time and provided good support for

providers. This has ensured that the council and provider organisations are well placed for the start of Supporting People in April 2003.

- 166 However, the adequacy of service providers' risk and contingency planning has not always been adequately explored. The council and its partners need to monitor closely some of those providers with the lowest unit costs who may struggle to deliver the standard of service required over the coming year. They also must ensure they themselves have adequate contingencies to deal with those financial risks that may arise should current Supporting People expenditure (in particular to mainstream social care service user groups) be challenged.
- 167 The council has used Supporting People planning as an opportunity to develop new services and make changes to existing provision and has worked well with providers to carry out these changes. The council and its partners have developed a range of proposals to improve services. These include:
- ◆ the provision of outreach support for women's aid and homeless services;
 - ◆ the planned de-registration of a number of residential homes, in consultation with NCSC³, in order to provide independent living within the community; and
 - ◆ three new vulnerable tenant floating support services with a capacity to support 135 clients within their own home.
- 168 The Supporting People strategy also includes proposals to expand the floating support services to cover a wide range of client groups, to increase the provision of very sheltered/extra care housing for older people and to develop supported accommodation for people with mental health problems.
- 169 The corporate strategy and associated plans have clear priorities that are widely owned and shared to secure a sustained focus, with Supporting People linking well with other overarching strategies. Supporting People priorities are also linked into the primary care trust priorities for learning disabilities and mental health.
- 170 The council has identified the requirement for improved needs analysis and a commissioning strategy has been developed as an overarching framework for service development. A sustained focus on what matters was clearly evident for the learning disability groups.
- 171 In relation to social services there has been a sustained focus on what matters evidenced by good performance on delayed discharge, which is a key government priority, and steady improvement on key performance indicators within the performance assessment framework. There has been also been a sustained focus on areas of low performance which has brought about improvements, for example the purchasing of equipment and carrying out adaptations.
- 172 Additional resources have been dedicated to Supporting People in the shape of additional posts and there are a number of on-going health and social services projects. Resources have been identified within adults with learning disabilities services to meet any shortfall in costs.
- 173 In terms of the Supporting People programme, there is a progress plan in operation which is monitored by the core strategy group and internally by senior management team. Reports are also provided to members both at the executive and policy and performance boards which have a scrutiny role. The Supporting

³ NCSC is the National Care Standards Commission - the responsible body for the regulation and inspection of registered care homes.

People programme progress is also discussed at the local strategic partnership (LSP) forum.

- 174 The council intends to develop a five year operational plan for Supporting People which will be linked to targets set within the five year Supporting People strategy, for example sustaining tenancies and improving carers and service users involvement.

Will improvements be delivered?

- 175 The corporate performance assessment (CPA) found that the council has made a significant investment in developing its capacity since it was established as a unitary authority. There is a long history of partnership working in Halton.
- 176 The Halton partnership has been reconstituted and accredited as the local strategic partnership. The council has developed and implemented detailed structures and systems for performance monitoring and management and there is evidence that these structures and systems have been refined and improved over time. Further work is required in this area and the council acknowledges this.
- 177 A number of key corporate initiatives are now in progress including a corporate performance management framework and a draft communications strategy. Currently performance management by elected members is through milestone tables and additional monitoring and review is undertaken by the policy and performance board.
- 178 Increased resources have been provided to improve capacity in the department for example in human resources, commissioning and contracting across the directorate. The Supporting People team, contracts and performance teams have been expanded to take forward the Supporting People programme. There are clear lines of responsibility and areas of under performance are challenged and tackled with additional resources allocated if this can be justified.
- 179 The Supporting People team is enthusiastic, committed to improving services, and has a wide range of relevant skills and experience. A training programme for Supporting People has been delivered to all staff and the council is currently in the process of procuring further training.
- 180 An extra £3 million (including £1 million from savings made given the transfer of some of the funding responsibilities to the Supporting People programme) was made available to social care to increase resources, address capacity issues and improve performance. A decision was made corporately to invest more revenue in Supporting People and expand the team. This was over and above what was allowed for Supporting People set up costs through direct funding from ODPM. The improved financial position of the council will assist in increasing their capacity to deliver.
- 181 The council is working together with its neighbours to implement Supporting People. There is a cross authority group for Supporting People and the work carried out to develop services in the last two years has increased the overall funding available for housing related support services in Halton.
- 182 Voluntary cancellation of residential care services for adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems and the transfer of the majority of the funding to Supporting People contributed some critical pump priming resources in assisting the council to achieve the desired outcomes of the valuing people strategy and the national service framework for people with mental health needs.
- 183 The new services that are now in place have tangibly transformed service delivery and there is a clear focus on maximising individual independence and in

achieving personal goals. There are, however, some issues that have yet to be addressed about the eligibility of all aspects of these services for Supporting People funding.

- 184 The Supporting People services for older people are an area that has not yet benefited to the same extent. Most sheltered housing is well established and generally caters for people with low level support needs. There is potential to target the floating support service to more people with higher levels of need. Given the high incidence of older people and those with long term health and disability related needs in the area, this is a service that needs further development. This is recognised by the council and commissioning strategies are being developed that align housing related support with the work of other agencies.
- 185 However, we found concerns from providers about how services will find the capacity and funding to grow and there are real issues already apparent of demand outstripping supply. The council has been able to roll forward an underspend of £270,000 in 2004/05 which will assist in cushioning the impact of the ODPM efficiency savings in year two of the programme but services in year 3 may be at risk unless the council is able to make prompt progress on the areas where efficiency savings can be achieved. The nature of existing contracts especially in relation to how funding is linked to the number of accommodation units could be limiting the opportunity for more innovative use of the funding. This should be a key issue for the council to address in its five year strategy and through its programme of service review and monitoring.
- 186 Service standards are under development and are based upon the ODPM standards. However, the council have informed us that they will also develop objectives targets and a process for monitoring of performance against strategic objectives. These will be incorporated in the new 'steady state' contracts subject to clear information on future funding levels for the Supporting People programme from the ODPM. Details of individual grant allocation for the next three years from April 2005 had not been published at the time of completion of this report in October 2004.
- 187 The Supporting People proposals were not linked to measurable objectives and it was not clear what results the council expects to achieve. The council had not set high level targets showing what it wants to achieve from Supporting People and it had tended to focus on planning initiatives and not on the results expected. These weaknesses are being addressed through the five year strategy and if successfully managed will leave the council better placed in terms of a clear strategic steer for the future development of the programme.
- 188 Members receive monitoring information through quarterly reports, however, we are not clear how robust the information is at present given the current stage of development of the corporate performance management framework. We were also concerned that there is no obvious mechanism for the portfolio holder and the executive board to ensure that performance information is used effectively to drive improvement and influence strategic decision making.
- 189 Awareness of the Supporting People programme and its potential to deliver against key targets has been raised and the Supporting People team is represented on a range of groups including LSP sub groups to further develop this. Some targets have been set for the Supporting People team but these are not yet strategic targets. However, there is awareness that this is a development need and plans are in place to address this within the five year strategy.

- 190 The council recognises the need to build on existing good practice and therefore as part of its race equality scheme each department has identified a lead officer to take forward the equalities agenda.
- 191 However, the council has not fully developed a framework showing how it will monitor and report performance for Supporting People. For example, the council has not planned how it will make use of the full range of performance information to be introduced in 2004 to develop local performance indicators and targets and manage the performance of providers.
- 192 At a corporate level the extent of elected member involvement in monitoring performance within a clear performance management framework appears underdeveloped. While there is a clear role for the policy and performance boards in performance monitoring it is not clear what the role of the executive board is in performance monitoring and management.

Summary

- 193 Overall we judge that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements because the drivers for improvement largely outweigh the barriers and the council can evidence areas of improvement over the last 12 months.
- 194 The corporate strategy and associated plans have clear priorities that are widely owned and shared to secure a sustained focus. The council has displayed an open approach towards this pathfinder inspection with managers willing to acknowledge areas for improvement. There has been corporate ownership of the weaknesses which came out of CPA with funding channelled towards ensuring improvements especially in relation to social care and there is evidence of the council inviting and welcoming external challenge. The refreshment of the CPA demonstrated that this has been effective.
- 195 Staffing structures within the social care, housing and health directorate have undergone radical change to secure a performance culture and continuous improvement, a new performance management framework has been adopted to drive forward improvements and a working group has been set up to address risk and contingency planning.
- 196 The council has developed an operational plan for how it will implement Supporting People beyond April 2003 and there is a progress plan in operation which is regularly monitored by members and senior managers.
- 197 However, there are areas of concern that need to be addressed. These include the need to improve user involvement and provide easier access to the range of services available. There is also the need to develop clear targets in the Supporting People strategy and ensure that plans for improvements include robust information covering unmet needs and the priorities of users and their carers.
- 198 There are concerns about the value for money presented by the programme and the appropriateness of the Supporting People funding awarded to some services where it is clear that the nature of some aspects of services cannot be described as housing related support. The council is aware of the need to address this, has begun action to challenge ineligible costs and has risked assessed the implications for social services budgets. There are financial implications for the council once the value for money and appropriateness of some of the existing Supporting People funded services start to be addressed and this will impact on other service areas, most notably, social services.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Corporate Plan 2001-2006.
- ◆ Better Care, Higher Standards Document.
- ◆ Community Plan.
- ◆ Corporate Procurement Strategy.
- ◆ Community Safety Strategy.
- ◆ Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- ◆ Major Emergency and Health & Safety Policies.
- ◆ Consultation and Communication Strategy.
- ◆ Shadow Supporting People Strategy 2003/04.
- ◆ Supporting People Communications Strategy 2002-2004.
- ◆ Housing Strategy 2002-2005.
- ◆ Race Equality Scheme and Equal Opportunities Plan.
- ◆ Full Interim Contract for Supporting People Services.
- ◆ Commissioning Body Terms of Reference and Minutes of Meetings.

Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ Visits to sheltered housing and older person schemes.
- ◆ A visit to a Foyer, a service for young people.
- ◆ Visits to the domestic violence refuge and a visit to a scheme for homeless families with support needs.
- ◆ A visit to a scheme for people with mental health issues.
- ◆ A visit to a scheme for people with learning disabilities, a scheme for young people at risk and a single homeless with support needs project.
- ◆ A visit to the council owned and managed Gypsy site.
- ◆ Focus groups with staff, the Inclusive Forum and the Residents Association.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the service:

Angela McNamara	Supporting People Project and Commissioning Manager
Liz Garner	Accommodation Manager, Cheshire Probation
Sandy Bering	Learning Disabilities Service Director Halton PCT & Halton Borough Council
Andy Pownall	Halton Community Safety Team
John Treadwell	Council Solicitor
Janet Dunn	Halton PCT Commissioning Manager
Dwayne Johnson	Operations Director Policy and Support
Kath O'Dwyer	Operations Director Children Services
Councillor Harris	Member for Housing, Leisure and Community
Councillor Tony McDermott	Leader of the Council
Paul Mullins	Operations Director Housing
Peter Gosling	Operations Manager Older Peoples Provision
Mike Fowler	Divisional Manager Contracts, Policy & Performance
Barbara Guile	Housing Needs and Advice Manager
Hilary Barker	Young People's Team
Councillor Alan Taylor	Leader of the Opposition
Steve Williams	Housing Strategy & Client Manager
Lindsay Smith	Divisional Manager – Mental Health
Jennifer McGovern	Divisional Manager – Planning and Commissioning
Dianna Terris	Executive Director- Social Care Housing and Health
Samantha Pinder	Director of Modernisation and Primary Care
Councillor Pat Tyrell	Portfolio Holder for Supporting People
Laura Hunt	Supporting People Review and Monitoring Officer

Sue Edwards	Supporting People Review and Monitoring Officer
Kath Howarth	Supporting People Review and Monitoring Officer
Karen Sandiford	Supporting People Review and Monitoring Officer
Marie Marmood	Joint Commissioning Manager- Adults with Learning Difficulties
Claire Coughlin	Commissioning Manager – Older People
Steve Eastwood	Drug Action Team – Co-ordinator
John Webb	Operational director – Adults of Working Age

Demographic information

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

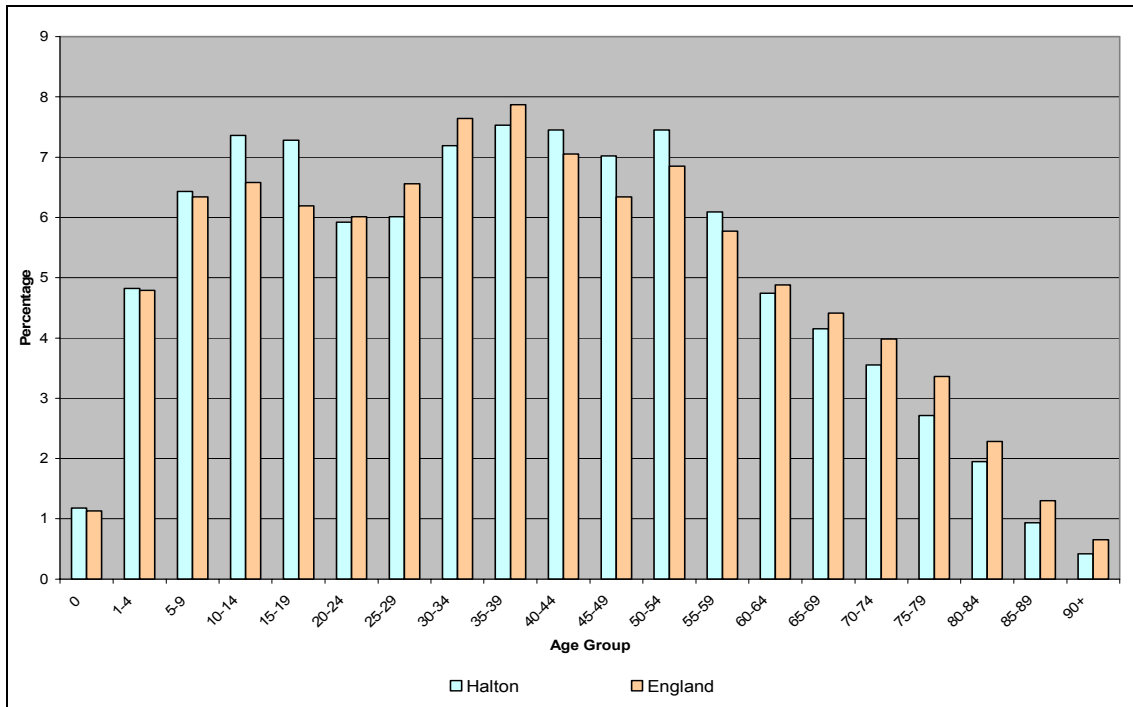
Measure	Halton	England
Population (mid-2001)	118,208	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	13.71	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	2.38	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	4	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁴	18	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁵	10 of 21	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁶	0 of 21	-

⁴ Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

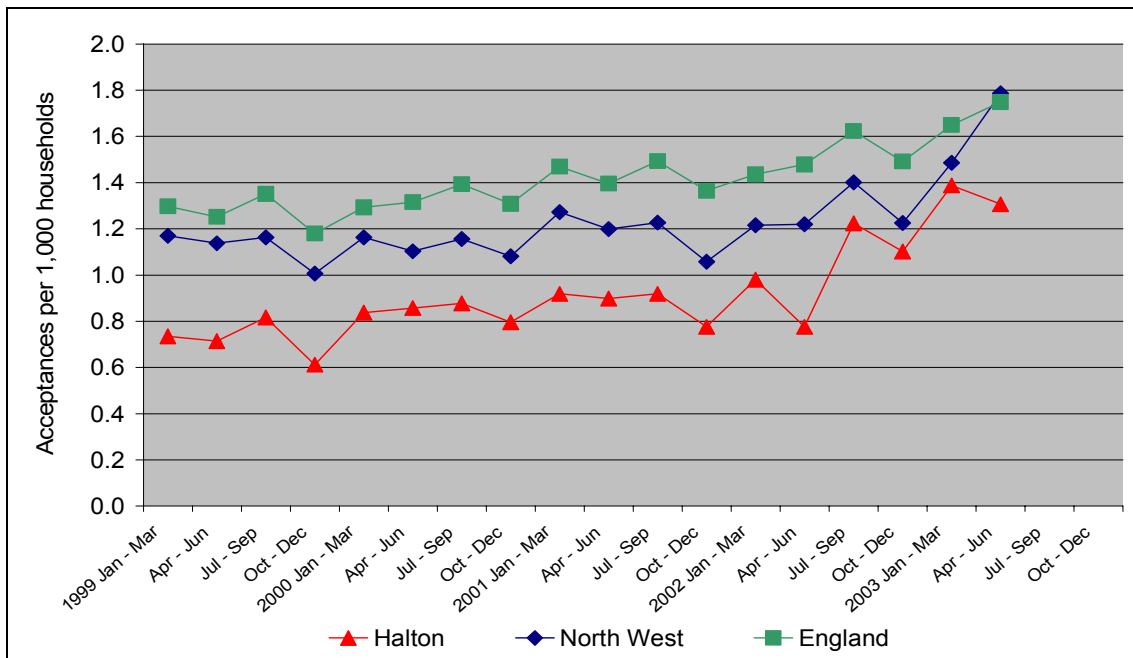
⁵ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

⁶ 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)



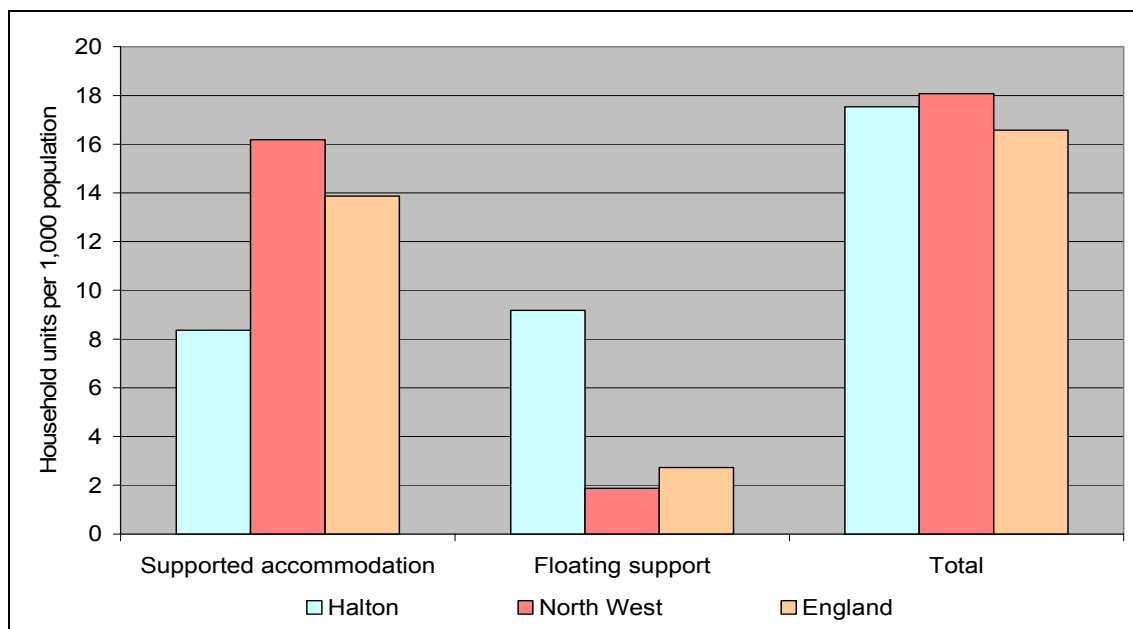
Performance information

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.

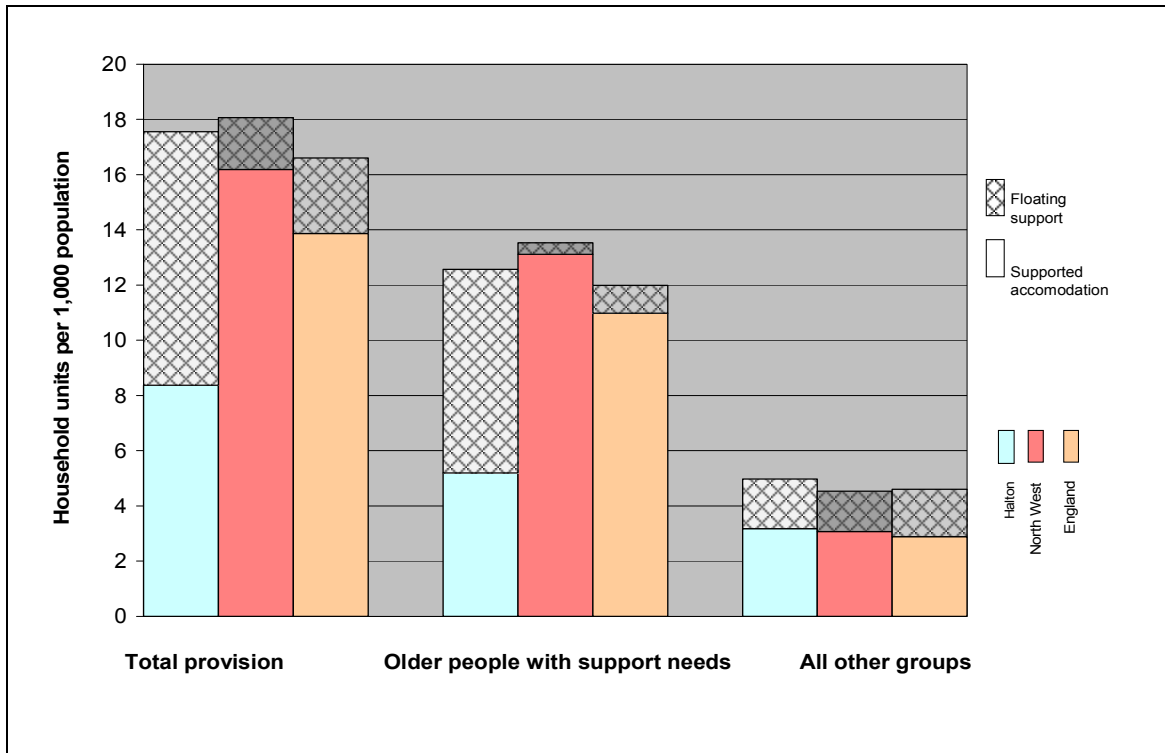
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁷

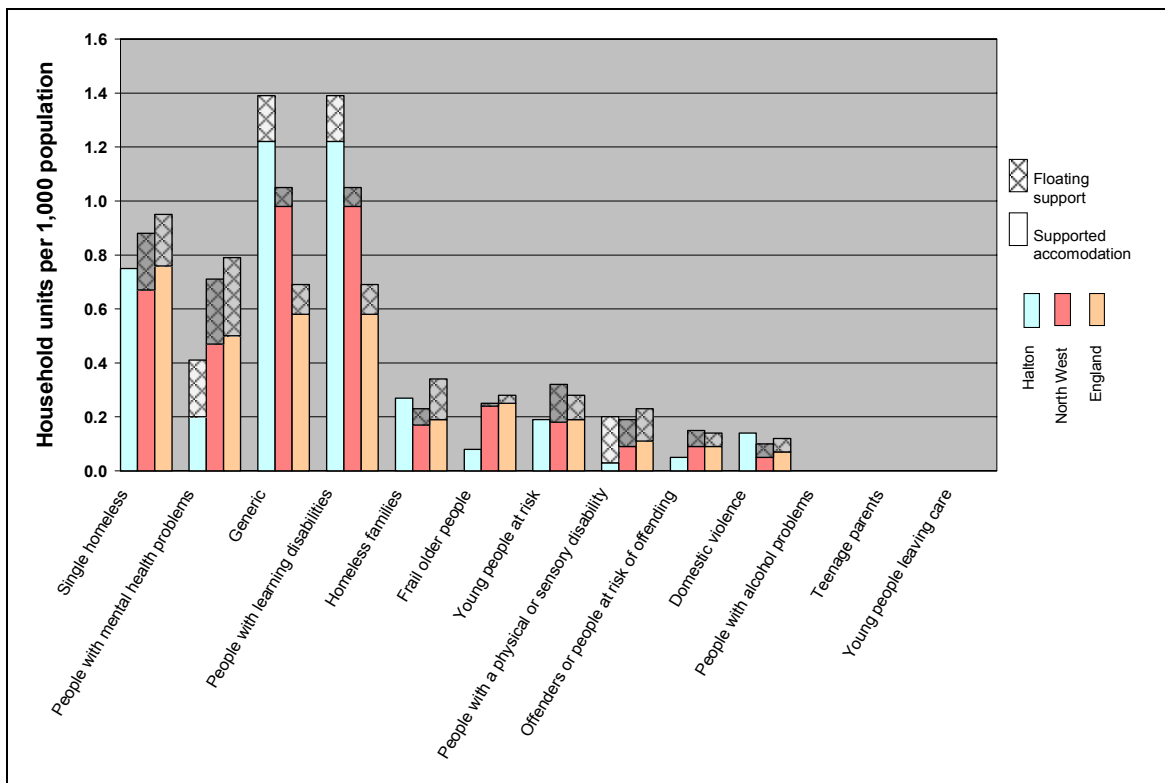


⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁸



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁹



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

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

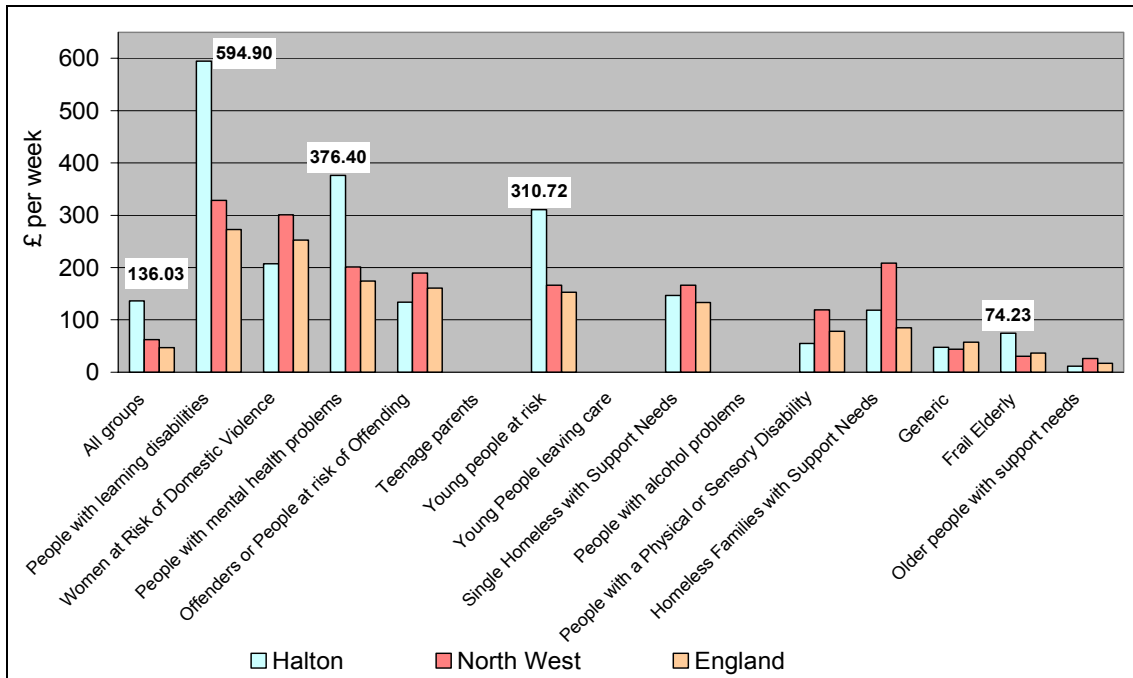
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Halton	£ 8,502,554	£ 279,784	£ 185,511.92

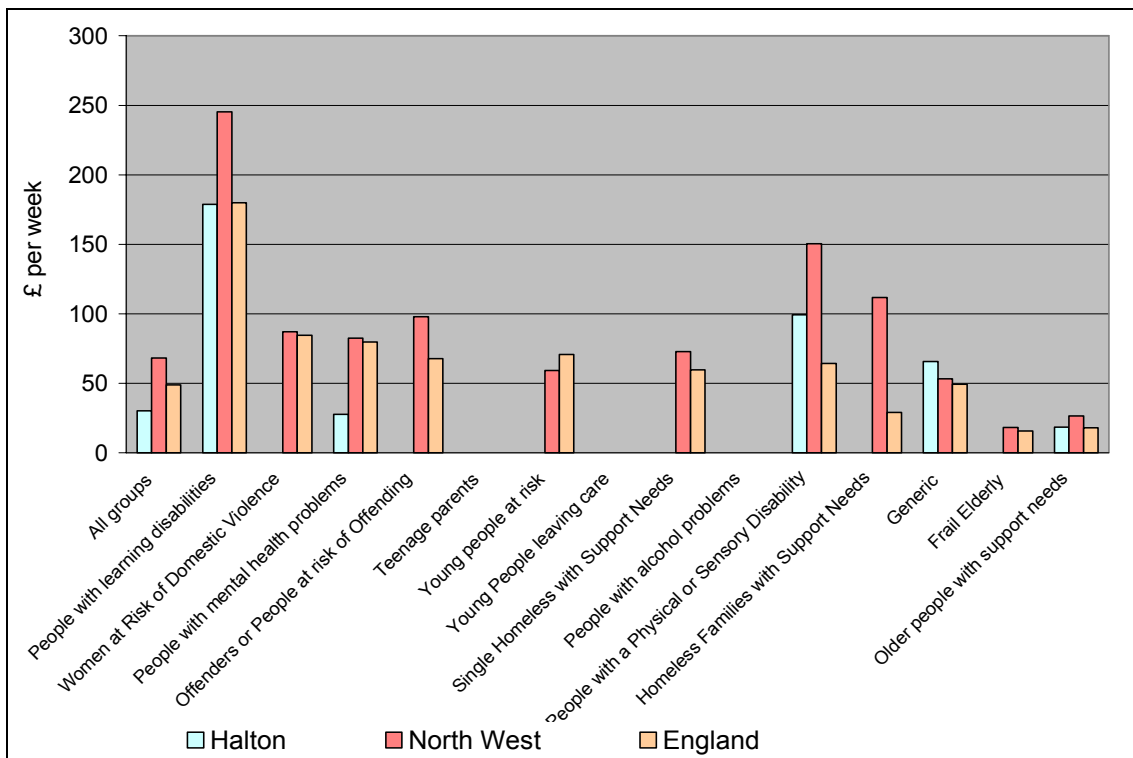
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Halton	£ 1.38	£ 61.87	£ 78.22	£ 238.89
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
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)¹⁰

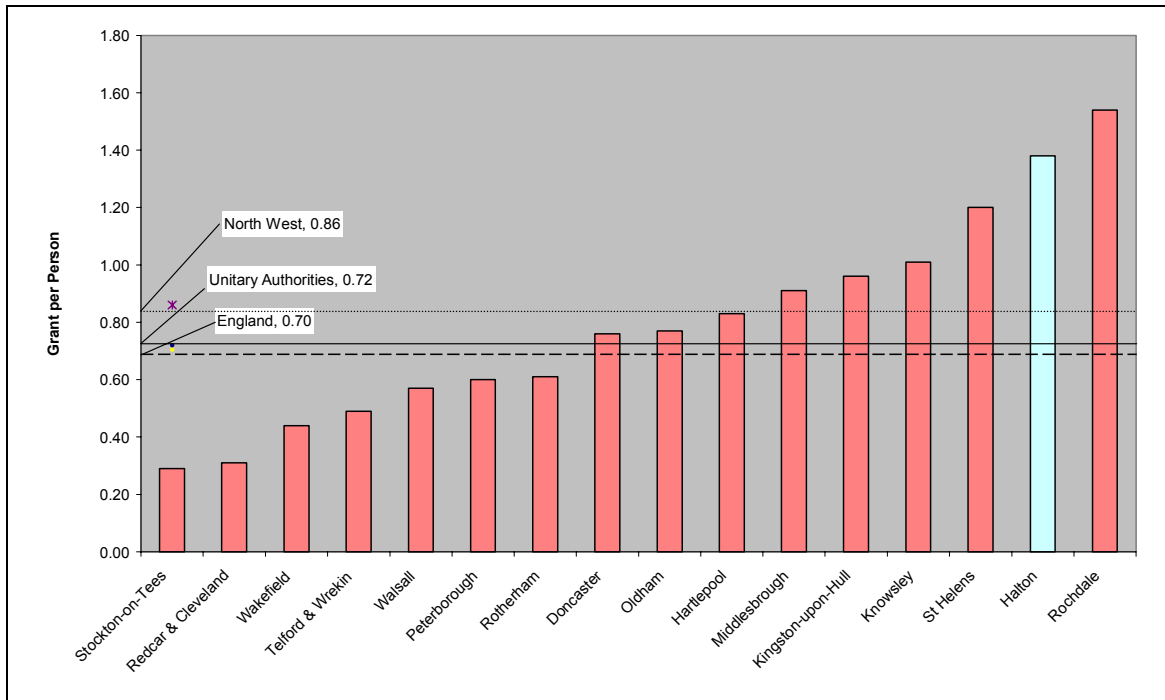


Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)

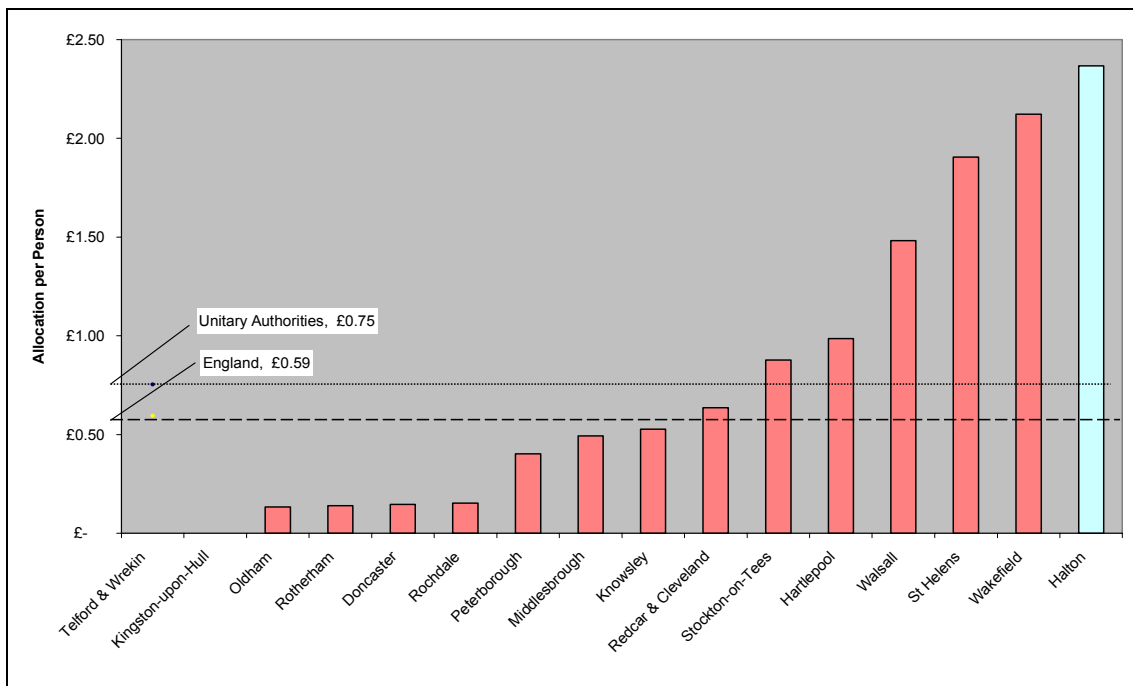


¹⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹¹, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)

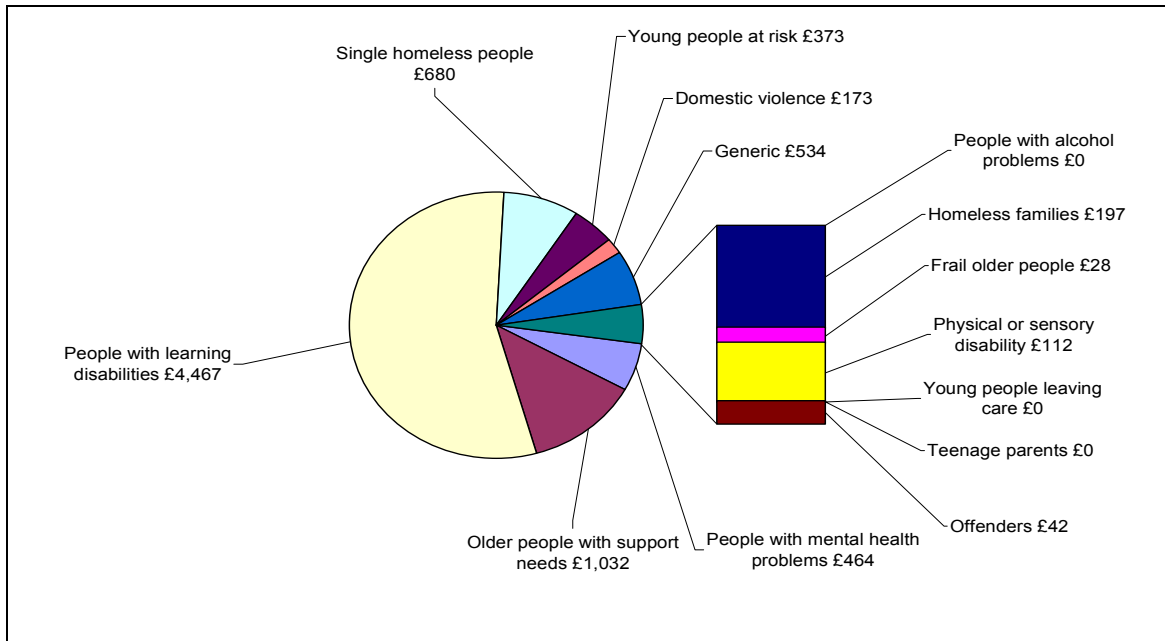


Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils

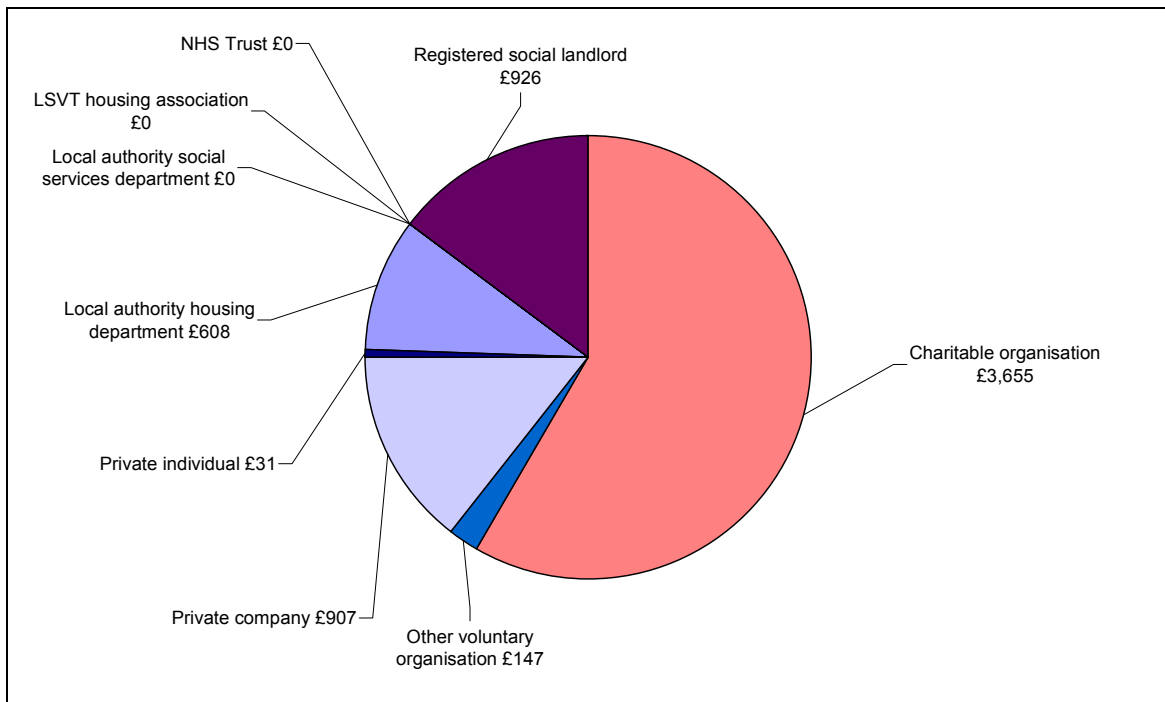


¹¹ A comparator group of similar councils.

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

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

Best value performance indicators

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

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

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

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)

Item 1

Halton Borough Council, through Supporting People, have developed some very effective operational partnerships with a range of agencies to develop their five year strategy and can demonstrate positive outcomes from this in the joint commissioning of services to support vulnerable people. There are some notable examples in work with young people and people with mental health problems.

Item 2

Supporting People has been a major contributor in the promotion of independent living amongst adults with learning disabilities. The council's medium term plans involve assessing the first year's impact of the programme to ensure that there have been clear outcomes and that they have met the priority needs identified.

Item 3

The council has produced a number of booklets for service users, for example for those in Supporting People sheltered housing schemes and Supporting People long term supported accommodation. Both of these booklets introduce the new Supporting People policy to customers and give information about the changes in service provision and funding.