

Inspection report

September 2004



Supporting People Programme

Liverpool City Council

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The Housing Inspectorate

Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and 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 Liverpool City Council was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme and was among 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.

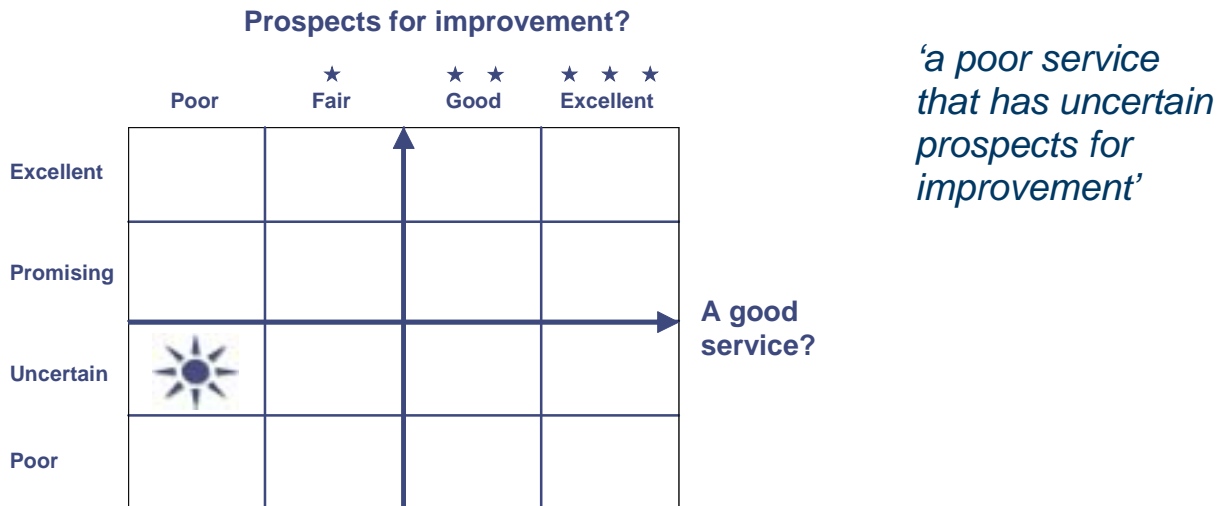
Background

- 5 Liverpool City Council is a metropolitan council located in the North West of England. Its population is 439,473 of which 8.2 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. The council is led by the Liberal Democrat party who now holds 60 of the 90 available seats. In 2003/04 the council's gross revenue budget was £1.2 billion, its capital budget £180 million and, excluding teachers, it employs the equivalent of 16,000 full time staff, across all services.
- 6 The total amount of Supporting People funding available for the first year of implementation (2003/04) was £46,124,127 plus an administration grant of £369,391 and pipeline allocation of £369,391. The grant for 2004/05 has been reduced by 1.5 per cent to £45,786,029 (which includes efficiency savings of £800,000). The grant is the second highest awarded in the country.
- 7 The council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. In commissioning Supporting People services the council works in partnership with three local primary care trusts and the Liverpool probation service. There are 137 service providers and high unit costs (£80.42) compared to comparable cities (£33.04) and the England average (£28.30). The highest cost service is for people with learning difficulties at £3,108.15 and the lowest is £0.48 for a community alarm scheme for older people.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed the council as providing a poor, no star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart¹: Liverpool City Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 9 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date. These include the following:
- ◆ The overall aims of the council and some of its key strategies reflect local commitment to supporting vulnerable people.
 - ◆ Feedback from a number of service providers indicates that they have been well supported and informed, and, on the whole, they receive payments on time.
 - ◆ There are some effective specialist services for people from black and ethnic minority communities.
 - ◆ Older people can access supported housing through a single point and this city-wide access service is beginning to gather some useful information about the needs of the people it serves.
 - ◆ IT systems generally work well and provide a reasonable level of management information.
 - ◆ Service users are welcoming the opportunity they now have, to comment on the services they receive, during the Supporting People service reviews.

Areas for Improvement

- 10 However, we found a significant number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed. These include:

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 involvement of service users has been poor in both the development of the service and in commenting on the quality of the individual support they receive. There is an insufficiently joined-up approach to monitoring the housing related support people receive, and their wider health, care and general support needs, by frontline health and social care staff. This means that people's needs are not holistically assessed.
- ◆ There are concerns that a number of people with complex needs have had their cases closed by social services, due to their support funding being met from the Supporting People grant. In addition, the information that is held by the Supporting People team on the needs of individual service users, and the support they receive, is frequently inaccurate.
- ◆ There remain some significant gaps in services for single homeless people, rough sleepers, people with HIV/AIDS; and limited services for teenage parents, women at risk of domestic violence, people with drug and alcohol problems. The services for frail older people, people with dementia and offenders need to be developed.
- ◆ Only a small proportion (£2,952,000) of the grant is spent on older people, despite Liverpool having a higher than average number of people over the age of 75 and a high level of emergency admissions of older people to hospital.
- ◆ There are issues about access to services, evidenced by the significant increase in the number of homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation. There are difficulties in accessing move on accommodation, due to the shortage of floating support services. The spread of services is currently very uneven with most services located in the centre of the council's area and limited availability in the outlying districts.
- ◆ The availability of adapted property in the city is low and there are difficulties in adapting existing pre 1919 houses to meet the needs of older people. Relationships with other agencies delivering the housing market renewal project are still under development.
- ◆ The administration of the Supporting People programme has not been strategically led, nor actively monitored, by elected members or executive managers. It has not been integrated into the council's corporate delivery of support to vulnerable people or other key strategies.
- ◆ The arrangements for overseeing the delivery of the programme, through the commissioning body have not, until very recently, met the requirements of the ODPM and the commissioning body has not been effective in directing or monitoring the programme.
- ◆ A number of weaknesses identified in the shadow strategy by the ODPM have not been addressed and the development of the five year strategy is presenting a significant challenge.
- ◆ There are no effective commissioning arrangements yet evident and little progress has been made in re-configuring legacy services. The development of council services is primarily led by external providers, rather than by the council setting clear criteria, expectations and direction.
- ◆ Supporting People grant eligibility criteria have not been applied consistently and this is preventing a common understanding of the appropriate use of the grant.
- ◆ Whilst there is some information that covers the needs of people living in the city, this has not been brought together in a meaningful way. The allocation

of the grant is therefore not based on a comprehensive understanding of need or how service development should be prioritised.

- ◆ There is an insufficient understanding, by partners and frontline staff, of the very high cost of services, and whether this reflects value for money. Whilst a small contingency fund has been set aside to meet initial risk in the transition to programme implementation, this will not be sufficient to address the shortfall if services are to be reduced in line with the proposed local eligibility criteria.
- ◆ The service review programme started late in January 2004 and to date none has been completed. The council has not followed ODPM guidance in prioritising high cost services for review. The council does not possess the information it needs to reduce costs, reconfigure existing services and improve services in order to raise standards, ensure that only eligible services are being funded and secure value for money.
- ◆ Services within the council are not working together to contribute to the delivery of Supporting People. Frontline staff lack knowledge about the Supporting People programme and do not direct people to the support that could be offered.
- ◆ Performance and financial management information is poor, some key information held on service users and providers is inaccurate and prevents effective benchmarking of quality and costs.
- ◆ There is weak service monitoring, a number have not yet been visited by the Supporting People team, and given the lack of a joint approach between frontline health and social care staff, and the risks posed to some vulnerable people are high.
- ◆ There is an acknowledged disappointment that the implementation of Supporting People has not led to widespread improved outcomes for individuals.
- ◆ There is limited capacity within the Supporting People team to address the challenges and priorities it faces now and to address slippage in the outstanding tasks that need to be completed from the implementation and transition phases.

11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement overall. We found the following strengths:

What works well

- ◆ The council has acknowledged the lack of user involvement and has produced a strategy to deliver information to service users and receive information and comment from them.
- ◆ The council has agreed an appropriate programme of prioritised service reviews.
- ◆ The council is self-critical and fully accepts the poor standards in the implementation of the programme. It recognises and is fully committed to address the weaknesses of the programme. Since the inspection:
 - ◆ A comprehensive improvement plan has been produced to address improvements in the service. This includes a restructuring of the delivery of Supporting People, additional resources in terms of senior management posts and a reporting arrangement to senior managers and the chief executive on a frequent basis.

- ◆ A review of high cost and high risk cases has begun by a fully staffed team of social workers and staff from Supporting People. To this team will be added expertise from housing and health staff to ensure multi dimensional assessments are undertaken.
- ◆ The council's internal auditors are undertaking work on high cost services and the Audit Commission's appointed auditors are also undertaking work on the council's fair access to charging policy.
- ◆ The council is working to improve its business planning processes, in order to ensure that its policies are translated into practice. It also has an effective corporate performance management scheme now in place and sees the development of its senior staff as a priority.
- ◆ The arrangements for governing the Supporting People programme have been revised and new terms of reference and agreements with partners are being produced.
- ◆ In recent years, the council has given a higher priority to the way it delivers its services in terms of equal opportunities and in improving its systems for identifying the diverse needs of its local population. Access to mainstream services is being improved for people from black and ethnic minority communities and an improvement plan to address the specific needs of BME residents is being developed.
- ◆ A review of the staffing capacity of the Supporting People team has begun and an agency worker has started work on identifying and reviewing high cost cases.

Areas for Improvement

- 12 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve:
- ◆ There are risks to the vulnerable people in an independent living environment who do and do not have comprehensive care and support packages in place and whose needs are not being monitored by social services.
 - ◆ The improvement plan produced towards the end of the inspection does not contain measurable outcomes for service users.
 - ◆ The development of the five year strategy is unlikely to be completed in time to meet the council's financial planning timetable and is unlikely to contain a comprehensive overview of local needs.
 - ◆ There is no effective performance management of the Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ No service reviews have been completed and the capacity of the council to negotiate with providers and to properly manage the market has not been tested.
 - ◆ Value for money has not yet been demonstrated and there is evidence of inefficiencies, waste and inappropriate use of the Supporting People grant in a number of areas.
 - ◆ Service users have not been consulted or included and it is not clear how their views will be captured in developing the five year strategy or in providing challenge or feedback to the council or service providers.
 - ◆ There are still significant gaps in services, with little capacity to move resources to people who are currently under served.
 - ◆ The commissioning arrangements are not yet based on identified and projected need that will ensure the development and reconfiguration of services, in partnership with other agencies.

- ◆ There is as yet no fully developed strategy to manage the market and protect vulnerable people, if the grant is significantly reduced or if the analysis of high cost services indicates that they are inappropriate or unsustainable.
- ◆ The application of new eligibility criteria could lead to services being amended if people no longer qualify for Supporting People support. The cost of meeting needs from other budgets will create pressures on other service areas.
- ◆ There is, as yet, insufficient understanding, at a political, corporate or senior manager level, of the significant risks to services and vulnerable service users, which could arise, if services are found to be ineligible or if overall savings have to be made following a reduced grant allocation.

Recommendations

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

Within three months from the publication of this report the council must:

- ◆ Agree with all partners, the revised improvement plan.
- ◆ Undertake a review of all previously closed high risk social care cases that were transferred to majority funding by the Supporting People grant, to ensure that service user's needs are being properly met and monitored.
- ◆ Carry out a comprehensive interrogation of high cost cases to ensure funding is appropriate and that the outcomes being delivered enhance the individual's independence.
- ◆ Agree a risk management approach to service reviews and complete those of a high priority first, in order to improve the eligibility of existing services and the value for money of the programme.
- ◆ Cleanse the information held on the Supporting People database so that accurate information on services and service users is held.
- ◆ Ensure accurate and timely payments are made to all providers.
- ◆ Develop Supporting People grant eligibility criteria in partnership with all stakeholders and ensure wide ownership and understanding of the process.
- ◆ Establish robust governance arrangements for the programme that fully meet ODPM requirements.
- ◆ Establish effective line management for the Supporting People team to provide accountability and support and ensure the capacity of the team is sufficient to deliver the programme, these recommendations and the improvement plan.
- ◆ Establish a clear five year strategy for the Supporting People programme, linked to key council objectives and directed by effective senior management to ensure that services are commissioned to meet the needs of local people and represent value for money. This must be developed within a prescribed timetable that will meet the council's reporting arrangements and the ODPM deadline.

Within six months of the publication of this report the council must:

- ◆ Address the needs of homeless single people and of homeless families to ensure systems work effectively and seamlessly and to ensure there are robust alternatives to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- ◆ Increase the access to mainstream services for people from black and minority ethnic communities.
- ◆ Accelerate the completion of reviews to ensure that all services are reviewed in the next 21 months in line with ODPM requirements.
- ◆ Visit all unseen services to validate and accredit them as appropriate.
- ◆ Improve partnership working at both policy and practice levels to ensure that services meet the holistic needs of service users.
- ◆ Improve joint commissioning approaches for the procurement of support services alongside health and social care.

Within twelve months of the publication of this report the council must:

- ◆ Review the provision of services for older people within the Supporting People grant to ensure it meets the significant needs of older people in Liverpool.
- ◆ Re-configure its high cost services so that better value is achieved and to ensure that systems are in place to address those whose needs are currently unmet or who are under served relative to local demand. Develop housing related support services for frail older people as an urgent priority.

The Audit Commission Inspectorate will subject the council to a further inspection in twelve to eighteen months to ascertain progress on the improvement and action plan.

- 14 We would like to thank the staff of Liverpool City Council, particularly John Laverick and Irene Buick, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

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

The locality

- 16 Liverpool City Council is a metropolitan council in the North West of England. It forms the core of the Merseyside region and is a growing centre of commerce. Its population is 439,473, living in 187,865 households. 8.2 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities. The population of Liverpool has been falling for some years. 11.2 per cent of the population are under the age of 10, compared to an England average of 12.26 per cent. The life expectancy of children born today in Liverpool is 4 years lower than the national equivalent. Its population also contains a higher than average number of older people. 10.6 per cent are over the age of 75, which is higher than the England average of 7.3 per cent.
- 17 Liverpool is undergoing major regeneration supported by having achieved Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder status, and considerable efforts are being made to ensure that when it becomes the European City of Culture in 2008 it will be a city that can host the event with pride.
- 18 Currently the city is ranked as the second most deprived council in England with 25 of its 30 hospital wards being in the most deprived in the country. Unemployment stands at 5.2 per cent compared to the national average of 2.6 per cent. Liverpool has 40 per cent of Merseyside jobs and generates 42 per cent of Merseyside GDP but its population have an average annual income lower than the national average. Single homelessness is a major problem with many young people coming into the city from surrounding areas.
- 19 Only 52 per cent of all housing is occupier owned compared to a national average of 68 per cent. 13.5 per cent of the total is privately rented compared to a national percentage of 9 per cent. Of these 17.5 per cent are considered to be unfit. Overall there is a backlog of repairs in public and private housing of £1 billion.
- 20 The city has large estates of houses built before 1919 and although they were improved in the 1970s and 1980s, to extend their life, this period has now ended and because they are old buildings they present a challenge for the council in adapting them for the occupancy of increasingly older people. Of these houses 8.6 per cent are unfit, 10.3 per cent are in poor condition and despite the number of homeless families 12,000 are vacant.

The council

- 21 The council is led by the Liberal Democrat party, which holds 60 of the 90 available seats. In 2003/04 the council's gross revenue budget was £1.2 billion, its capital budget £180 million and, excluding teachers, it employs 16,000 full time equivalent staff across all services.
- 22 Current projections indicate no over or underspend. The budget for the delivery of social care services is £137.6 million and the budget for housing is £2,692,243 (net).
- 23 Currently a cabinet system governs the business of the council.

- 24 The council's priorities, as identified in the community plan 'Liverpool First 2002-2005', include:
- ◆ modern and effective local services;
 - ◆ a business friendly and learning city;
 - ◆ an inclusive and safe city; and
 - ◆ a good place to be.
- 25 The council has had a number of inspections and ratings include the following:
- ◆ Audit Commission Corporate Performance Assessment (2003) 'good' overall.
 - ◆ Audit Commission Customer Care Inspection (April 2004) a 'good' service with 'excellent' prospects for improvement.
 - ◆ Audit Commission Housing Inspection of Repairs and Housing Maintenance (November 2002) a 'poor' service with 'promising' prospects for improvement.
 - ◆ Social Services Inspectorate Annual Performance Review - one star authority: Adults Services - 'serving most people well and promising prospects for improvement' and Children's Services - 'serving some children well and promising prospects for improvement'.

The service

- 26 The council acts as the administering local authority for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 27 The programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people. The vulnerable people included older people, the homeless, young people leaving care, people with physical disabilities and mental health problems, asylum seekers, women fleeing domestic violence, people with drug and alcohol problems and offenders.
- 28 The budget for the programme for 2004/05 is £45,786,027 (which includes efficiency savings of £800,000). This is a reduction of 1.5 per cent from the previous year but remains the second highest Supporting People grant in the country. The council receives an additional administration grant for the programme of £372,535 for 2004/05.
- 29 Compared to other core cities the overall unit cost of services for:
- ◆ older people is very low (£9.69 per week);
 - ◆ homeless families is the highest - £359.39 (and £130 more expensive than their nearest council);
 - ◆ single homeless people is the highest - £201.79;
 - ◆ people with alcohol problems is the second highest - £223.13;
 - ◆ people with learning difficulties is the highest - £506.34;
 - ◆ people with mental health problems is the highest - £227.18;
 - ◆ people at risk of domestic violence is the highest - £332.54;
 - ◆ young people at risk/leaving care is the second highest - £210.37;
 - ◆ generic services is the second highest - £89.19; and
 - ◆ for people with drug related needs it is low - £69.78.

How good is the service?

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

Governance of the programme

- 31 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ The accountable officer and the Supporting People team drive the whole process.
 - ◆ An inclusive forum consults with service providers and service users.
 - ◆ The core strategy group proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and the work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ The commissioning body agrees the strategic direction, ensures compliance with grant conditions, considers the outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Councillors approve the key decisions of the commissioning body.
 - ◆ The Supporting People team delivers the programme.

Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under the grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. Each named representative has one vote, although the administering local authority has the power to veto where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the authority.

Summary

- 32 The council has not provided effective leadership in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme. Although it has worked collaboratively with partner agencies it has not ensured that service users have been consulted. The Supporting People team has worked hard and established good relationships with stakeholders but this has been without effective management oversight or support from the commissioning body. The commissioning body has not followed the ODPM arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme nor consulted with service users in the delivery of the interim Supporting People strategy.

Administering Local Authority

- 33 The council is not effectively fulfilling its role as the administering local authority. There has been little political or corporate executive oversight. Relationships with external partners in health and probation need significant further development in the context of housing related support to vulnerable people.

The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group

- 34 Liverpool City Council initially established a different set of governance arrangements to those required by the ODPM. In the early stages of implementation a core strategy group was convened and brought together a number of appropriate agency representatives, but when the implementation of Supporting People was completed it ceased to meet and was replaced by a commissioning body.
- 35 Since the appointment of an assistant executive director for adult services the governance arrangements have been reviewed and since April 2004, the commissioning body has met regularly. There is a positive relationship between the council and health and probation through their representatives, who include senior representatives at the appropriate level in both organisations.

Accountable Officer

- 36 The accountable officer is on a comparable grade to the Supporting People manager and is 'acting-up' in terms of line management responsibilities in the housing assessment service. Whilst the officer has an understanding of Supporting People issues, his role has not been utilised to the full and the post is not placed at a sufficiently senior level within the organisation. In his substantive role he manages a service that provides services to homeless users and whilst there is no criticism of the officer concerned, there is the potential for this officer to be faced with a conflict of interest given the dual role that he has as a direct service provider and the accountable officer for the programme.

Delivery Arrangements

Supporting People Team

- 37 The Supporting People programme administration is based within the responsibilities of the supported living and community safety portfolio holder. Its position is designed to ensure integration with both housing and social services and the council's regeneration agenda. The team includes:
- ◆ a team manager;
 - ◆ five contract and review managers;
 - ◆ an agency contract manager (temporary appointment to look at high cost cases);
 - ◆ a research, information and monitoring officer;
 - ◆ a finance officer, whose time is purchased from regeneration finance section; and
 - ◆ purchased half from an IT post.
- 38 Despite the poor physical accommodation in which the team works, it has striven, with limited leadership and support, to implement the programme. Senior officers recognise that the Supporting People programme has been developed in isolation from other policy initiatives and influences, and that for services to be developed more effectively this approach needs to change.

'We internalise too much and need to be more outward looking in commissioning services'. – A council officer.

- 39 Senior officers reported that the involvement of elected members in decision making relating to the Supporting People programme has been lacking to date.
- 40 The team has worked hard to establish positive, supportive relationships with all stakeholders including colleagues in supported living (social care) and housing, providers and external partners in health and probation, but this has been limited by the inappropriate expectations of many frontline health and social care staff and the capacity and expertise of team members.
- 41 The providers we consulted were almost universally of the view that the Supporting People team have provided them with a good service and they particularly liked having a named contact officer.

'The Supporting People team consults with all service providers on a regular basis'. – A service provider.

'It is good that we have a named contact within the team'. – A service provider.

- 42 The Supporting People team was only fully established in February 2004 and still lacks capacity, particularly in view of the need to 'catch up' on a considerable amount of outstanding work.
- 43 The team have no targets for their performance, as it is perceived that their role is to ensure the delivery of Supporting People through the council's key strategies of the older person's accommodation strategy and the supported housing strategy. Given that these strategies have limited targets and measurable outcomes, overall accountability for performance is weak.
- 44 The team feel that given the size of the grant that they are administering and the number of contracts that are held by the council, they are under resourced in comparison to other Supporting People teams. These concerns have been raised within the council but the response has been unclear. Several posts paid for from the Supporting People administration grant are still filled by agency staff. However, there is now an acknowledgment that the scale of the task they faced was under estimated.
- 45 The Supporting People team and associated senior managers have not taken a sufficiently robust 'purchasing' approach to the commissioning role. Whilst a number of providers speak highly of the helpfulness and enabling approach of the team, there has been insufficient challenge from them in terms of determining what is an appropriate level of housing related support to be provided to service users, in compliance with grant conditions. This, coupled with misunderstandings and confusion about the Supporting People grant eligibility criteria, has meant that there are a number of existing situations where the grant is being inappropriately spent.
- 46 In 2002/03 the Supporting People team did not have sufficient capacity to assist providers, who were not used to providing performance information, and although they now have more time to do so, the amount of information collected from providers is still inadequate. The team estimates that 10 to 20 per cent of services have not yet provided the required performance information and only 5 per cent of services have provided self assessments of the core objectives as required under the quality assessment framework.

'They have positive intentions to monitor quality but...'. – A service provider.

- 47 Despite having various meetings with the Supporting People team, providers say that whilst they were being provided with information they were not being asked questions or challenged about their performance. There is very limited monitoring and checking of services in advance of service reviews.
- 48 Eligibility grant criteria based on the ODPM's guidance, to determine whether or not all or part of the services provided can be defined as housing related support, have been applied and interpreted differently.

'There is confusion about what is eligible for Supporting People funding'. – A service provider.

'Eligibility differs depending on who you speak to'. – A service provider.

Development of the Five Year strategy and legacy services

- 49 There is a plan to develop the five year strategy, based on the model used to write the shadow strategy, which was thought by some providers to be useful although the ODPM described it as lacking evidence of service user inclusion and ownership by stakeholders. In some areas, meetings with providers and commissioners and individual members of the Supporting People team, through strategy development sub-groups, have now begun.
- 50 Although the ODPM does not require the strategy until 31 March 2005, it is recognised by senior officers that intensive work will be required if it, or at the very least some core objectives, are to be produced in time to meet the council's financial planning cycles as this would mean the strategy would need to be completed by September 2004.
- 51 Whilst there is a plan involving work in several sub-groups it is unclear what the deadlines are for producing the commissioning strategies from these groups. In addition, staff resources will have to be identified in order to ensure an effective dialogue with regeneration staff in the seven neighbourhoods across the city. Given these additional pressures, staff resources and their effective deployment to developing the five year strategy is weak.

Links to other strategies

- 52 There is evidence that the council does not have a joined up approach to aspects of housing policy and Supporting People implementation. There are reports from housing related support providers of difficulties in securing move on accommodation or floating support and registered social landlords (RSL) are requiring applicants to wait for between 6-12 months for placements. This means that some people are living in situations with a higher than necessary level of support, this is wasteful of Supporting People resources and the situation could be eased by negotiating a higher priority for move on from Supporting People schemes in council and RSL stock.

Older People's Accommodation strategy

- 53 In 2002 an external consultant led the development of the older people's housing strategy and it has become one of three key strategies for the development of support for vulnerable people (the others being the valuing people and supported housing strategies). A project manager, who reports to the Supporting People team manager and subsequently to the Supporting People commissioning body, oversees this work.
- 54 Although there is active work around housing for older people, it is based on a strategy that is now out of date. The strategy failed to take account of council information on the need for sheltered accommodation, and to reflect the changing pattern of demand, as the desire for traditional models of sheltered

accommodation reduces and demand for intensive support (arising from the increasing frailty associated with longevity) that very sheltered housing can provide, increases.

- 55 Few service providers recognised the importance of the strategy and had little or no involvement in its development. There has been little senior manager oversight of the delivery of the strategy despite the project manager's post being jointly funded by health and social care.

Valuing people strategy

- 56 Valuing people is the department of health's policy that guides the work of health and social services in meeting the needs of people with learning disabilities. The council's document shows a clear vision and an understanding of national policy requirements and there are good links between this strategy and the Supporting People shadow strategy and learning disability housing strategy.
- 57 There is a clear outline of 'five levels of support' – ranging from support for people in institutional settings to floating support or outreach services.
- 58 Partnerships in learning disability services have been sound in the past – with traditional residential placements purchased in a co-ordinated way between social services and health, and a range of provision established. However, it fits with the role and capacity of the Supporting People grant has not been properly understood.
- 59 There is a significant risk that the lack of clarity about eligibility for funding and any ineligible use of Supporting People funds that may be identified, will make serious demands on the valuing people programme that are, as yet, unplanned for. It is unclear how any future budget reductions will be managed.

Existing services

- 60 In response to identified local need, some existing services have been reconfigured. For example, some traditional sheltered schemes have altered their minimum age range to accommodate single people with additional support needs such as alcohol dependency and low level mental health problems.
- 61 There is evidence of sheltered schemes providing good services at a reasonable cost. One provider we met has assessed the future viability of the schemes it operates in the city in line with the stated older person's accommodation strategy. It also had a structured and well-developed approach to support plans including specified 'identified areas for development' and a resettlement programme for all tenants.
- 62 It is generally hard to identify how existing services have changed since the implementation of the Supporting People programme. In interviews senior officers found it difficult to identify what had improved for service users as the result of the programme to date.
- 63 Gaps and unmet needs have not been clearly identified. Developments tend to be on demand. A recent governance report, written by the council, described Liverpool as 'having a passive provider led approach'. Our inspection findings lead us to agree with this statement.
- 64 Strategic relevance, appropriateness of existing service provision and grant eligibility has not been prioritised under the programme. The Supporting People team have been administering the fund in an uncritical way because of the absence of a proper set of priorities. This has led to a provider led service in which outcomes for individuals are not adequately monitored.

- 65 Some providers felt that the message from the council in the two year lead up to Supporting People was to 'get as much money as possible into the pot' by maximising the take up of transitional housing benefit (THB). The level of urgency described by one major service provider as being 'a sort of mass hysteria'.
- 66 The shift of costs from core health and social care budgets to the Supporting People grant has had the effect of reducing ownership and involvement by frontline health and social care staff. This carries the risk of reduced safeguards for vulnerable people.

'The case was a health and social services 50/50 shared funded placement until Supporting People came along. Now that pooled budget has been disbanded and some cases have been closed there is no monitoring'. - A social services officer.

- 67 There is little evidence of assessments of the extent to which existing services adequately meet needs of individuals or provide value for money services. The unit costs of some services are exceptionally high, averaging between £1400 and £1700 per week and in a number of cases the support reinforces individual dependence on individual support workers and social isolation through the withdrawal of day care.
- 68 In some cases, care management was withdrawn by social care at the time of funding being assumed by Supporting People, which led to a reduction in the effective management of the promoting independence initiatives.

'We only review packages of care where there are funding implications – Supporting People is not social services money and the team manager at the time closed the case because Supporting People had agreed to fund it'. - A social services officer.

In one service we found the following:

Supporting People Case Study 1

Type of Service: Accommodation with support for people with mental health problems, nine tenancies – six supported by the Supporting People budget. Extensive individual support programmes are offered, including one to one care and a structured system for working towards increasing independence.

At the time of the inspection, all tenants had an allocated social worker or community psychiatric nurse but links between care and support plans were not well established and, at times, service users had not had an allocated social worker. Despite very high costs, this lack of consistent supervision, combined with no contract management from the Supporting People team, has left room for quality standards to fall.

The case of H

H has lived in the unit since 2001, following discharge under the care programme approach. While the package of care was originally labelled a 'care plan' and jointly funded by health and supported living, application was made for transitional housing benefit and subsequently Supporting People funding. Health and supported living jointly funded the placement until the application had been approved, at which time all core budget funding was withdrawn and health and social care agencies were reimbursed for the costs incurred up to that date.

On transfer of the care plan to a support plan, supported living closed the case and only CPA reviews were implemented annually. There is therefore only oversight supervision of a package of support which costs over £1400 per week - including 15 hours per day 'one to one' care and a 'half share' of a waking night staff, at a cost of £400 per week. Although H's needs are extensive and there is a comprehensive package that is well detailed in a structured support plan, a number of problems have arisen:

- ◆ Supported living has closed the case - partly because of funding.
- ◆ Enduring care plans under the care programme approach have not been shared adequately with the staff at the supported accommodation unit - there is no copy of the care plan on site.
- ◆ The pooled budget for health and social care complex placements has been disbanded, because of the availability of funds from Supporting People.
- ◆ Supervision, oversight and contract monitoring of the support package is poor. Social workers have assumed that the Supporting People team will monitor the extensive daily activity regime but there is no evidence of this responsibility being accepted by the team or of concerns about the quality of care on the case file, being shared with the Supporting People team.

Closing summary when Social Worker withdrew from the situation:

'H will be due to receive oversight from the Supporting People team'.

- ◆ Inadequate monitoring of the quality of the daily support package.

Consultant Psychiatrists' letter 2003

'I am very concerned about her lack of structured activity and feel this must be addressed'.

Added Value: The transfer of the support package from 'care' to 'support' has eased pressure on the core social care budget but the reduction of care management and poor systems for monitoring the contract have compromised the quality of care and failed to secure value for money.

- 69 Home improvement agencies provide support to vulnerable owner-occupiers and tenants in the private sector and assist people in securing adaptations and essential improvements to their homes. In Liverpool there are issues around the funding of the home improvement agency that need to be urgently resolved, to ensure financial stability and meet the needs of the vulnerable home owners and private sector tenants. The service is currently comprised of only three members of staff and a significant proportion of their costs are underwritten by their sponsoring local RSL. The agency feels its financial position is unsatisfactory and is unclear what is required of it if it is to be able to access Supporting People grant funding and contribute to improved outcomes for vulnerable people.
- 70 The council failed to take a strategic overview of the role of floating support until fourteen months after Supporting People started. Not enough organisations were allowed to refer cases for floating support, which led to under capacity. Other services were unable to provide move on accommodation with greater independence for the service user, as they did not know they could access floating support.
- 71 Single person homelessness has been identified as a significant challenge for Liverpool, but the housing market has been slow to respond and demand outstrips supply. There is a shortage of direct access accommodation and one provider reports that he receives 20 referrals per week but has no space to accommodate the demand.
- 72 The poor quality of accommodation provided by the council's own directly managed homelessness service and some external providers is an area of concern. 18 per cent of the Supporting People grant is devoted to the support of single homeless people yet the combination of the unsuitability of, and the lack of investment in, a number of buildings, and the failure to recruit permanent staff, in some cases, has significantly impacted on the quality of the service.
- 73 There is also a problem with homeless families, some of whom are now placed once again in bed and breakfast, despite the government's aim (which Liverpool initially met) that this should cease from March 2004. Performance in this area has fallen recently and may be to do with the regeneration of central Liverpool as private landlords seek to capitalise on the new opportunities to sell their properties for development land, but whatever the reason the situation needs to be improved.
- 74 Homeless hostels get blocked with people who could benefit from being moved on to permanent re-housing, but due to the lack of more appropriate accommodation they remain in hostels receiving a more costly level of support than they need. This arises from the failure of landlords to accept people from temporary accommodation schemes and those in hostels wanting to move to high demand areas of the city. The council needs to do more work with landlords to resolve both this and the levels of evictions that are a concern by some providers who have identified 'revolving door issues'.
- 75 Unlike most regions of the country there is no regional consortium to deal with the dispersal of asylum seekers in Liverpool. This has led to a lack of co-ordination and support for those asylum seekers who are granted refugee status or leave to remain in the country. In order to get maximum value out of Supporting People funding for refugees, and to ensure that their housing related support needs are met, an understanding of the wider picture is necessary.

Financial monitoring & management

Contracts and Payments

- 76 The council has adopted the standard ODPM interim contract for providers and made a few minor alterations to meet the needs of Liverpool. These alterations included:
- ◆ the right to bring forward date of service reviews with one month's notice;
 - ◆ the obligation on providers to notify the council if number of staff fall below the level stated in SP3;
 - ◆ the expiry date altered to 90 days after completion of service review (from 12 months); and
 - ◆ the allowance that the contract price might have to be adjusted subject to transitional housing benefit levels being agreed after the contract has been signed.
- 77 Although there were difficulties in the initial phases, payments to providers are on time.

'Regular payments are usually on time'. - A service provider.

- 78 However, there are still some ongoing disputes with providers about legacy transitional housing benefit claims which need to be resolved. The council is uncertain about the size of these outstanding claims and how the cost of these will be met.
- 79 We have identified potential risks to the council, associated with the inappropriate allocation of the funding, in that some vulnerable people may not receive the appropriate amount of housing related support to allow them independence and the best quality of life.
- 80 We have also identified a potential financial risk in that the Supporting People grant may be insufficient to meet service provider's expectations in the future, this coupled with a lack of challenge to date of the cost effectiveness of current provision provides a level of risk that needs to be evaluated.
- 81 Directorate and team business planning is poorly developed. While there are service plans for adults and children, the council has only just developed a supported living business plan, a supported living improvement plan and an information technology improvement plan.
- 82 The Supporting People team has not been actively monitoring their contracts. Some units have not been visited at all or received a visit just a few weeks before the inspection.
- 83 The council has issued a large number of high cost individual contracts for people with complex needs. Of these £1.3 million are attributable to service users placed by other councils, but there is no agreed protocol for the funding of these placements. While providing significant flexibility in relation to future funding of services, this approach has left the council with a significant number of contracts to manage and the desired flexibility will be slow to achieve, as it is partly dependent on people moving on. As a result of the high numbers of spot contracts the council is now considering the consolidation of contracts.

Financial Monitoring and Management Systems

- 84 In 2003/04 the grant was under spent by £1.5 million, due largely to suspended contracts, the fact that some providers with subsidy contracts did not make

applications for further subsidies on behalf of service users and some savings due to the termination of some short term contracts.

- 85 In a number of cases where there are high levels of health or social care needs, the Supporting People budget is carrying the largest share of the costs. We consider this to be inappropriate in a large number of cases. For example, in two cases the health component is much less than the Supporting People contribution and yet these were fully funded health placements prior to the advent of Supporting People. In other cases the care component of the package is only one seventh of the overall cost of £3,500 per week, despite the service user clearly being very disabled and requiring a predominantly 'care' orientated plan.
- 86 A number of very high cost/low volume services have been developed - including high ratios of individual support to two residents in one unit with five staff. Unit costs are very high and whilst the regime gives the user real benefits regarding choice and flexibility of activities, not all of these activities are eligible for Supporting People funding, according to ODPM guidance, and are being provided at a very high cost. Some service managers did not know their unit costs or if health or social care were paying a proportion of the costs.
- 87 One provider based their initial assessment of Supporting People charges on a time and motion study of scheme managers. This resulted in a low level of charge in relation to city wide, regional and national comparators. Since this point the new emphasis on support planning has increased the actual amount of time scheme managers devoted to Supporting People tasks, but without a related increase in charges. The service concerned has requested an inflationary increase from the council but at the time of the inspection they had not received a response.
- 88 A number of services offer 24 hour support, which will lead to a significant risk for the council, if the subsequent service reviews determine that only a limited number of hours are truly housing related support and attributable to Supporting People grant funding.
- 89 There have been concerns regarding the manner in which one provider secured initially transitional housing benefit, and now Supporting People funding, as both landlord and support provider and there is no evidence on file of an independent assessment of need for each service user.
- 90 A number of schemes were developed at a very late stage and there are still outstanding issues regarding the agreement of some of the claims. There is insufficient understanding of the very high costs of services and whether these reflect value for money. Whilst a small contingency fund has been set aside this would not meet the needs of providers or service users if services had to be reduced. This, alongside the limited progress that was made on service reviews, puts significant additional pressures on the council's ability to commission new services where there is unmet need.
- 91 The council holds incorrect information about the number of people being supported, thereby making the analysis of the costs of services unreliable and payments for these people questionable.
- 92 There have been various cases where the council's housing benefit section failed to process papers in time or simply lost papers. As a result some existing schemes are not getting the funding that they were. The council's figures on those receiving support are based on the numbers that would have been receiving support if housing benefit had processed claims as expected. When payments are late, it is often due to the poor service delivered by housing benefit.

Benefits Work in Progress

Week commencing	01-Mar-04	RAG Status
Work type		
New Claims target	9,168	
Actual (inc pending)	9,998	
Pended	1247	
Actual work outstanding	8,751	GREEN
Renewals target	357	
Actual (inc pending)	4,145	
Pended	308	
Actual work outstanding	3,837	RED
Changes & cancellations target	4,104	
Actual (inc pending)	9,154	
Pended	86	
Actual work outstanding	9,068	RED
Enquiries target	8,627	
Actual work outstanding	9,715	AMBER

- 93 There was limited professional expertise available to support housing benefit officers when making judgements about the appropriateness of THB claims, and the volume of work prior to the end of 31 March 2003 did not allow adequate scrutiny of costs. There was no corporate ownership of the situation or any attempt to rectify it by allocating additional resources.
- 94 Delays in processing housing benefit claims are currently hampering the viability of some Supporting People service providers and making them reluctant to take on people with more chaotic lifestyles, including homeless people, although this is an area identified by the council as being in need of improvement.

Service reviews

- 95 The service review process is central to ensuring that services are effective, provide good value for money and comply with the Supporting People grant conditions.

Programme development and implementation

- 96 The commissioning body agreed the service review programme for Supporting People services on 31 January 2003. The priorities of the programme are to review:
- ◆ in year one: Homelessness services, adult placement, dispersed alarms, and high cost services;
 - ◆ in year two: Learning difficulties and offender services; and
 - ◆ in year three: Service for people with mental problems and older people.
- 97 The council began its review programme by considering homelessness services and the knowledge from this implementation is being used to develop a project plan timetable for future reviews of other services.
- 98 Despite the review programme being agreed in January 2003, no service reviews have yet been completed. Thirty two are 'in hand' and some began in January 2004. As a result, the outcomes from reviews have yet to be agreed or reported to the commissioning body.

- 99 Despite the prioritisation of the reviews we cannot see how the programme priorities were determined, or whether service providers were engaged in the process of determining them
- 100 A large number of services have not yet had validation visits to check that they exist, some are not accredited and the lack of performance returns and the level of information being captured are hampering the process. Providers were told when to expect their reviews but for most, these dates have long since passed.
- 101 The extent of high cost services and the issue of poor quality and inappropriate services make service users vulnerable. If the reviews uncover poor services or if cuts in the Supporting People grant mean support packages cannot be provided there will be considerable pressure on other budgets to address the shortfall.
- 102 Given the significance of high cost services it is difficult to understand why these were not reviewed early. Value for money work is being undertaken but this is separate from reviews.
- 103 In house services have some intensive management infrastructures and are unlikely to offer best value when compared to other market sectors.

Service providers and users understanding of the review process

- 104 The few providers who have had a service review spoke well of the 'process' although they have yet to learn of the outcomes.

Value for money

- 105 The council has recognised that high cost services and their value for money (VFM) are major issues and have appointed an agency worker to focus on this area and report to the platinum cut group and the commissioning body.
- 106 Despite the knowledge that the council has some of the highest costs of services in England there has been little attention until recently to analysing and addressing the reasons for this.
- 107 There is a lack of clarity as to how the work of the officer analysing high cost cases fits with the wider service review programme or contract/performance monitoring. At present no VFM reviews have been completed, no services revised and no costs reduced.
- 108 There is still more work to be done in terms of benchmarking costs with other providers, nationally and locally and comparing quality with those who have mid to low costs but it is unlikely that this will be done by the end of June 2004, when the high cost worker's contract ends. Housing services have very intensive management infrastructures and when compared to others are not likely to offer best value.
- 109 Internal audit sampled block subsidy contracts payments to 15 providers in August 2003 (totalling £158,000) but no anomalies were identified. They also identified 15 block gross contracts totalling £218,000 but no high cost schemes were sampled.
- 110 The council sets great store on value for money in all its services but it has admitted that this has not been applied to the Supporting People programme and securing best value has not a priority in these services to date.
- 111 High cost services have been adopted without critical re-evaluation. Managers have said that this is to ensure that a 'stable state' of provision prevailed at the time of transfer to the Supporting People budget on 1 April 2003. However, the subsequent failure to review services has led to this situation continuing some 17 months into the programme, some service users receiving very extensive and

expensive support services whilst other groups have very little service and an overall unstable situation.

- 112 One floating support services has been left with 20 per cent under capacity at the cost of £300,000 a year as the council did not allow a wide number of different agencies to make referrals for floating support. In addition a significant number of those referred will have had lower support needs than is justified by a floating support service that costs twice the national average.
- 113 There is limited availability of services across all housing tenures as yet so the focus on prevention is patchy and not driven at a strategic level. There are a number of older people who would benefit from tenancy support but are not being enabled to access it. This could lead to more costly home care or residential care costs being delivered in a crisis when they are unable to cope.
- 114 The council is allowing Supporting People service providers to charge a large amount of 'on costs' for their services. One scheme is charging an on cost of £18,000 for the service it provides to one person. Some services are providing services in close proximity, for example in adjacent houses, and charge 'on costs' on each property, with no attempt to reduce the charges by managing the services more effectively.
- 115 Some scheme costs are high in some cases due to the failure of mainstream health and social care agencies to engage with the service user. For example, one service user we met did not want to attend day care and there was general agreement that it did not meet her needs. No further assessment of needs has been carried out and the case has drifted with Supporting People bearing the majority of the costs and no social interaction being provided for the service user.
- 116 There are issues about the level of understanding and consistency between services provided by health and by social care and little understanding of their responsibility for monitoring the outcomes for vulnerable individuals and checking whether VFM is being obtained.
- 117 A number of services (including low cost services) are undertaking tasks that fall outside the remit of housing related support. These include services that should be provided via health and social care funding. For example, in some schemes, where case workers have less than five service users each, they do not have sufficient to do and as a result sometimes only spend a few hours with each service user, carrying out tasks directly related to their needs. However, administration and other indirect tasks take up a high percentage of their time. The Supporting People team does not appear to have the capacity to identify and address these issues.
- 118 There is a real issue about the future sustainability of services and the risks to very vulnerable individuals when revised eligibility criteria are applied and services reviewed. Without Supporting People funding, health and social care would have been unable to establish such high cost and individualised care packages and there will be consequences of reducing the level of support if this is found not to be entirely housing related support as is evident from a number of services we visited.
- 119 New local eligibility criteria has not yet been agreed. There are high cost schemes where the same person or people provide the care and housing related support. Over half the funding is supplied by Supporting People but the vast majority of the service is clearly care, not housing related support.

User involvement & Partnerships

Service users

- 120 The council have accepted that this is an area of weakness and has now agreed a strategy for including, consulting and communicating with service users. However, this will require time and resources for implementation and these have not yet been agreed nor secured. Supporting People contract managers are now addressing the previous lack of inclusion by fully involving service users in the review of their services and some providers have introduced very inclusive approaches.
- 121 In addition to the questionnaire that is completed during the review, a considerable amount of time is being taken as part of the validation visit to discover how individual users rate the service that they are receiving.
- 122 The Supporting People website is inadequate and does not provide the information it should - as a result it is rarely used by providers or service users. In terms of providing an opportunity for service users, carers or providers to provide feedback or comment via the web, there are no facilities to do this; an opportunity to contribute to the development of Supporting People is therefore lost.

Service Providers

- 123 Many service providers felt that there was a lack of information about what services are available and feel that if they were better informed they could help each other, particularly with floating support.
- 124 We received positive feedback about the newsletter sent to service providers.

'The Supporting People newsletter is very good, easy to understand and informative'. - A service provider.

Cross authority and other relevant groups

- 125 The council has strong local housing partnerships, good links with other Merseyside councils and evidence of good cross agency partnership working on crime and disorder, older people's accommodation and substance misuse strategies.
- 126 Although at the individual level there are positive relationships the connections between mainstream housing, health and social care individual planning systems are currently disjointed. There is weak practice in undertaking a holistic focus on needs and agreeing jointly how they will be addressed.

Customer care, access to services & information

- 127 The document 'better care: higher standards' is now in its fourth edition in Liverpool and recognises its duty to inform the public about the services they can expect to receive from the housing, health and social care and support services in the city. It has been revised from previous versions to take account of the responses from the public and other stakeholders for example, the use of jargon has been minimised. However, it has not been revised to include reference to Supporting People and does not have a common layout for the sections for different needs groups, this makes it difficult to pick out common themes, for example, what new schemes, if any, are proposed for particular groups or where to contact if users, their carers or advocates wish to discuss access to services.
- 128 In terms of information, there are examples of users being provided with a range of information relating to their housing related support services and some

recipients of floating support services receiving information from their registered social landlord, as well as the support service provider.

- 129 A range of information in different formats has been provided to enable people to be aware of the Supporting People programme, but they would benefit from greater service user input to improve their wider accessibility.
- 130 On the council's website there is some information on the general services available (basically social services) but nothing on housing related support services and there is nothing on fairer charging.
- 131 It is recognised by senior officers involved with the Supporting People programme that the service has not engaged with the developing network of 'one-stop' shops and that information on Supporting People has yet to be made readily available from these sources.
- 132 There are issues in respect of the location of services and where the people that need them live. In some areas services have not been developed locally leading to difficulties in accessing them.
- 133 Access to some services is easy and direct and contributes to prevention of deterioration in the issues/conditions faced by the vulnerable person supported. One unit that receives referrals from landlords who are worried about tenants in difficulty, are able to intervene with floating support to try and avoid a crisis and make accommodation with support available if required.
- 134 Service users can access supported housing through a single point of access and this is beginning to gather information about the needs of the people it serves.

Diversity

- 135 Within the community strategy for Liverpool there was a commitment to delivering a black and minority ethnic (BME) communities housing strategy and action plan. These were developed in consultation with stakeholders and launched last April to ensure race equality and equal opportunities in terms of housing and neighbourhood services.
- 136 Housing strategy statement update 2003-2006 has key action to assess and meet the needs of BME communities.
- 137 Recent changes, allowing BME housing associations to make referrals to mainstream services have meant better access to mainstream floating support services for people from BME communities and the Supporting People team is currently working with one housing association to develop accessible and lifetime homes for older people.
- 138 Where the Supporting People team found that floating support providers were not getting enough referrals, they placed BME agencies at the top of the list that advertises the service, in order to encourage BME referrals.
- 139 Whilst there are some specialist providers, there are still gaps in service provision and a lack of access to mainstream services by BME communities.
- 140 Diversity work within the wider housing department is being developed but is not yet adequately integrated with the Supporting People work plan, to widen access for minority groups.
- 141 The council recognises that the BME community regard their need for service development on housing issues as having been ignored and there has been an effort made to redress this. However, there is still a high level of resentment from some BME communities towards the council due to lack of consultation, gaps in

understanding of their needs and firm proposals to create new services to meet those needs.

- 142 There are no Supporting People services specifically for people with HIV and AIDS and the service for travellers is limited. A service for offenders was developed without reference, by the providers, to probation and has created some concern because of the level of risk the service users pose to the community.

Outcomes for service users

- 143 There are examples of floating support services that have been recently developed in Liverpool and are appreciated by users. These allow people with mild learning disabilities to live independently within the community and in their own homes.
- 144 Since the introduction of Supporting People, housing related support plans have been well developed and documented in a number of cases. Some services use 'Essential Lifestyle' plans, and whilst this is positive practice, they would benefit from a clearer overview of housing related support needs.
- 145 In some cases, providers have a limited focus on outcomes or personal targets, and a weak focus on promoting independence and move on from services. Goals have not been adequately reviewed or updated in other cases that we investigated. There is insufficient capacity within the Supporting People team to proactively monitor this.
- 146 Resettlement plans are mixed. While some agencies for single homeless men are good systems of planning 'move on' accommodation and have developed a range of flats and associated floating support, others have little forward planning and their regimes do not build skills for independence, for example in one service we looked at cooking is an activity carried out by the 'staff' while the tenant watches television and drinks tea. This approach does not meet the ODPM eligibility criteria for Supporting People funding.
- 147 Some services for homeless people are in poor physical condition and have been described as being 'like the workhouses of the 1910's'. One in particular is in dire need of re-decorating, comfortable furnishings, decent equipment and support for the staff, but at the time of the inspection no such support was forthcoming. As a result staff morale is low and is being manifested in stress related sick leave.

Summary

- 148 Overall, we judge that Liverpool is delivering a poor, no star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. Although we found some positive aspects of service, the following areas of concern outweighed these.
- 149 The commissioning body has not, until recently, been established in accordance with ODPM requirements and has not provided a clear strategic direction, effective commissioning or management oversight. The core strategy group has recently been reconvened but members are unclear about their role and purpose.
- 150 There has been little involvement by corporate management or politicians and the Supporting People team has been left to develop its own direction and manage itself. The development of services has been largely provider led and there are substantial gaps.
- 151 The cost of services is extremely high and does not offer value for money.

- 152 The application of eligibility criteria has been inconsistent, there are varying standards of support and some evidence that care is being inappropriately provided from the Supporting People grant. Care and support plans have not been reviewed as part of a total package and some aspects have not been monitored at all.
- 153 Some services that were previously unknown to the council have not been visited to be validated or accredited, no reviews have been completed and the amount of information provided by providers is still inadequate.
- 154 There are a limited number of positive aspects to the programme in that there are positive relationships between the council, partners and providers, some positive aspects to services for people from black and minority ethnic communities and some effective services for people with complex needs.

What are the prospects for improvement?

What is the evidence of improvement?

Implemented plans and previous inspection recommendations

What has improved?

- 155 Supporting People service providers have been asked to assess their own schemes and approach the council with their development plans so that the council can ensure that services are developed in geographical areas to meet the needs of the local people.
- 156 The creation of Access Liverpool, managerially linked to Supporting People provides a single point of access to sheltered housing for service users and is working well.
- 157 There has been an improved focus on the needs of BME community members. A new floating support service for twelve service users was developed in conjunction with an independent provider, in response to a need for more mental health services. In addition a residential unit, formerly registered as a residential home, relinquished its registration enabling the residents to become tenants and access benefits; it also established a move on support services for people as they left. This service is working well to support people from BME communities.
- 158 By working in partnership with the housing action trust the council has been able to improve the extra care sector for older people. The intention is to create 500 more units of extra care by 2006 although there are still some issues about the financial basis for this expansion. Liverpool was one of sixteen local authorities that successfully applied for department of health funding for an additional scheme to provide extra care and has converted another scheme into one that provides extra care.
- 159 The council is now working to strengthen the governance of the Supporting People programme and has begun to tackle its high cost services. This work is, however, at a very early stage of development.
- 160 Liverpool City Council recognised it had a lot of work to do to promote equality and diversity and addressed this by developing, in consultation with stakeholders, a housing black and other minorities strategy launched in April 2003. They have also produced a comprehensive equalities action plan and are committed to improving performance in this area nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to build the confidence of the local community.
- 161 The lack of progress to date on developing the Supporting People five year strategy puts service improvement in a commissioning vacuum. In the absence of the strategy there are no interim priorities, agreed with partners, as a result the team has no clear strategic direction on which to concentrate their efforts.
- 162 The sheer number of high cost spot contracts are difficult to manage (and review) and the future sustainability of these schemes are uncertain given the nature and quality of some of the currently funded Supporting People services.
- 163 In some cases, providers have a limited focus on outcomes or personal targets, and are weak on promoting independence and 'moving on'. As things stand there is insufficient capacity within the Supporting People team to proactively address this.
- 164 The lack of progress on service reviews is a problem, given their key role in driving up standards, addressing the appropriateness and value for money of existing services and capturing the views of service users, their carers and

advocates. Few resources for service review have been freed up as yet and there is limited capacity to re-model services in the line with a robust assessment of need, co-ordinated approaches to housing, social care and health and in accordance with agreed strategic priorities.

- 165 There is an insufficiently 'managed approach' to the housing related support market supported by effective business planning, commissioning and contract monitoring. The council's programme has therefore been largely provider led.

Is the degree of improvement reasonable?

- 166 There is an acceptance amongst senior officers that social care services, overall, have not received as much corporate attention, in terms of driving services towards improvement, as other areas of service delivery.

'This place was so bad. You can't sort everything at once'. - A council officer.

- 167 There is a keen sense of disappointment that the extent of improvement experienced by Supporting People service users is less than could have been reasonably expected. The reasons given for this include some delays in social services departmental restructuring, the lack of senior management oversight of supported living and a lack of skill in implementing policies.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 168 The Liverpool community strategy sets some clear and challenging aims that require the full and effective implementation and integration of Supporting People if they are to be delivered. The fourth and fifth aspirations within the strategy are 'to reduce levels of poor health, preventable death, impairment and disability so that Liverpool is better than the national average by 2010' and 'making the city a good place to be'.
- 169 The key strategic drivers contained in core strategies set out the council's aims to refocus investment to preventative services to maintain people in their own homes and reduce expenditure on institutional settings. This is a sound strategic driver and the Supporting People programme offers a key delivery vehicle for its achievement. However, the council has not taken sufficient command of its role as the administering authority to ensure that this is achieved.
- 170 Immediately following the on-site period of our inspection, the council, recognising the need to address the performance and delivery of the Supporting People programme, produced an improvement plan built on four building blocks for change:
- ◆ Building capacity.
 - ◆ Improving commissioning.
 - ◆ Commissioning support/upstream services/prevention.
 - ◆ Performance management.
- 171 At the end of June 2004 following our on site period, a two day meeting of the chief executive's corporate team was held, at which the action plan was further developed. A Supporting People project manager has been appointed to co-ordinate the delivery of the key actions. It was also agreed at the meeting, that the implementation of the action plan would be monitored through the commissioning board, the portfolio holder and the chief executive.
- 172 Homelessness is now recognised as a top priority for housing and the Supporting People team is working with one housing association to develop accessible and lifetime homes for older people.

173 Managers have some plans for addressing the current Supporting People spending difficulties and distortions and how the 2.5 per cent savings will be made. These include finding efficiency savings, working with providers to commission different types of support in a more intelligent and cost effective way and implementing clear eligibility criteria to ensure that in future costs are appropriately lodged against the core, community care, budget or the Supporting People budget. However, the lack of capacity and expertise in the Supporting People means progress has been slow in addressing these issues.

174 Internal auditors are going to undertake audits of several services. These include, in respect of the Supporting People programme:

- ◆ The examination of a sample of payments to service providers to verify that there is an audit trail to demonstrate that, for each service user, there has been an assessment of need, that the service provision has been properly costed, that there is an appropriate creation/amendment form and that the entitlement to payment is properly validated by reference to the returns from providers.
- ◆ Review the cost effectiveness of the service in relation to service costs per service user or other appropriate comparator and identify reasons for variances that are considered significant.
- ◆ Review the action taken by the senior manager, Supporting People team, in carrying contract reviews of high cost schemes and review the outcomes from those reviews.

In respect of services for people with mental health problems a review of:

- ◆ The partnership arrangements between Liverpool City Council, Mersey Care NHS and Sefton Borough Council in respect of service delivery by Liverpool City Council as a partner.
- ◆ The performance management arrangements that ensure that the appropriate care is given to those in need of the service.
- ◆ The cost effectiveness of service delivery by reference to relevant performance indicators and other statistical and financial data.
- ◆ The effectiveness of the financial controls within the day, residential and accommodation support services and similar reviews in services for people with learning difficulties.

175 The revised Supporting People improvement plan identifies how progress in the programme will be measured and who will monitor this progress and be accountable if improvements are not achieved. It also identifies the resources required for the achievement of the programme. However, the lack of a clear strategy upon which improvement plans can be based is a considerable impediment.

176 Although addressing the performance of the Supporting People programme the plan has some weaknesses:

- ◆ It does not identify links with the council's key corporate or community strategies.
- ◆ It not been developed or as yet agreed with, partners.
- ◆ It has few specific, measurable outcomes for service users.
- ◆ It contains an action to complete the five year strategy by December 2004, this may present difficulties in terms of future resource commitment as it that does not fit with the council's financial planning cycle.

- ◆ Given the lack of capacity in the Supporting People team, it identifies an overly demanding timescale for completing a comprehensive mapping of need.
- ◆ It identifies a key action to review high cost services, but does not specify how savings will be made or contracts renegotiated before January 2005.

177 There is poor project planning regarding the new extra care housing provision, which, if not addressed, will jeopardize its successful implementation.

178 Supporting People commissioning and financial profiling both need to be strengthened to ensure that future provision is based on an accurate understanding of need.

Will improvements be delivered?

179 The council has a track record of improvements in other areas of its services. In 1999 the Ofsted inspection almost resulted in responsibility for education services being removed from the council's control but by addressing poor performance the service is now rated as being a four star service.

180 The council has a corporate work plan directing the development of services and the strengthening of performance recording and, recognising a previous lack of customer service focused business planning, social care has agreed a charter for social inclusion ('a Vision for Social Care in Liverpool') and a Liverpool supported living business plan for 2004-2005.

181 'The Liverpool Way' leadership programme has begun to address some organisational issues, in terms of standards and ownership by staff at all levels in the organisation, for the work that they do.

182 Despite the council's track record there is no evidence to show that this drive to improve, and demonstrate improvement through improved performance monitoring, has been applied to the Supporting People programme. The programme is still relatively new and provided an opportunity to apply improved practices to its implementation and development. This has not been done and the most vulnerable people in the city are feeling the impact of this failure. The council is now taking steps to include the Supporting People programme within its performance framework.

183 Despite the known pressures on the Supporting People team, the commissioning body has not reviewed the staffing structure or the issue of capacity. No additional resources have been identified to meet the demands of the Supporting People work programme for the current financial year.

184 Within the council and partner agencies there are a number of commissioners and accommodation teams but they are not interconnected or strategically linked. Economies of scale could be achieved through better alignment and a shared focus on agreed priorities and outcomes.

185 The lack of a clear strategy denies staff a clear view of how their individual role fits within the wider agenda. Staff in the Supporting People team have not received appraisals of their performance or been involved in setting targets for their own achievement.

186 The lack of progress on service reviews, which will be a key component in ensuring improved outcomes for vulnerable people, has released few resources or capacity to remodel services and is also resulting in a failure to identify service users who are at risk due to inadequate and/or inappropriate services.

- 187 Due to the immaturity of the market a number of providers will require substantial training in order to support service users in developing their skills and confidence to move on to less intensively supported situations or general needs housing.
- 188 There are significant future risks to the financial viability of the programme and sustainability of some services, due to the lack of rigour applied to ensuring the eligibility of Supporting People funded services, work to secure the value for money of services and risk management of the programme.

Summary

- 189 We have assessed the Supporting People programme administration and delivery by the council as having uncertain prospects for improvement. The council has openly acknowledged that there have been failings in the implementation of the Supporting People programme and is now seeking to address these through robust improvement proposals. However, the plans are at an early stage and the capacity of the team to undertake these improvements will need considerable additional resources, expertise and support.
- 190 The challenges created by the previous lack of strategic direction, managerial oversight, weak business planning, commissioning and performance monitoring systems are considerable and it will need the full resources of the council to fully address the demands of the new action plan. Significant additional capacity has been identified and needs to be implemented urgently to bring the programme back on track and to ensure that funding is appropriate to the grant conditions and sustainable.

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 Liverpool City Council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ Supporting People Strategy.
- ◆ Older Person's Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Valuing People Strategy.
- ◆ Supported Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Tackling Homelessness in Liverpool.
- ◆ Liverpool Supported Living Business Plan 2004-2005.
- ◆ Corporate Performance Plan 2003-2006.

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 those services provided to people with a range of needs, by sixteen different providers.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the service:

Ronnie Barr	Operations Manager
Trevor Beckett	Partnership Manager - Probation
Derek Blake	Project Manager - Probation
Irene Buick	Supporting People Contract Manager
Paula Burns	Finance Officer
Paul Clitheroe	Group Manager Strategic Commissioning
Flo Clucas	Executive Member for Housing
David Dixon	Benefits Manager
Gill Dixon	Supported Housing Manager
Ray Dixon	Supporting People Contract Manager
Francis Dunne	Supporting People Contract Manager

Julie Gallagher	Research Information and Monitoring Officer
Philip Halsall	Executive Director Resources
Darren Hartley	Strategy and Information Manager
David Henshaw	Chief Executive
Tony Hunter	Director Supported Living and Community Safety
Jonny Keville	Project Manager IT
John Laverick	Supporting People Lead Officer
Maria O'Brien	Divisional Manager
Tricia Martin	VFM Project Worker
Simon McEnemy	Manager - Regeneration
Paula McGlynn	Supported Housing Manager
Michelle Montrose	Commissioning and Development Manager-Health
Paul Murphy	Senior Finance Officer
Andrew Nimbard	Head of Equalities
Christine Voutsinas	Supporting People Contract Manager
Kath Wallace	Project Manager Strategic Commissioning Board
Alan Ward	Supporting People Contract Manager
Focus Group	Managers
Focus Group	Providers

Demographic information

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

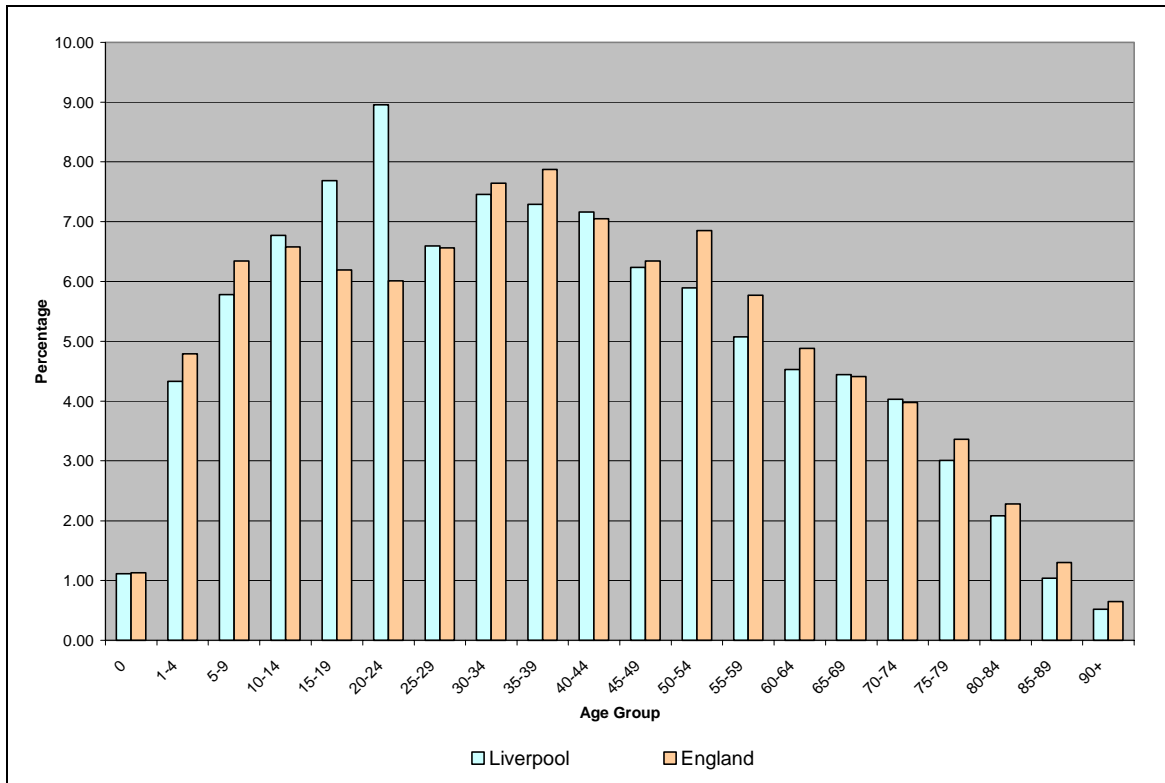
Measure	Liverpool	England
Population (mid-2001)	441,500	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	15.13	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White-British 2001)	8.16	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	5.6	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ²	2	-
Multiple deprivation-wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ³	25 of 33	-
Access to services-wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁴	0 of 33	-

² Indices of Deprivation 2004, average ward score for the authority.

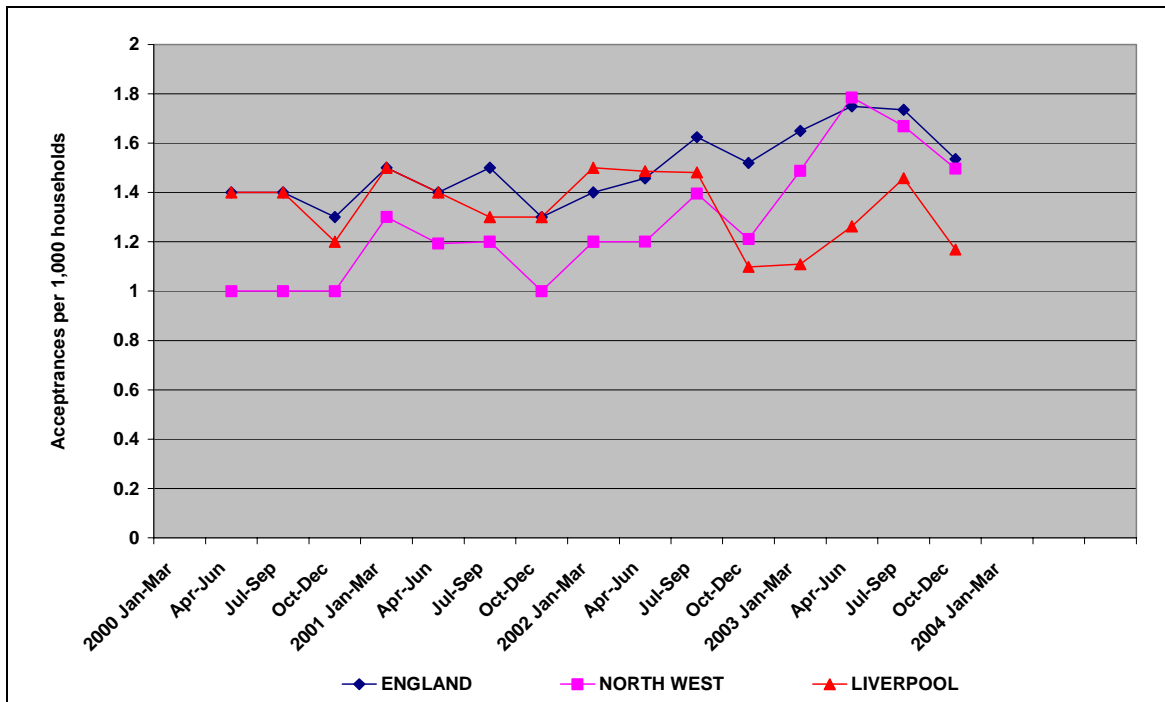
³ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

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

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



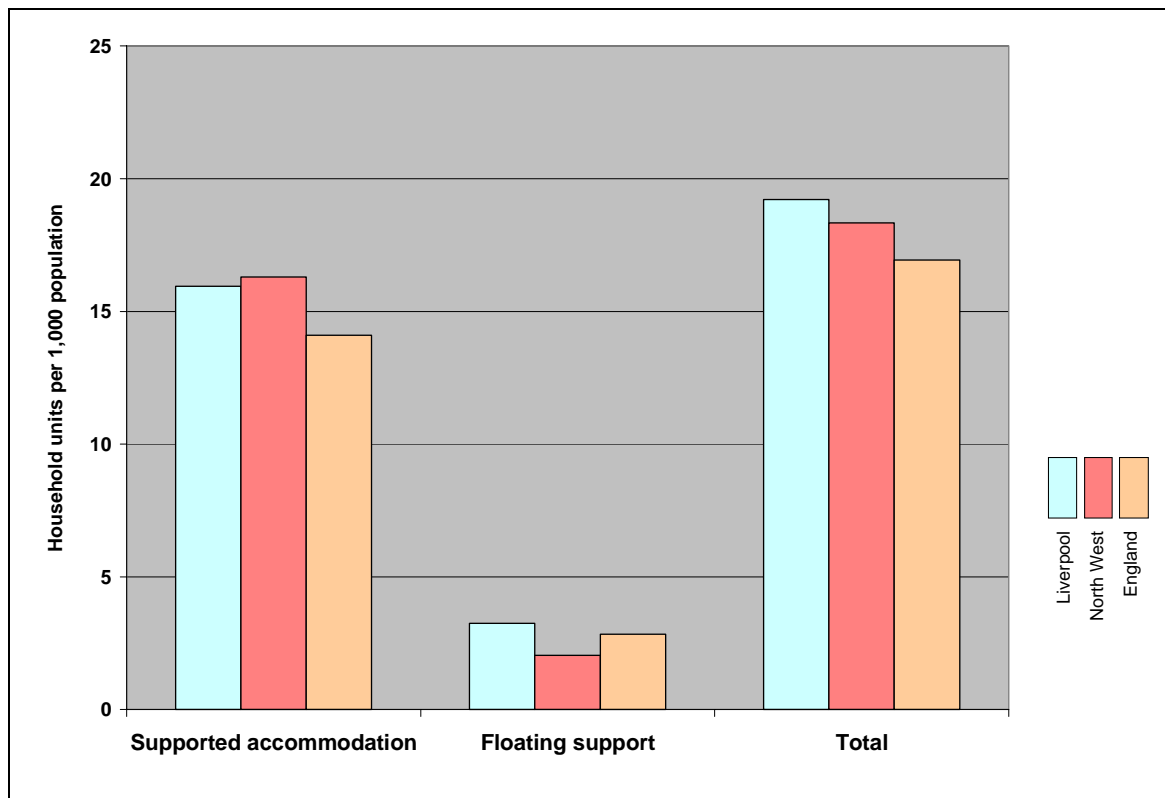
Performance information

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

- ◆ data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- ◆ comprehensive performance assessment scores;
- ◆ star ratings for social services;
- ◆ performance assessment framework indicators for social services; and
- ◆ relevant best value performance indicators.

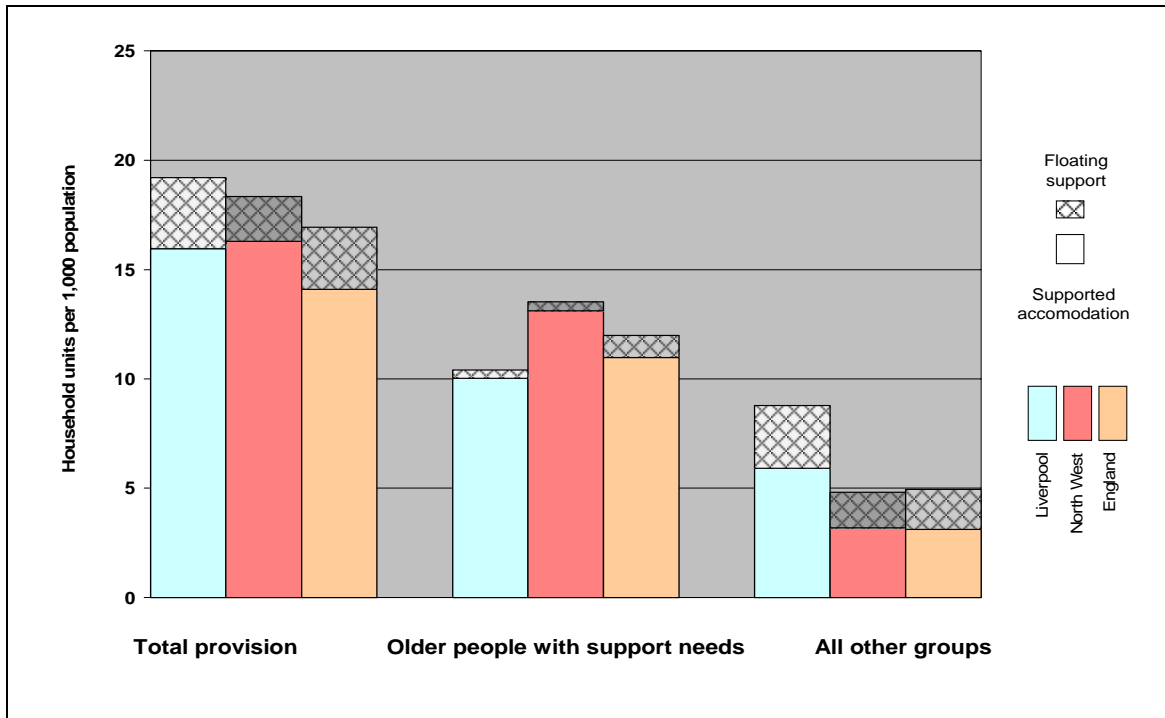
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁵

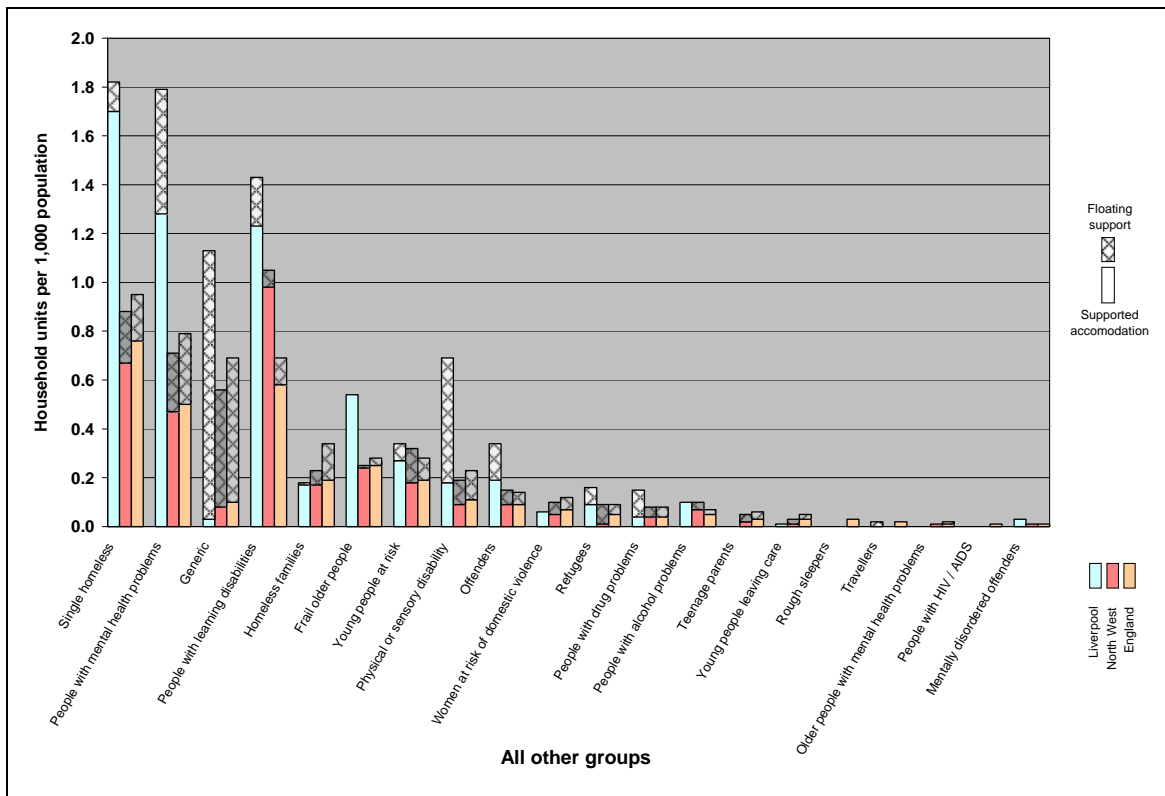


⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁷



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

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

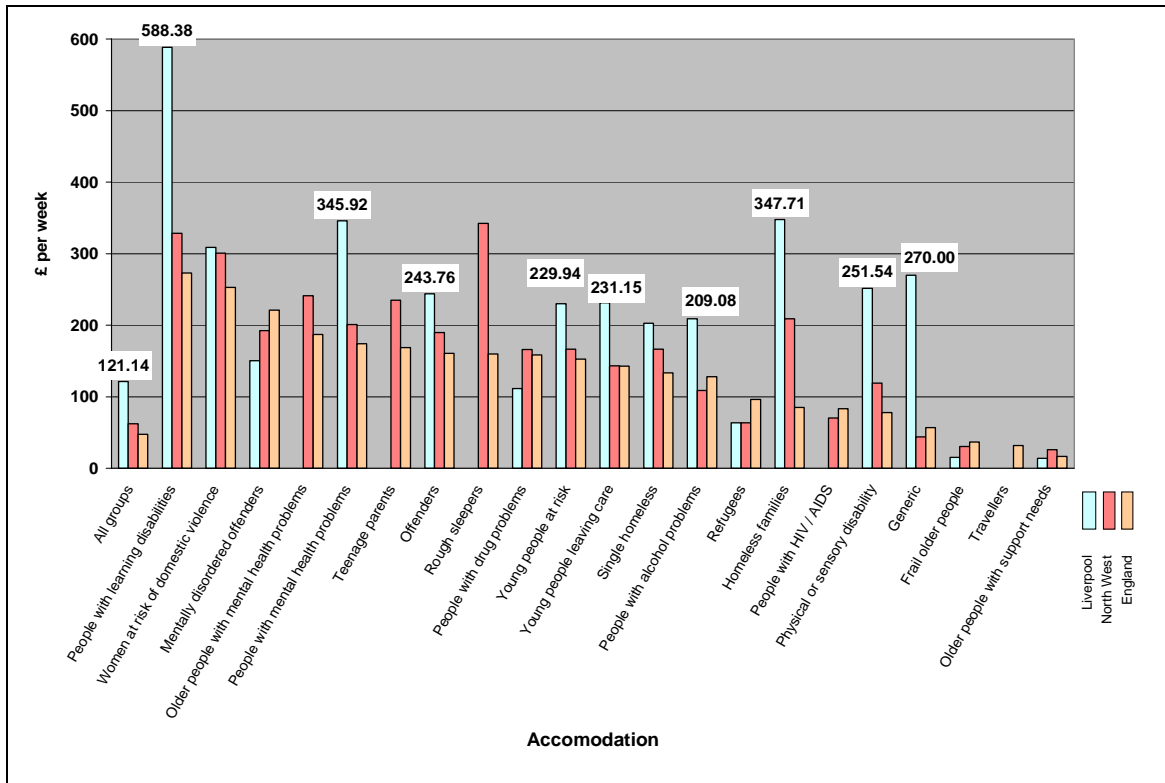
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Liverpool	£ 46,124,127	£ 369,391	£ 399,013.07

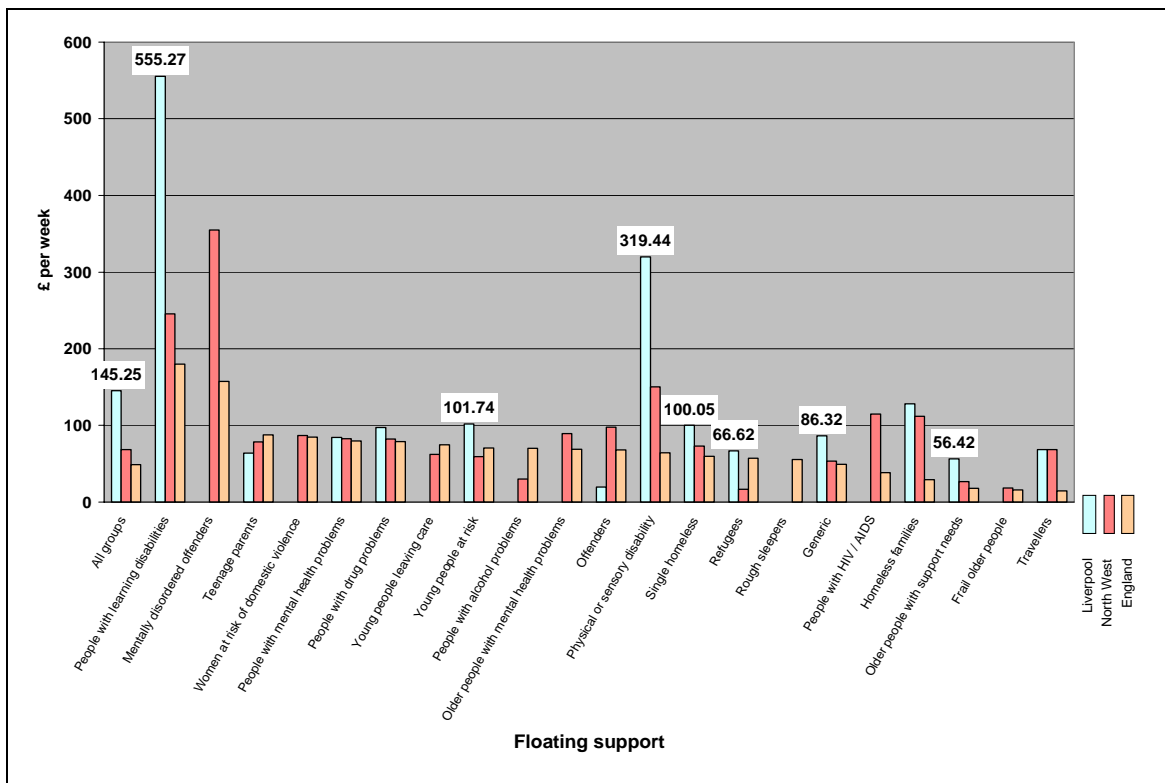
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Liverpool	£ 2.01	£ 80.42	£ 97.38	£ 188.42
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)⁸

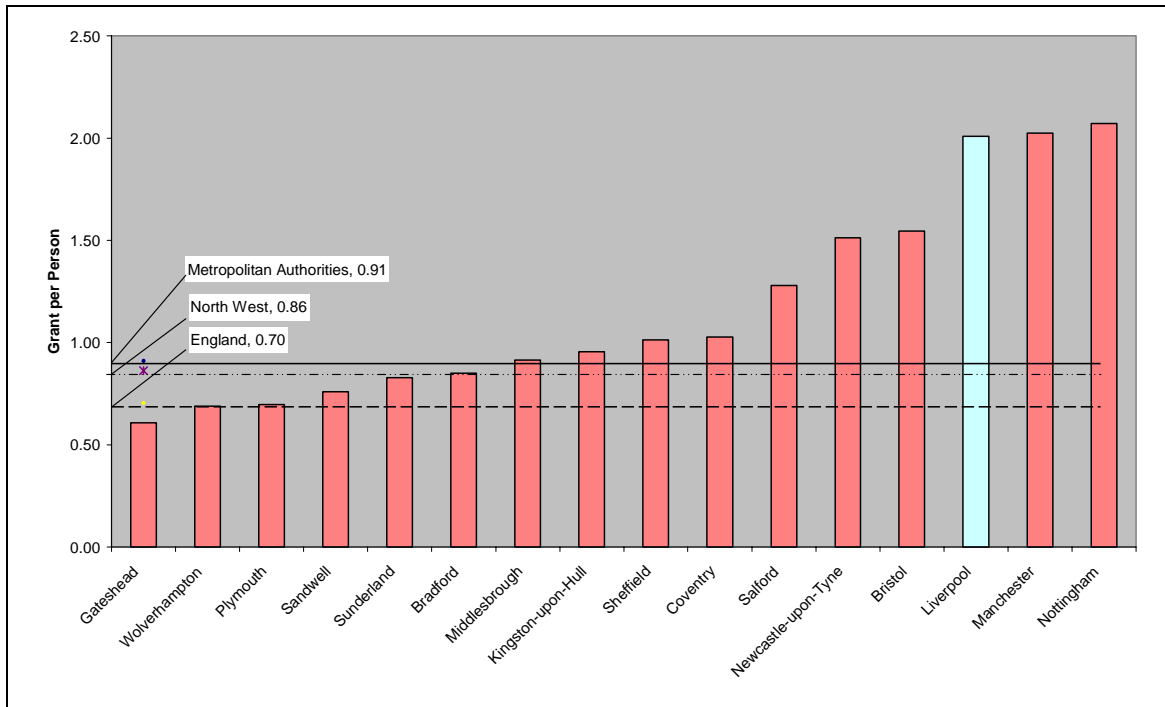


Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)

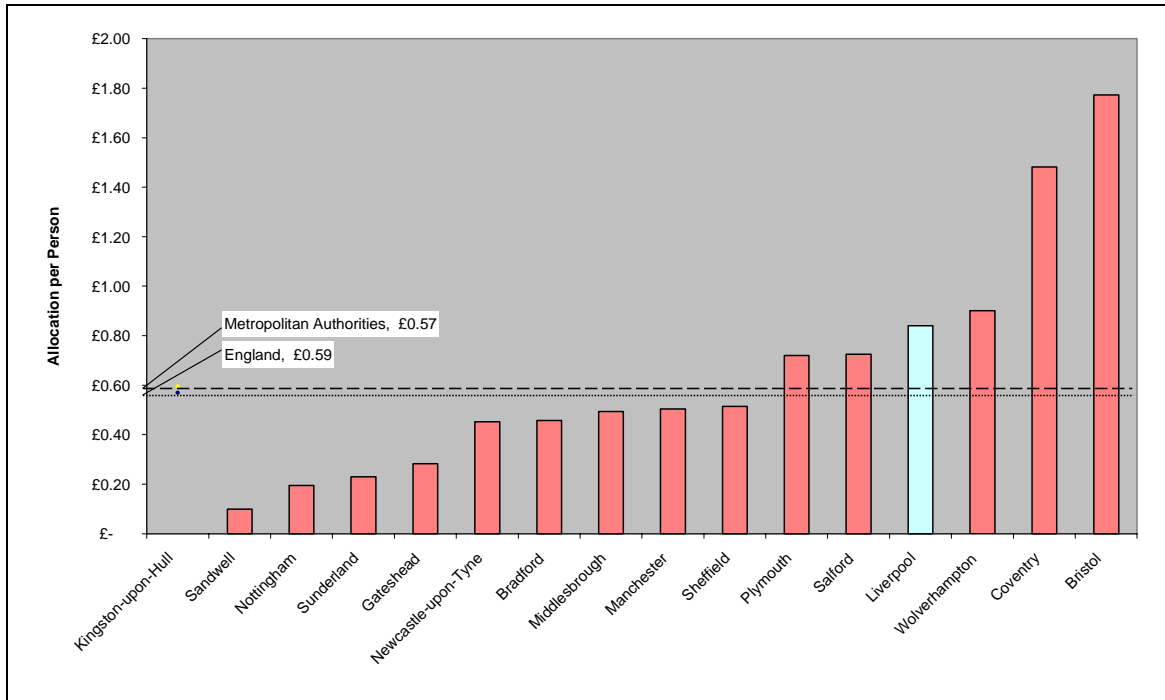


⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

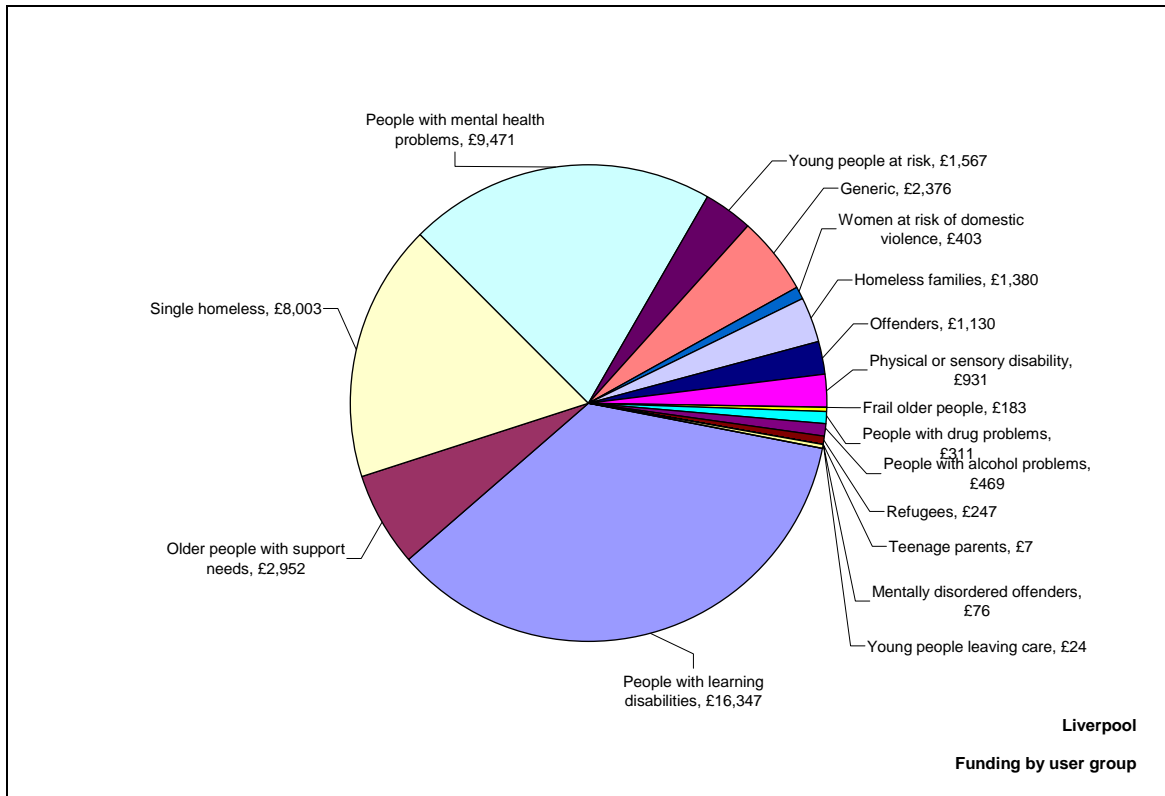


Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all metropolitan councils and all English councils

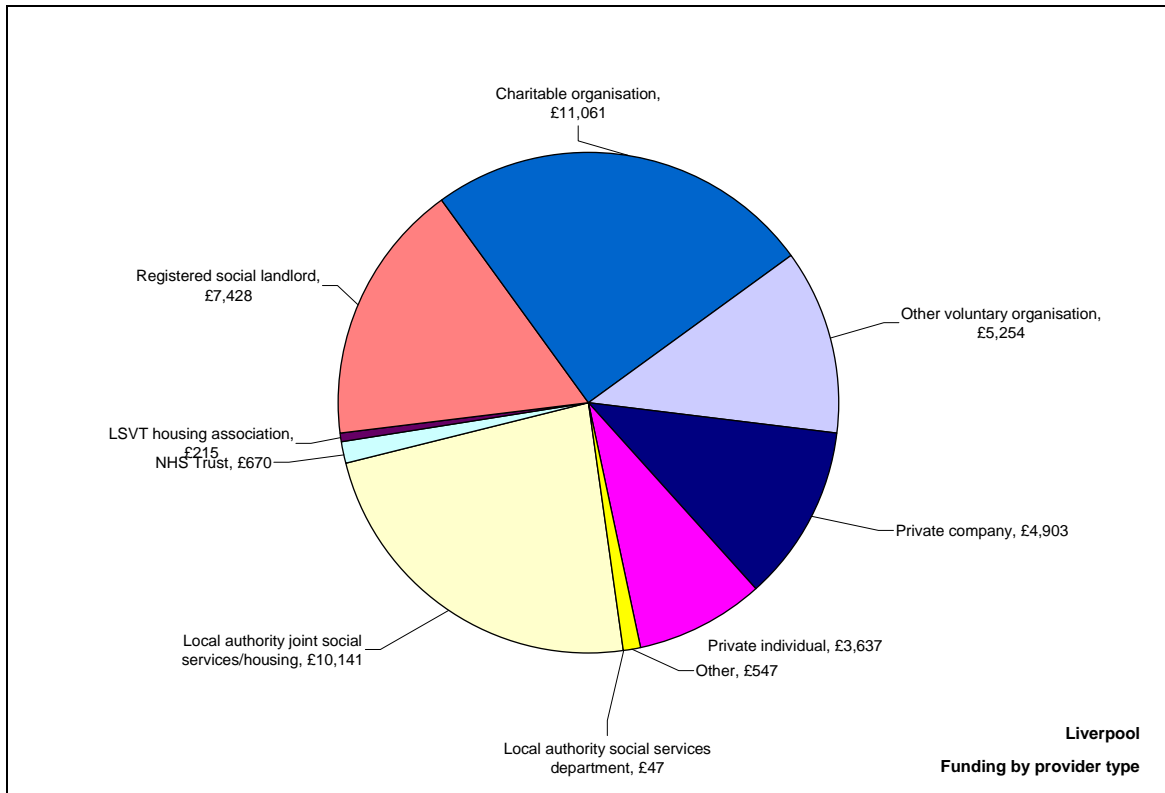


⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Some	Uncertain	★
Children's Services	Some	Promising	(2)

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.

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

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with metropolitan councils

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

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

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