

Inspection report

March 2004



Supporting People Programme

Middlesbrough Council

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing related support services that help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current complex and unco-ordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.
- 4 Middlesbrough Council is one of the councils to be inspected within the early months of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it moves from implementation to the introduction of the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery and the outcomes of this for vulnerable people.

Background

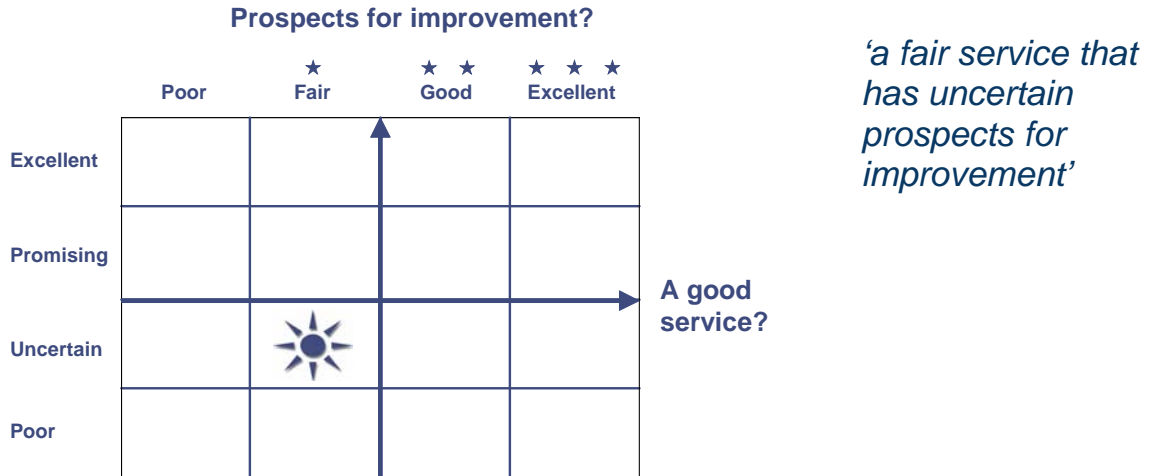
- 5 Middlesbrough is a unitary council in the North East of England at the mouth of the River Tees.
- 6 The population of the area is declining. In 2001 it stood at 134,000, living in 59,500 households¹. Over six per cent (6.2) of the population are from minority ethnic communities¹, the highest in the area.
- 7 The area has significant levels of deprivation. Unemployment stands at 5.6 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. Of the 25 wards in the borough, 16 are amongst the top 10 per cent of the UK's most deprived wards. Drugs, crime and prostitution are significant local issues for residents.
- 8 Since May 2002 the council has been governed by a directly elected mayor. In addition, there are 48 councillors: 32 Labour, 7 Conservative, 5 Liberal Democrat, and 4 Independent. The council's net revenue budget for the year 2002/03 was £217.8 million.
- 9 Middlesbrough Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Middlesbrough primary care trust and Teesside probation service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 10 The total amount of Supporting People grant funding available in 2003/04 is £6.36 million. The council receives £188,856 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.

¹ Census 2001.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart²: Middlesbrough Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

12 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date.

- ◆ Some positive outcomes for service users are beginning to be realised as a result of the Supporting People programme through additional services and a system of service reviews that is seeking to identify areas for improvement in terms of the quality of the services provided.
- ◆ The transition to Supporting People funding has been managed smoothly. Contracts are all signed and in place and there was no disruption to payments to providers or the services they provide.
- ◆ Assessments for the purposes of transitional housing benefit, that determined the level of the majority of housing related support funding prior to 1 April 2004, were thorough. Charges were rigorously examined and high costs challenged.
- ◆ Linkages between the Supporting People programme and the local strategic partnership and other local multi agency partnerships are beginning to develop. These are providing the programme with a better grounding in meeting the needs and aspirations of Middlesbrough's communities.
- ◆ The council has met the published statutory conditions for the management of Supporting People grant. Partnership structures are in place and a programme of service reviews has been agreed.
- ◆ The council's programme of service reviews are facilitating a further assessment of the Supporting People funding that will be required and are ensuring that appropriate services are funded within the guidelines for eligibility.

² 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.

Areas for improvement

- 13 However, we found the following weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.
- ◆ The engagement of users is underdeveloped as are the visible means for communicating with users and potential users. Consultation mechanisms already exist for some client groups, although not all, but no real dialogue has yet been established with them.
 - ◆ Supporting People is not integrated into work going on within the council and Middlesbrough partnership to identify the range of communities and diverse groups, understand their current and future housing support needs and put in place a strategy that seeks to address these.
 - ◆ The inclusive forum has operated primarily as a vehicle for training with providers and other arrangements for creating a dialogue with users, carers and advocacy groups are yet to be fully explored.
 - ◆ Aims for the Supporting People programme are not clear. Priorities for future development have not been determined leaving it unclear for users, providers, partners and staff where the programme is heading in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ No comprehensive map of local needs exists although good information is available on the needs of some client groups. Current services nationally are the result of legacy provision and this is the case in Middlesbrough. These services have been developed over time to meet need identified by providers for particular client groups but with insufficient strategic planning or balancing of needs and priorities.
 - ◆ The commissioning body has yet to fully develop as the body that directs the course of the Supporting People programme, drives improvements and sets a clear strategic steer in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ The team employed to develop and implement Supporting People is under resourced. It does not have the capacity to carry out the full programme of service reviews and contribute fully to the strategic development and implementation of Supporting People in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ Without clear aims and priorities, service reviewers are unable to determine the strategic relevance of services. Consequently funding cannot be unlocked from legacy provision for reinvestment in new or remodelled services. Nor has the council, under the steer of the commissioning body, determined how it will assess whether services are value for money and cost effective. Providers are understandably anxious about this.
 - ◆ Little information is available for service users on the availability of and how to access Supporting People services. Access remains much the same as it was before. A new general purpose leaflet has been produced but this has limited distribution. There is no information available on the council web site.
 - ◆ Supporting People partnerships are not as effective as they need to be. While the structures are generally in place, there needs to be greater clarity about what each partnership is trying to achieve and the contribution it is expected to make. Plans need to be put in place and mechanisms to measure progress and performance.
 - ◆ There are no protocols or processes in place to resolve disputes with providers or rule on appeals against decisions made by the commissioning body.
 - ◆ Risk assessment, contingency planning, performance management and monitoring all need significant further development.
 - ◆ The Supporting People partnerships with health and probation lack shared aims and shared targets for the programme that are understood by housing

related support providers, commissioning managers within the council, health service providers and others involved in the criminal justice services in Middlesbrough.

- ◆ It is unclear how gaps in provision, such as floating support for older people, offenders, and people suffering from HIV/AIDS are to be addressed.
 - ◆ The lack of any current high level work programme or action plan is a major weakness. Without one, there is no prioritised list of actions to be carried out, no identification of resources required, no identification of responsibilities and no timescales set for completion.
- 14 This is a borderline judgement between fair and poor. There are a number of weaknesses in the way the programme is being delivered and some are significant. However, given the early stage of development of the Supporting People programme, the progress made and the fact that the programme in Middlesbrough complies with ODPM grant conditions, we judge that arrangements are just sufficient to warrant a one star rating.
- 15 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for delivering further improvements. This is a reflection of Middlesbrough starting this work late. Although work is beginning to develop, the council is unable to evidence outcomes. We found the following strengths.

What works well

- ◆ There is a commitment to improve services from all stakeholders including the partnerships. Whilst the council have not given Supporting People priority in the past, recent changes in personnel have brought more impetus, drive and raised the stakes.
- ◆ The comprehensive performance assessment identified that Middlesbrough Council is ambitious and has a reputation for trying new ways of doing things. The new corporate management team is undertaking a fundamental review of corporate objectives, partnerships, user consultation and involvement arrangements, and performance management arrangements.
- ◆ At a corporate level, partnership working is well established and a number of consultation mechanisms already exist to engage with several of the client groups who receive Supporting People services, for example, people with learning disabilities.
- ◆ Additional resources are being recruited to increase the size and capacity of the team to deliver Supporting People and the changes it is expected to make. This will be achieved by February 2004.
- ◆ The transition to Supporting People funding for providers has gone smoothly. All contracts are in place and payments are being made on time. IT systems are robust.
- ◆ A Supporting People consultant is being commissioned to help Middlesbrough catch up on lost ground. The consultant is expected to.
- ◆ Review the appropriateness of decision making structures.
- ◆ Identify the gaps in information in client needs.
- ◆ Analyse and advise on user and provider engagement structures.
- ◆ Make proposals for the strategic direction of Supporting People in Middlesbrough.
- ◆ Develop an action plan to implement proposals.
- ◆ Put forward proposals for a Supporting People strategy for Middlesbrough.
- ◆ In the run up to Supporting People additional services have been developed, and some changes are being made to inherited services. The service review

process and reality checks are already instrumental in improving the quality of service delivery.

Areas for improvement

- 16 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve.
- ◆ The commissioning body has only recently taken ownership of the issues in Middlesbrough and the failure to set a strategic direction for the programme and establish what the priorities are for Supporting People in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ No comprehensive improvement or action plan exists to identify what key blocks of work are needed to carry the programme forward, who will carry them out, how they are prioritised, and how delivery will be monitored and outcomes for users measured.
 - ◆ There are no consistent systems for communicating with and encouraging the participation of service users to help shape the future delivery of Supporting People in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ There needs to be a greater understanding of how the programme will make contributions to the objectives of the various statutory agencies and partnerships. Partnerships are in place, both within and outside of Supporting People across Middlesbrough, but there needs to be greater clarity about what Supporting People can achieve for each and how they inter-relate.
 - ◆ There is a lack of definition about the role and purpose of low level housing related support within the delivery of health, probation and social care services and its contribution to improving the lives of vulnerable people in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ The council needs to develop its capacity to deliver the Supporting People programme. This needs to develop at two levels.
 - ◆ Strategically, the commissioning body needs to take a lead on ensuring that Supporting People has strategic direction, ensure measures are in place to secure user involvement, understand the housing related support needs of the diverse client groups, put in place a service review programme that will deliver improvements quickly, ensure that sufficient and appropriate resources are in place to deliver the programme, and measures and targets are in place to monitor progress.
 - ◆ Operationally, the council has only recently taken steps to ensure it has adequate staff resources with sufficient knowledge, skills and expertise to deliver the programme.
 - ◆ Without strategic direction or understanding of what is a priority in Middlesbrough, service reviews are unable to unlock funding from legacy services for reinvestment or redesign in new or remodelled services. Providers are also not given a lead on which new services are likely to receive support and which legacy services are not.
 - ◆ The review programme is not currently geared to unlock legacy funding. It also needs to make clear how reviews will address the questions of strategic relevance, value for money and cost effectiveness.
 - ◆ Whilst corporate mechanisms exist within the council, Supporting People has not been integrated into the wider processes. Nor is it clear how they will be developed. This includes service planning including the setting of objectives and outcome measures for users, developing actions to meet targets, resourcing plans and monitoring results. Monitoring is particularly under-developed. Currently there is no reporting of spending against allocations.
 - ◆ Providers and service users are not fully involved in the programme. More use needs to be made of a properly functioning inclusive forum to seek provider and service user views and ensure their concerns are understood

and addressed. There is no mechanism in place for providers to challenge service review decisions made by the commissioning body.

- ◆ Risk appraisal and contingency planning in relation to the delivery of the Supporting People programme are underdeveloped.

Recommendations

- 17 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, we are making the following recommendations.
- 18 Within three months of the published report.
- ◆ The commissioning body must conclude its strategic direction and priorities, even as an interim arrangement until more researched and widely consulted priorities are developed for the forthcoming strategy.
 - ◆ The commissioning body must complete work on an action plan setting clear targets for the development and delivery of the main structural items needed to deliver the programme. This needs to show how user involvement mechanisms, performance management and monitoring arrangements will be put in place, by whom, by when, and with what resources.
 - ◆ Revisit the service review programme.
 - ◆ Ensure it is balanced between the need to unlock legacy funding and other criteria such as cost and risk.
 - ◆ Decide how the reviews will approach the issues of value for money and cost effectiveness.
 - ◆ Decide how service standards will be set and monitored.
 - ◆ Ensure that there is a comprehensive assessment of the current workload and skills needed to implement the Supporting People programme. Consolidate arrangements to put in place sufficient and appropriate resources with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver the programme.
 - ◆ Improve clarity around the criteria for Supporting People funding across all vulnerable groups and ensure that the grant is only paid for low level housing related support services.
 - ◆ Within the context of vulnerable clients within the Supporting People service, ensure interpreter services meet the needs of Middlesbrough's ethnic communities and are appropriate for the circumstances in which they are required, both in terms of the range of languages covered, availability, and sensitivity to the needs of the individual.
- 19 Within twelve months of the published report.
- ◆ Develop risk appraisal and contingency planning for the Supporting People services in Middlesbrough with an emphasis on the potential for service failure. These plans should be linked to the corporate programme of risk management, should be clearly recorded and agreed by the commissioning body.
 - ◆ The commissioning body should consider how performance indicators and other statistical information provided by all the partners can be used to evidence the impact that the Supporting people programme is having in Middlesbrough.
 - ◆ Develop and deliver the five year strategy to reflect the information being gathered from service users about their views and needs for future services and the quality of existing services. Ensure that the strategy is owned by the Supporting People commissioning body and its stakeholders.
 - ◆ The commissioning body with the administering local authority needs to agree the procedures under which the administering local authority will exercise its veto over decisions where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the council.

- ◆ Actively manage the consultancy contract, making use of corporate expertise where appropriate, to ensure there is clarity about what is to be provided. Ensure as much knowledge and learning is captured from the project as possible, and ensure arrangements are in place within Middlesbrough to carry the work forward effectively.
- 20 We would like to thank the staff of Middlesbrough Council particularly Donna Owens, and Tony Parkinson who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

- 21 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

- 22 Middlesbrough Council is in the north east of England situated at the mouth of the river Tees. No longer a thriving port and major iron and steel manufacturing area, Middlesbrough's economy is now service based with a significant number of public sector jobs.
- 23 The population of the area is 134,000, living in 59,500 households³. It is declining with a reduction of 10,000 over the ten year period from 1991 to 2001. Over six per cent (6.2) of the population are from minority ethnic communities⁴, the highest in the area, and over half (3.6 per cent) are of Pakistani origin.
- 24 The area has significant levels of deprivation. It is assessed as the 44th most deprived borough in England, the second most deprived unitary council. Unemployment stands at 5.6 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. Of the 25 wards in the borough, 16 are amongst the top 10 per cent of the UK's most deprived wards.
- 25 Crime, drugs and prostitution are significant local issues. Most residents regard community safety as the most important issue in Middlesbrough⁵. In 2001 the level of crimes reported to the police was almost double the national average. Residents believe that problems with drugs are at the root of high crime.

The Council

- 26 Since May 2002 the council has been governed by a directly elected mayor. He is supported by an executive board of eight councillors to make and direct the council's policies. In addition to the mayor, there are 48 councillors: 32 Labour, 7 Conservative, 5 Liberal Democrat, and 4 Independent.
- 27 The council's net revenue budget for the year 2002/03 was £217.8 million. Significant additional funding, both public and private, is attracted to the area, estimated at £73.7 million in 2003/04.
- 28 In 2001/02 the council was instrumental in establishing a local strategic partnership, Middlesbrough partnership, for the area. Thematic priorities for the partnership were derived from extensive public consultation and are set out in the partnership's community plan. They are:
- ◆ making Middlesbrough safer;
 - ◆ creating jobs and skillful people;
 - ◆ investing in neighbourhoods – to live, work, access services and enjoy life;
 - ◆ improving urban living; and
 - ◆ improving health and care.

³ 2001 Census.

⁴ 2001 Census.

⁵ Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Survey 2001.

The council has adopted the same priorities.

- 29 Middlesbrough council has a strategic private sector partner, Hyder business systems, to help it deliver a range of central support services, improve efficiency, introduce new IT systems, and allow easier access to services.
- 30 In 2001 the council entered into a local public sector agreement with the government. This contains twelve stretching performance targets including:
 - ◆ improve care for older people to help them live independently;
 - ◆ reduce the use of Class A drugs; and
 - ◆ reduce domestic burglaries.
- 31 A comprehensive performance assessment was carried out in 2002 and renewed in 2003. In both assessments the council received an overall score of 'good'.

Supporting People – ODPM Framework for Delivery

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

Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Middlesbrough

Management Arrangements

- 34 The Supporting People team sits within the social services directorate. The accountable officer is the head of modernisation and performance in the social services department.
- 35 The commissioning body comprises the director of social services and the head of housing of Middlesbrough Council, the director of financial investment of Middlesbrough primary care trust and the finance director of the national probation service (Teesside). Terms of reference for this body have been agreed which set out its role of overseeing the Supporting People programme in the borough.
- 36 The administration grant awarded to the council by the ODPM to assist in the costs of implementing, delivering and managing the programme is £188,856 for the financial year 2003/04.

- 37 The Supporting People team comprises:
- ◆ a lead officer;
 - ◆ support from the contracts and review team equivalent to one full-time officer; and
 - ◆ support from the fairer charging team equivalent to part of one full-time officer.

Supporting People Strategy and Budget

- 38 The ODPM required all Supporting People administering local authorities to submit a shadow strategy in the Autumn of 2002. The shadow strategies were required to demonstrate a clear vision and strategic steer for the programme and to set out the map of existing housing related support provision. The ODPM assessed the council's shadow strategy as poor.
- 39 The shadow strategy sets out the context for Supporting People in Middlesbrough. It also explains the identified supply of Supporting People services in the borough. These services are mapped against the ODPM's suggested supply profile of Supporting People services in an area such as Middlesbrough.
- 40 The primary client group analysis of current services and unmet need shows:
- ◆ adequate levels of accommodation and floating support provision for people with mental health problems, people with drug or alcohol problems, women at risk of domestic violence and people with learning disabilities;
 - ◆ over 1440 units of accommodation for older people but no floating support provision;
 - ◆ a lack of floating support provision for homeless people and families, offenders and people with a physical or sensory loss; and
 - ◆ no provision for travellers or people with HIV/AIDS.
- 41 The actual supply of accommodation and support services as funded by Supporting People grant based on 31 March 2003 was:
- ◆ 1987 units of supported accommodation;
 - ◆ 116 individuals receiving floating support;
 - ◆ 1759 community alarm units, and
 - ◆ 400 individuals receiving support from home improvement agencies
- 42 The final Supporting People grant allocation to the council for the financial year 2003/04 is:
- ◆ £6,362,833; and
 - ◆ £66,565 has been awarded to cover the revenue costs of schemes under development (pipeline funding).

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 43 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 44 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.

- 45 The aims for the Supporting People programme are not clear or challenging, nor are they integrated with the corporate aims of the statutory partner agencies. Priorities have not been determined and there has been little involvement of users and providers to date. These are major weaknesses. Without the involvement of users and providers it is difficult to develop sustainable and relevant priorities. Without aims the programme has no guide to the development and redesign of services.
- 46 The weakness stems from the shadow strategy which was acknowledged by the council as being a very basic position statement and assessed as 'poor to fair' by the ODPM. It fails to provide a foundation for developing Supporting People services. Significant comments from the ODPM evaluation include:

'The vision is a statement of national Supporting People policyrather than locally grounded'.

'No sense that the document is representative of a partnership'.

ODPM Jan 2003.

- 47 Whilst there was some useful analysis of data, users were not involved in the development of the strategy and providers were given limited opportunity to comment.
- 48 The commissioning body are employing the services of a consultant to help them develop the five year Supporting People strategy for Middlesbrough to be in place by November 2004. This work is intended to address the weaknesses identified by the ODPM. However in the meantime there is a lack of clear direction. This impacts on the commissioning of new services and the redesign of existing ones.
- 49 Links are made in the strategy to others strategies and groups where Supporting People can contribute to the achievement of objectives and targets. But these links are implicit. The contribution that Supporting People can make to the wider agenda in Middlesbrough is not clearly identified and made explicit. These include contributions to:
- ◆ 'the reduction in re-admission rates to psychiatric hospital' by providing support at home to prevent crises; or
 - ◆ 'reduce the level of crime' by providing support for offenders to obtain and maintain tenancies. A high proportion of crimes are committed by previous offenders. Helping them to maintain a stable lifestyle, address possible drug or alcohol problems and live independently can assist the drive to reduce crime.
- 50 The community strategy states that 'making Middlesbrough safer' is their first challenge but the report is heavily focused on crime rates and the effects on victims, and does not address re-offending or public protection.
- 51 Other bodies and groups are unable to perform as well as they might without clarity from the commissioning body about what Supporting People is trying to achieve. The drug action team do not consider that the aims address the housing related support needs of drug users. The links are not always easy to make. Supporting People will have difficulty making links with probation as they do not have an up to date offender accommodation strategy.
- 52 Other than meeting ODPM implementation milestones, there are no measures or targets in place to monitor and track performance. Aims and objectives can therefore not be described as challenging as, without measures, it is impossible to say what is intended to be achieved or what progress has been made.

- 53 Whilst there are a number of established user forums in Middlesbrough for some of the Supporting People clients groups, they have not been consulted on aims or priorities and feedback mechanisms for Supporting People are not developed.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 54 Having considered the aims that the council has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it set out to do.
- 55 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ commissioning services to meet local needs;
 - ◆ user involvement;
 - ◆ diversity;
 - ◆ partnership working;
 - ◆ quality and monitoring; and
 - ◆ outcomes for service users and carers.

Commissioning services to meet local needs

- 56 Most current housing related support services are the result of legacy provision. These services have been developed over time to meet user need identified by providers for particular client groups but without any strategic planning or balancing of needs and priorities. This is true of all initial Supporting People programmes. No comprehensive map of local needs exists although good information is available on the needs of some client groups. Gaps, as identified by the council in its Supporting People shadow strategy, exist in a number of areas such as floating support for frail older people. The council has met the statutory guidance and financial regulations for grant compliance.
- 57 Supply has been adequately mapped and the funding transition from transitional housing benefits and other funding streams to Supporting People has gone relatively smoothly. In the run up to Supporting People some new services have been developed but there are currently no funds available for new services and there are gaps in provision.
- 58 The council is complying with ODPM grant conditions and the framework and main structures are in place. However, there is a wide acceptance that the Supporting People team is under-resourced and the current fragmented structure is not effective.
- 59 Identifying and making an accurate assessment of current supply has been one of the implementation priorities for the Supporting People team. In the main, the assessment appears to be comprehensive.
- 60 Transitional housing benefit (THB) is another area that was given early priority which has ensured a smooth transition to Supporting People. Individual claims were rigorously examined and high costs challenged. All THB claims were determined prior to the Platinum Cut and no appeals are outstanding.
- 61 Information on local housing related support needs is patchy. For some client groups it is good, such as people with mental health problems or with people with learning difficulties – these are groups that are likely to be social services users, and less good for others such as offenders, travellers, and ‘sofa surfers’ – mainly young people moving between friends and relatives and sleeping on their sofa who are less likely to be engaged with social services. Whilst the gaps in information are recognised, it is not clear how these gaps are intended to be addressed.

- 62 The council has not adequately developed its approach to housing related support service users who are not also social services users. We are concerned that there is a lack of understanding of the needs of vulnerable people who fall outside the high risk groups engaged with social services. The council needs to ensure that the aim of Supporting People, to provide low level housing related support as part of a preventative agenda to reduce the risks of increased dependency on statutory services for a wide range of vulnerable groups, is being realised.
- 63 In the run up to the go live date, some new floating support services have been developed including support services for elderly tenants, homeless families and victims of domestic violence. However, even without a detailed needs assessment, there remain gaps in service provision in some areas and under provision in others. This is a national profile and one that needs to be addressed.
- 64 There are close links with social services commissioning arrangements. And there are examples of joint commissioning of services which include elements of housing related support, personal care and in some cases health services.
- 65 Payments are being made to two registered homes which, although currently entitled to Supporting People funding because of legacy funding from SHMG, will have no entitlement following their review. Early work is necessary with these providers to ensure that adequate arrangements are made for users and providers are clear about their future funding options. A resolution on these options are dependent on guidance from the ODPM.
- 66 Providers have mixed views of the support they have received from the Supporting People team in the run up to go live date on 1 April 2003. Some were satisfied while others made negative comments. Some providers who also operate in other council areas told us that they received most of their information on Supporting People from other Supporting People teams. They were most critical about the lack of information for service users and the lack of training for providers on specific areas, such as the charging policy.
- 67 The team employed to develop and implement Supporting People is under resourced. It does not have the capacity to carry out all the service reviews and contribute fully to the strategic development and implementation of Supporting People in Middlesbrough. In addition, the fragmented structure of the team, whilst good for integration with social services, provides competing priorities for staff and has not been effective at focusing attention on Supporting People development.
- 68 Internally systems are generally in place to process returns from providers, although there are areas where procedures to deal with certain individual applications have not been finalised.
- 69 The council has met the statutory guidance and financial regulations for grant compliance in that:
- ◆ the local authority, the primary care trust and the probation service are all involved through the commissioning body;
 - ◆ each partner organisation has one vote only on the commissioning body;
 - ◆ joint working arrangements come within the framework of the local strategic partnership;
 - ◆ the commissioning body operates under terms of reference and a memorandum of understanding that recognise the relationship between the commissioning body and the administering local authority;
 - ◆ a list of Supporting People services in the commissioning body's area is maintained;
 - ◆ the council attends regular cross authority groups;

- ◆ the council has agreed a charging policy for Supporting People services;
- ◆ the council is ensuring that the grant is spent only in connection with eligible housing related support services;
- ◆ service reviews are being carried out with a view to raising standards. The outcomes of the reviews are being reported to the commissioning body; and
- ◆ contracts are in place and, despite the need to use contingency plans in the first two months, payments are being made on time to all.

User involvement and access to services

- 70 There is no co-ordinated approach across supported housing services in the borough to involve users in the development of services, improve information provision or access.
- 71 The council accepts that there was no meaningful engagement of users in the development of the Supporting People shadow strategy. In general, access to Supporting People services remain the same as they were before, using the same channels and the same referrals systems. Limited additional information is provided for users, but not readily available.

Consultation

- 72 The strategy drew on views expressed by users where user groups, boards or forums were already established but these were not specifically sought for Supporting People purposes.
- 73 The nature of many of the groups assisted by Supporting People is that they are amongst the most marginalised in society. Although a number of groups, boards and forums already exist, such as the Middlesbrough First user group for people with learning disabilities, links to Supporting People have yet been formalised. This should not be a difficult task and presentations have already been carried out. A bigger task is to consult and involve those groups, such as people suffering from HIV/AIDS, where mechanisms do not currently exist.
- 74 The methodology for ongoing reviews of services includes consultation with service users. Providers are expected to engage in developing better ways of consulting service users. Results need to help shape the nature of and way that services are provided to meet client needs.

Information

- 75 The council's arrangements for disseminating information specific to Supporting People have been limited. There is no access to general Supporting People information through the council's website. There is no access to information on the range of Supporting People funded services available through the council's website.
- 76 Our reality checks revealed that frontline customer service staff have a limited knowledge of the Supporting People programme. We made a number of mystery shopper enquiries to the council. In each case, the enquiry was dealt with quickly and sympathetically. Whilst unable to deal with the enquiry at the first point of contact, we were correctly signposted to the most appropriate point where the enquiry was adequately dealt with.
- 77 Leaflet information for users is also limited. A new leaflet has been produced to provide general information on Supporting People. This is easy to understand and available at the council's main reception points. It does not have a wide distribution, for example none were displayed in local libraries.
- 78 However, users have not been involved in its production and, whilst informative, it does not help user's access services and therefore is of little practical help to them. There is no evidence to indicate that information for particular user groups have been amended to include information on Supporting People services.

- 79 The leaflet carries a strap line in several different languages to say that it is available on request in other formats and languages. However, it is presented as a social services service which we think is inappropriate for two reasons.
- ◆ Supporting People services are provided by a partnership between health, probation and the council and the branding on the leaflet should reflect this tripartite arrangement. If the council logo is shown, so should the probation service and PCT logos.
 - ◆ Some people may shy away from or be too proud to apply for a service that is provided by social services when they are only in need of low level housing related support and not high need or crisis support usually associated with social services. The term social services carries a stigma in some people's eyes.
- 80 The council has concentrated on providing information to providers firstly in the form of newsletters, and more recently in the form of information bulletins. Little has been provided to users. During our discussions with users, we found that some had heard of Supporting People, usually from their service provider, whereas others had not and none had participated in any consultation.
- 81 The council's free newspaper has not been used to promote awareness of Supporting People. No articles have been included in any issues and this medium has not been used to inform service users of the changes that took place from 1 April 2003.
- 82 Internally there is little to inform council staff. There is no information on the council intranet and there is no internal bulletin. There is a similar paucity of information for elected members.
- 83 In general, access to Supporting People services remain the same as they were before, using the same channels and the same referrals systems. However, there are individual signs of improvement. One provider felt that access for offenders was improving and less stigmatising than previously as an individual can now self refer without being reliant on referral by one of the statutory agencies. Also, the housing department is assisting better access for sheltered and adapted homes by matching applications manually to ensure that sensitivity is allocations is maintained.

Diversity

- 84 Through their best value performance plan and community plan, the council and Middlesbrough partnership make a strong commitment to understanding the diversity of communities in Middlesbrough and developing services that address their needs. A number of activities are underway corporately but they are starting from a low base. Supporting People is part of this corporate picture but the links need to be stronger. It should be clearer who is going to do what to progress improvements in Supporting People services, where there are overlaps and where there are gaps.
- 85 The council's Supporting People shadow strategy recognises the need to research further the needs of the borough's black and minority ethnic (BME) population. The BME housing strategy takes this one step further setting out a number of key factors apparent when assessing BME support needs. Detailed work on the needs of these communities is planned for completion by March 2004. The research needs to feed into the development of both the Supporting People strategy and the BME housing strategy and clear links must be made between the two.
- 86 As part of the BME action plan a number of actions are proposed that will review access to services, and ensure that adequate monitoring and evaluation of services is carried out
- 87 There are however gaps in information and services in other areas. For example, the needs of people with HIV/AIDS and travellers are not catered for by existing

housing related support services in the borough. The number of homeless young people who stay with friends are unknown and their needs are not identified. It is not clear how these needs are intended to be addressed.

- 88 There are a small number of BME services in the area. For example, a number of voluntary groups established locally currently provide support to victims from the BME community who experience domestic violence.
- 89 The council uses its own interpreter service employing individuals from local communities. Whilst this can have advantages such as understanding local circumstances, it needs to be sensitive to the possible nature of reports. For example, it is inappropriate to use a husband or someone from the local community to interpret for a wife wishing to flee from domestic violence. We were informed that this was the case in Middlesbrough. The council's strategic partner has recently entered into an agreement to use the Language line interpreter service.
- 90 In its 2003/04 best value performance plan Middlesbrough council makes a public commitment to valuing diversity, seeking to promote community cohesion and to providing structures, ways of working and managing to ensure that services are responsive to community and individual needs.
- 91 It is promoting diversity and cohesion through the Middlesbrough partnership by, amongst other things:
- ◆ establishing a diversity advisory group;
 - ◆ developing networks to bring all community interests, including BME interests, together to elect representatives onto the partnership;
 - ◆ employing a qualified and experienced diversity manager to;
 - ◆ promote the interests of diverse groups;
 - ◆ ensure that the partnership delivers outcomes for minority users; and
 - ◆ ensure that services to BME communities are culturally sensitive.

Efforts to date concentrate on mainstream services, Supporting People services are not included.

- 92 Users reported variable experiences of housing related support from good to indifferent. Most were confident that they knew how to access support if they needed it, although this has to be qualified by the fact that these were already users of the service and had experience of gaining access.
- 93 Within Supporting People, there is no sense of strategic planning to identify the range of communities and diverse groups, understand their current and future needs and put in place a strategy that seeks to address these.
- 94 Reviews do address providers commitment to equality, policies and procedures to ensure there is no discrimination. However, monitoring systems are not yet in place to understand the amount of provision, standards and how it differs to address the needs of specific individuals or groups. Nor are they able to track trends linked to ethnicity or wider diversity issues.
- 95 On race equality, the council is making some progress but is starting from a low base. In the 2002/03 best value performance plan, it reports that it has not attained level one (the lowest level) of the commission for race equality's (CRE) standard for local government. However, it does follow the CRE code of practice in rented housing and the code of practice for social landlords: Tackling racial harassment. As stated above, it is also making progress with a BME housing strategy.

Partnerships

- 96 Co-ordinated and effective partnership working is key to the success of the Supporting People programme that delivers real improvements to the housing related support available to vulnerable people. The council has a range of mechanisms in place to achieve this as described in the following sections of this report.
- 97 Overall we consider that the Supporting People partnerships are not as effective as they need to be. While the structures are generally in place and there is a willingness to work together for common purposes, there needs to be greater clarity about what each partnership is trying to achieve and the contribution it is expected to make. Plans need to be put in place and mechanisms to measure progress and performance.

Inclusive Forum

- 98 Initial guidance from the ODPM⁶ stated that council's should operate an inclusive forum that would meet regularly and involve all partners in consultation. It is not evident that the group operating in Middlesbrough acts in this manner, in particular due to the lack of representation from users, their carers and advocates.
- 99 The Middlesbrough Supporting People inclusive forum has met nine times. The initial meeting was on 8 January 2002 and the latest in December 2003. The inclusive forum does not fulfill its description as in the last year it has acted mainly as a forum for informing, and more recently training, service providers. Only the early events sought to engage with users, their carers and advocates.
- 100 The council has arranged training events for Middlesbrough's 34 providers. These included:
- ◆ training in respect of recognising and responding to potential/actual abuse of vulnerable adults. Delivered by social services department. 42 provider representatives attended;
 - ◆ support planning - How to develop and maintain support plans for residents of supported housing? National housing federation delivered training to 15 provider representatives; and
 - ◆ the review process - How and why reviews will be conducted and how to prepare and participate in them? The council were assisted by the national housing federation delivering training to 40 provider representatives.

Details of other training events delivered by SITRA and the national federation are also circulated by the Supporting People team to ensure providers are aware of regional events.

- 101 The core strategy group has liaised with the inclusive forum through reports from the Supporting People team to inclusive forum meetings.

Core Strategy Group

- 102 Good links exist between partner organisations for example the health primary care trust, the council's social services department and the probation service at the core strategy group. Meetings are well attended.
- 103 Terms of reference for the core strategy group are in place. However, following implementation, the group feel they lack clarity of purpose. They feel that they need greater direction from the commissioning body about what they are expected to achieve and suffer from a lack of clearly defined priorities for the Supporting People programme.

⁶ ODPM Supporting People Guidance – October 2001.

- 104 No external providers attend this group. Representatives of the council, who are also major service providers, from both housing and social services do attend. The core strategy group will discuss the outcomes of service reviews and decisions on reconfiguration and decommissioning services will be recommended to the commissioning body. It is imperative that access to these discussions from internal service providers does not compromise the independence of the decision making process.
- 105 Meetings of the core strategy group are beginning to discuss the emerging findings of service reviews. There is good debate around the options and the best way forward for example in circumstances where a provider is failing to provide the contracted housing related support and is unco-operative, and yet service users appear to like the service and there is a lack of similar specialist provision in the borough.
- 106 There is, however, no strategic action plan in place which, for example, details what work is still to be achieved. Such work may include:
- ◆ identifying gaps in needs information and service provision;
 - ◆ determining and advising on aims and priorities;
 - ◆ clarifying links to the wider agenda, such as Supporting People's contribution to tackling drug taking, health or crime in Middlesbrough;
 - ◆ determining how best to consult, involve and feedback to service users;
 - ◆ establishing performance and review targets;
 - ◆ monitoring progress on reviews; and
 - ◆ monitoring spend against allocation.

Commissioning Body

- 107 Key senior officers from the partner organisations, the council, the primary care trust and the probation service sit on the commissioning body. It has met monthly for the past nine months.
- 108 Whilst relatively well attended, the commissioning body has suffered through a lack of continuity of personnel. The current chair was appointed in the last seven months, a new accountable officer took up his position in the last four months and some partners expressed the view that the body had to spend the first few months establishing stability and developing working relationship. Consequently it started from a low base and suffered through not having a robust strategy already in place. Early meetings have concentrated on ensuring implementation arrangements were in place.
- 109 Commissioning body partners feel that they are working together and do understand each others statutory agency objectives. They feel confident in being able to influence the agenda. Roles of members were clarified at a recent away day. There are established links between the three partners into other partnerships and governing bodies. For example, the PCT chief executive is the chair of Middlesbrough partnership and all commissioning body members have a role on the thematic groups.
- 110 Whilst accepting the importance of implementation, the commissioning body has not operated strategically. It has not ensured that the deficiencies of the shadow strategy have been addressed. In particular, it has not established clear aims for the programme in Middlesbrough nor determined priorities for service reviews, even as an interim measure pending production of the 2004 strategy. This has significant implications for service reviews as it is impossible to establish which services are strategically relevant when priorities have not been set.
- 111 There is no strategic direction for the review programme nor any lead on how the programme is expected to unlock resources from legacy funding to be reinvested in relevant new or redesigned services. Until recently, resourcing difficulties have

- not been addressed. Nor are adequate monitoring arrangements in place for the commissioning body to compare budget against current and projected spending.
- 112 The lack of any current high level work programme or action plan is a major weakness. Without one, there is no prioritised list of actions to be carried out, no identification of resources required, no identification of responsibilities and no timescales set for completion.
- 113 On a more positive note, there was evidence of the commissioning body requiring business cases to be made for requests for new services including an assessment of user needs. This approach has still to be formalised and needs further development.
- 114 Terms of reference have been established for the commissioning body. They detail the voting rights and its general purpose. There is also a memorandum of understanding between the commissioning body and the administering authority which refers to the council's right to veto decisions, where a financial risk to the council can be demonstrated.
- 115 However, the terms of reference lack some fundamental criteria around the resolution of potential disagreements and conflicts. There is no specific mention of how disagreements will be resolved beyond the reliance on the split in the available votes.
- 116 Some significant service related decisions have been taken. The commissioning body has already taken the decision to withdraw Supporting People funding from one supplier and the contract is being re-tendered. Agreement has also been reached to provisionally commit to revenue grant subject to future funding, enabling future project development to continue.
- 117 There is a need to develop an overarching shared vision for Supporting People taking account of related policy initiatives for example the modernisation agenda for community care, valuing people and the national service frameworks for mental health and older people. The work to develop the five year strategy should help to resolve this.
- 118 Councillors are involved in a series of ways. Progress reports are provided to the executive body of councillors and these are available to all councillors. Activities are scrutinised by the social care scrutiny panel, part of the broader overview and scrutiny board, who examined implementation arrangements and reported progress to be slow with work still to do. More work is planned in 2004. However, there have been no specific training events or briefings for councillors.
- 119 The Supporting People charging policy statement has been agreed by the commissioning body.

Cross Authority Issues

- 120 Cross authority working is required in order to effectively meet the needs of vulnerable people for whom specialist housing related support services may not be available in their own administering local authority areas and where people needs may need to be met outside their immediate area. For example, women fleeing domestic violence and ex offenders who cannot be housed in the area. The council has been a member of cross authority working in Greater Manchester and has been proactive in its approach.
- 121 The cross-authority group for Teesside is well established and has been used as a support and information network. There is a good working relationship between the authorities although it has been noted that engagement from health on the group has been difficult. Cross-authority training has also been arranged and facilitated through the group. Benchmarking costs and the ability to discuss what was wanted from a scheme with other supporting people teams were seen as very helpful on new schemes. Post April 2004, the group is now looking at contracting and de-commissioning issues and the five year strategy.

With Service Providers

- 122 The council needs to work together with providers as partners in delivering services to vulnerable users. We found mixed views on their relationship with the council. The Supporting People team were generally regarded as knowledgeable, polite and helpful. Their contacts were clearly identified in information supplied.
- 123 The council has not addressed the need to create a level playing field for all providers in the planning and delivery of Supporting People funded services. Of the £6.36 million available to the council in 2003/04, £1.04 million is being paid to internal service providers. The council has yet to address the actual and potential conflicts of interest in the decision making processes where internal providers have access to decision making bodies denied to their external competitors.
- 124 External service providers consider that they have not received the level of information and guidance they required. Not all know about the provider forum, and more would have liked training, particularly on things like the charging policy. One commented that:

***'Our involvement with other councils is more organised and informative.'* – An external service provider.**

- 125 In the absence of clear aims, external service providers do not know what the Supporting People programme is trying to achieve in Middlesbrough and where their priorities lie. Decisions to withdraw or remodel services are taken by the commissioning body. However, there are no protocols or processes in place to resolve disputes or challenge decisions taken.

Quality and Monitoring

Contracts and Payments

- 126 The council has successfully negotiated the signing of all contracts with service providers and has implemented the payment of Supporting People grant in a timely and efficient manner.
- 127 The transition of funding streams from 1 April 2003 has been seamless. Although contingency procedures had to be used to make payments for the first three months, no difficulties with Supporting People payments are reported by the Supporting People team or the providers we contacted.
- 128 Efficient IT systems have been developed and procedures are in place to process provider returns advising changes in occupancy levels for net subsidy payments.

Performance Management

- 129 Performance management within Supporting People is weak and needs to be developed. Currently very little information is provided. Ad hoc progress reports are provided to the council but no information is routinely provided to either the commissioning body or core strategy group.
- 130 Procedures for the desktop monitoring of returns from service providers are in place and service agreements are signed. Performance management data is collated from providers to ensure they are delivering to expectations in relation to their contract.
- 131 Progress targets are in place for Supporting People implementation. However, a system of performance indicators, targets and outcome measures is not in place to allow regular reporting of performance across all areas of the service and also to support their approach to diversity.
- 132 Monthly budget reports are produced by the finance system but they are voluminous and do not present data in a user friendly format. Little analysis is carried out on the data and no periodic reports are produced for management purposes.

- 133 This situation is improving. The recent appointment of a strategic accountant to oversee social services finance, including Supporting People, has added much needed expertise. Work is ongoing to put systems in place to code and extract data so that meaningful financial information is readily available.

Value for Money and Cost Effectiveness

- 134 The council performed well in analysing and challenging claims for transitional housing benefit in order to define the level of Supporting People funding that would transfer from 1 April 2003. There is evidence to show that claims for transitional housing benefit were rigorously examined and high costs were challenged. Housing benefits section and social services have worked together to ensure that the balance between housing related support and care charges were correct.
- 135 Despite this approach it is acknowledged that there may still be some mismatch in the levels of Supporting People grant being claimed for some schemes and that there could be an element of care being paid for by Supporting People and vice versa. The intention is that the scheme reviews will allow for a reassessment and reallocation of Supporting People resources in line with grant conditions. This process will ensure that council only renews contracts for services that are eligible for grant funding.
- 136 The council has not concluded how it will approach the question of ensuring value for money and cost effectiveness. ODPM guidance and unit costs are being followed as guidelines to date and local comparisons can be made between providers. However, no definitive line on how to address the question of value for money has been agreed by the commissioning body and this is a major hindrance for effective service reviews.

Risk and Contingency Planning

- 137 The identification and evaluation of risks to the Supporting People programme and its service providers and users have not been assessed. A limited amount of assessment has been carried out to determine the service review programme and some contingency planning has taken place but not for all eventualities. The council has yet to undertake a risk analysis of the Supporting People programme in Middlesbrough in a manner that protects the users from potential service failure and puts contingency plans in place. It also needs to consider the wider risks to the potential benefits that Supporting People can bring to the achievement of council and partner agency objectives.
- 138 Some risk assessment work has begun on the potential financial risks that the Supporting People programme may have or pose for the council. But there is no overall assessment of the nature, likely incidence and potential impact of risks to the Supporting People programme as a whole. Consequently no actions are taken to manage the risks.
- 139 In addition, it is not clear whether Supporting People have agreed probation risk management and public protection protocols, although they have participated in multi-agency public protection agreement (MAPPA) meetings, a public protection panel for partner agencies to meet and prepare plans for a number of individuals who pose a risk to public safety.
- 140 Contingency plans are not in place. In the case of a major local emergency, action will be taken in accordance with the council's emergency plan. However, there does not appear to be any contingency planning for the loss of a particular service or scheme. For example, a sudden scheme closure caused for example by fire or allegations of abuse against staff.
- 141 Contingency plans were drawn up for the eventuality of payment systems not being operational by the 1 April. These were needed and were used effectively to ensure payments to providers continued.

Service Reviews

- 142 The ODPM Supporting People grant conditions require all administering local authorities to review all of their contracted services within a three year period from 1 April 2003. Service providers are currently providing services under interim contracts and a service review is required before a contract can be renegotiated. The outcomes of service reviews and any associated decisions to reconfigure or decommission a service must be agreed by the commissioning body. The ODPM has published extensive guidance on how service reviews should be conducted.
- 143 Whilst a review programme has been put in place with reviews ranked according to risk, cost, profile, and concerns, there are a number of significant concerns about the council's ability to carry out the programme.
- ◆ There are inadequate resources in place to undertake and complete the review programme. At best, council managers estimate existing resources will cover around 50 to 60 per cent of planned reviews. This is recognised by the council and additional staffing resources are being recruited.
 - ◆ The programme does not address how it will unlock legacy funding quickly for reinvestment in priority service areas.
 - ◆ The strategic relevance of services cannot be determined as Supporting People aims and priorities for Middlesbrough are not clear. This has particular relevance to unlocking legacy funding from existing services for reinvestment.
 - ◆ The approach to determine how to assess whether a service is value for money or cost effective is not agreed.
 - ◆ Arrangements are not in place on how the review will engage with users who have specialist communication needs.
 - ◆ There is an uneven playing field for service providers in terms of access to information with internal service providers given access denied to external providers.
 - ◆ Supporting People training needs are not being assessed or met.
 - ◆ There is no challenge process in place for providers.
- 144 On a more positive note, existing arrangements mean that it is easy to integrate Supporting People service reviews with social services service reviews for the same provider. Probation have also participated in a service review.
- 145 At the time of the inspection, seven reviews had been carried out and one was in progress. Essentially, to date given the limitations identified above, the review process has concentrated on assessing the quality of services and making improvements.
- 146 There are some positive outcomes from service reviews. One failing service provider has had funding withdrawn and another is part way through the process. These changes will ensure that users will now receive the services that are being funded by Supporting People and have their needs properly met.
- 147 Provider experience of reviews is mixed. One found that the process itself was a positive experience. The review confirmed existing good practice, made additional suggestions and has led to service improvements for users. Another felt that Supporting People brought more focus to the policies and procedures of the provider's project.
- 148 Service provider concerns centred around:
- ◆ training prior to the review – so they could understand what to expect and what was expected of them, to enable some improvements to be made in advance of the review;

- ◆ no information about how the council proposes to assess whether a service is cost effective and value for money;
 - ◆ timescales – not when the review would start, but additional information on when they would be notified of the result; and
 - ◆ how the council propose to engage with service users who have special communication needs.
- 149 The outcomes of all service reviews are reported to the commissioning body, in accordance with the grant conditions, with recommendations for further action as required.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 150 The Supporting People programme in Middlesbrough is beginning to deliver positive changes to the services it funds and thereby the lives of service users. Whilst some changes have come about as a result of the national programme, this process of change is being linked into scheme reviews and the outcomes are being recorded and reported. However, there are areas where challenges still remain and it is unclear how they are to be addressed.
- 151 Positive outcomes reported by some users include:
- ◆ less stigma attached to referrals via Supporting People for accommodation with housing related support;
 - ◆ people with learning disabilities and people with physical disabilities reporting positively on the support they have received to help them establish themselves to live independently following moves into permanent housing; and
 - ◆ better information on how to access support services.
- 152 One provider described how the programme had helped overcome earlier problems in moving people on through a lack of available accommodation. The council was described as unhelpful and registered social landlords were selective. With the introduction of the Supporting People programme attitudes are now changing, more accommodation is made available and the blockages have been removed.
- 153 These improvements are happening but not yet in a way that is structured and driven by the Supporting People programme. Currently there is no clear view of what outcomes Middlesbrough's commissioning body wants to see for users. These are not made known to users and providers and are not measured or monitored in any way. The work of the council's Supporting People team has helped housing related support service providers to understand the programme and how services could be developed.
- 154 Not all the feedback was positive. There is a lack of floating support for elderly tenants, and housing related support services for offenders and drug misusers do not fully meet needs.
- 155 The following case studies are historical and illustrate different outcomes for service users who have claimed low level housing related support prior to the introduction of Supporting People. They illustrate both the changes that Supporting People services can make to an individual's life and demonstrate the challenges for the council's work in this area. The second case study highlights a gap in appropriate service provision and the impact of exclusion on one particular person.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: Young person

Type of Service: Accommodation based

Key Players: Supporting People team, housing related support staff, social services, the service user, her family

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Miss A is a 19 year old with behaviour and personality problems.
- ◆ She was unable to get on with her mother and moved around from one family member to another.
- ◆ When she became pregnant she became increasingly depressed and stressed by her lack of ability to settle successfully with any member of her family.

Actions taken:

- ◆ In partnership with the provider and her social worker, Miss A was able to draw up a plan that would meet her care and support needs in an independent environment.
- ◆ She was given assistance to apply for and successfully secure temporary supported accommodation.
- ◆ Other appropriate funding partners were found to cover care elements of the package.

Outcome for service user:

- ◆ Miss A's baby has now been born. In her more stable and supported environment, she has rebuilt relations with her mother and her wider family who provide her with emotional support.
- ◆ Miss A is now applying for permanent accommodation and has trust in her support provider to help her make wise choices that will lead to her living independently.

Supporting People Case Study 2

Service user group: Offender and drug user

Type of service: Excluded from accommodation and support

Key players: Supporting People team, housing officer, probation officer, housing related support staff

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Mr P was a heroin addict.
- ◆ On his release from prison, he faced substantial rent arrears due to the non closure of his tenancy.
- ◆ He is helping to run a group for young offenders to share his experiences and wean them off drugs.
- ◆ He has been unable to access housing.

Action taken:

- ◆ Mr P has been offered supported accommodation at a local homeless hostel. He has declined this accommodation as he believes he will be exposed to drug dealing and this will put his recovery in jeopardy.

Outcomes for service user:

- ◆ Mr P has to live where he can.
- ◆ Changes are being made to the council's allocations policy which mean that he will shortly be offered a tenancy.
- ◆ He is not clear whether or how he can access housing related support services.

How does the performance compare?

- 156 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 157 Currently there are no published national indicators which measure the quality or effectiveness of Supporting People services. Data is, however, available on a number of measures where Supporting People services, or more accurately legacy services, have contributed either directly or indirectly to results, and on a number of other services which assist vulnerable people to live independently. Some data is available on cost.
- 158 The details of the data used to inform comparisons are included in the data appendix to this report. Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with average indicator for all England and all metropolitan councils.
- 159 Overall, based on the performance assessment framework and best value indicators the council compares relatively well against other councils. In terms of the resources it has secured to deliver Supporting People services, it also compares well. The average unit cost of Supporting People services in Middlesbrough is high in comparison to others in the north east, although it is lower than national comparisons.

- 160 In the performance assessment framework indicators for 2002/03:
- ◆ the council performed significantly above the average for the percentage of adults with physical disabilities, adults with mental health problems, adults with learning disabilities and older people helped to live at home;
 - ◆ the council performed above the average in the admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care, people receiving intensive home care, and the percentage of items of equipment and adaptations costing less than £1000 delivered within 3 weeks; and
 - ◆ the council performed averagely in relation to intensive home care as a percentage of intensive home and residential care, admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care, avoidable harm for older people (falls and hypothermia), waiting time for care packages and delayed discharge for (all ages).
- 161 In the best value performance indicators for 2002/03:
- ◆ the council were in the best 25 per cent of authorities for the average time for processing new benefit claims and changes of circumstance, for the number of local authority dwellings renovated (£5,000 and under), and the number of homelessness decisions determined within 33 days;
 - ◆ the council were average in the level of the commission for racial equality's standard to which the authority conforms, the energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings, the number of local authority dwellings renovated (over £5,000), the number of domestic violence refuge places, the number of unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished, council house tenant satisfaction with the overall housing service and with opportunities for participation; and
 - ◆ the council were below average in the number of public buildings accessible to disabled people.
- 162 Generally the council compares well in the resources it has secured for both the administration of Supporting People and the grant available to fund the whole programme. Both grants are above the average amount secured per head of population by unitary councils and in comparison to a group of councils with the most similar characteristics.
- 163 On costs, Middlesbrough's Supporting People average unit cost is high in comparison to others in the North East, although it is lower than national comparisons.

Summary

- 164 Overall, we judge that Middlesbrough Council is delivering a fair one star service. It borders on a poor service. There are a number of weaknesses in the way the programme is being delivered and some are significant. However, given the early stage of development of the Supporting People programme, the fact that contracts are signed, providers are being paid, partnership structures are in place and that the programme in Middlesbrough complies with ODPM grant conditions, we judge that arrangements are just sufficient to warrant a one star rating.
- 165 The transition to Supporting People funding has been managed smoothly. Contracts are all signed and in place and there was no disruption to payments to providers or the services they provide. The council has met the published statutory conditions for the management of Supporting People grant and there are emerging signs of improved outcomes for service users.
- 166 However, we found a number of significant weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.

- ◆ The engagement of users is underdeveloped.
- ◆ Aims for the Supporting People programme are not clear and priorities for future development have not been determined.
- ◆ No comprehensive map of local needs exists.
- ◆ The commissioning body has yet to fully develop as the body that directs the course of the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ Providers were critical about the lack of information provided for service users and the lack of training provided.
- ◆ The team employed to develop and implement Supporting People is under resourced.
- ◆ Without clear aims and priorities, service reviewers are unable to determine the strategic relevance of services.
- ◆ Little information is available for service users on the availability of and how to access Supporting People services.
- ◆ Risk assessment, contingency planning, performance management and monitoring all need significant further development.
- ◆ It is unclear how gaps in provision, such as floating support for the elderly, offenders, and people suffering from HIV/AIDS are to be addressed.
- ◆ There is no current active action plan or work programme.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 167 Inspectors have judged the service's prospects for improvement based on its capacity to improve using the four building blocks for effective improvement:
- ◆ ownership of problems and willingness to change;
 - ◆ a sustained focus on what matters;
 - ◆ the capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement; and
 - ◆ integration of continuous improvement into day to day management.

Ownership of problems & willingness to change

- 168 The council has been slow to take ownership of the Supporting People programme. As a consequence it is behind with its development of partnership working, setting strategic direction and making links with other agency objectives. This is beginning to change with the introduction of a new accountable officer, raising the profile of Supporting People and obtaining corporate, councillor and partnership support. However, there remains a lack of strategic direction for the programme and a full understanding of user needs for Supporting People. A consultant has been commissioned to advise on these areas and plans are being put in place to address these.
- 169 The council has a reputation for ambition, as evidenced by their comprehensive performance assessment and a willingness to try new ways of working to deliver better services. This was not extended to Supporting People in the past. The council was slow to put people and structures in place to develop services and contribute towards tackling Middlesbrough's problems. This is now changing. The commitment to Supporting People is developing and there is a growing awareness of the contribution the programme can make to improving services for vulnerable people and achieving shared targets for service standards across the partner agencies. There is, however considerable ground to make up particularly in setting strategic direction, engaging users, ensuring sufficient resources are in place to deliver the programme and measures to monitor progress.
- 170 There is no question over the council's ambition and willingness to change. Its groundbreaking strategic partnership with Hyder business services to deliver central support services and improved customer contact arrangements is evidence of its willingness to try something new. Nor is there any question over the council and its partners accepting what the problems are in Middlesbrough. Without a comprehensive assessment of the needs of Supporting People client groups nor strong linkages between the objectives and targets of the statutory agency partners, the council and the commissioning body cannot know the full extent of their problems and how best to address them.
- 171 The problem for Supporting People has been that it has not been a corporate priority. A lack of sustained focus on the programme has been aggravated by changes in personnel and the location of the team. Originally sited in the housing department problems arose when ODPM raised considerable concerns about their failure to appoint a lead officer for Supporting People. Responsibility was transferred to social services, but the council continued to struggle to implement the programme effectively through lack of sustained management and staff resources.
- 172 Recent changes in personnel have given Supporting People more impetus and raised its profile. A new accountable officer has taken up post who has the full support of the commissioning body. The council has a new chief executive and management team who are reviewing the council's aims, priorities and partnerships. They recognise that Supporting People has a part to play in achieving the council's stated aims and strategic objectives. The councillor who is the portfolio holder for the programme is taking an interest in progress and demonstrates a strong commitment to making improvements.

- 173 Requesting an early inspection was a recognition that there were problems and a desire to receive independent assessment of where they are now in relation to others and what needs be done to drive the programme forward. The council is strengthening the team, recruiting additional staff, restructuring the section and have additional financial expertise from which to draw support.
- 174 The lack of strategic direction is a cause for concern both for the short and the long term. In the longer term, a consultant has been appointed to advise on the strategic direction for Supporting People in Middlesbrough by July 2004. In the short term, no aims or priorities have been identified. As all Supporting People schemes need to be reviewed within three years of the April 2003 go live date, this has a particular impact on the review programme which will be almost half way through its course before priorities are put in place.
- 175 The consultant's original commission was primarily to develop the Supporting People strategy but the brief has been expanded to include:
- ◆ a review of decision making structures – by January 2004;
 - ◆ a desktop supply and needs analysis – by January 2004;
 - ◆ analysis and advice on user and provider engagement structures – by March 2004;
 - ◆ a report on the strategic direction for Supporting People in Middlesbrough – by July 2004;
 - ◆ an action plan - August 2004; and
 - ◆ a suggested strategy for Supporting People – by September 2004.
- 176 Within the proposal there is a clear recognition that this is Middlesbrough's Supporting People strategy and the commissioning body need to take ownership of it.

'Underpinning the work plan is the understanding that ultimately this is Middlesbrough's 5 year strategy and that the work should develop as a partnership between and Middlesbrough so that Middlesbrough gain the full benefit of the development process proposed and have full ownership.' – **An extract from consultant's proposal.**

- 177 New partnerships, in the form of the commissioning body and the core strategy group, have developed and there is a shared sense of ownership and needing to change by the partners. Partners on the commissioning body are developing relationships with each other and building trust. They are confident that they understand each others agency objectives and are keen to make a difference both to their own and partnership agendas which in the main are seen as complementary.
- 178 By the council's own admission the commissioning body for Supporting People is still at a developmental stage. The commissioning body has recognised that it needs to move beyond its previous role of endorsing and approving reports and become more proactive. In order to do this they will need to revisit the terms of reference, establish robust performance monitoring, review risk and contingency planning and address issues around conflicts of interest.
- 179 Initial guidance from the ODPM on the role of this body was published in October 2001 and we would have expected to find the commissioning body better prepared to take an active lead in determining strategy than is currently evident. In part, this is due to the lack of priority afforded to Supporting People by the council.
- 180 As Supporting People partnership working is at its early stages of development, it is not providing direction. The shadow strategy was essentially a position statement and there is still more work to be done to identify and agree local priorities and research needs amongst groups that have been overlooked or hard to reach. There is no clarity about priorities, no clear understanding how

Supporting People developments can contribute to each agency objectives, and therefore no direction for other groups on how services are being and should be developed. For example, the drug action team cannot see what priority is being given to drug users and how access to services for this group is planned to be improved.

- 181 This lack of direction is also having an impact on the core strategy group who are unclear, following the implementation of Supporting People, what their role is.
- 182 Both probation and the PCT are firmly committed to the Supporting People programme. Both consider there is a strong and effective partnership with the council, which is broader than just the Supporting People agenda. For example, the chief executive of the PCT chairs Middlesbrough partnership, the local strategic partnership, the older peoples local implementation team also has a chair from health. There are a number of other multi agency partnerships such as the Joint Investment Team for people with learning disabilities and the wider multi agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA). Multi-agency membership of these groups demonstrates their experience and commitment to working together and a willingness to respond to new ways of working. There is, however, currently a lack of clarity about the read across from these partnerships to the Supporting People programme.
- 183 The Probation service has been engaged in the Supporting People programme in Middlesbrough. Probation is felt to be a significant player with the commitment of senior management. They are positive about their links to Supporting People although to date it has only ensured that legacy funded accommodation is protected, rather than looking more widely at the needs of offenders. Probation's strategic input is enhanced through their close involvement in work with the drug action team, and other initiatives.
- 184 Councillors are engaged to a limited extent in the process through the scrutiny panel. Some work has already been carried out although this has tended to be informative rather than challenging.

A sustained focus on what matters

- 185 The primary focus for the Supporting People programme in Middlesbrough has been to move from legacy to Supporting People funding smoothly without disruption to vulnerable service users. To a large extent it has achieved this.
- 186 It has not, however, delivered on a significant part of programme that puts in place the framework for further developing Supporting People services in the future. These include:
- ◆ taking advantage of or putting in place mechanisms to engage meaningfully with current and potential service users;
 - ◆ beyond comparing supply rates, identifying local needs or filling gaps where local needs are already established;
 - ◆ establishing aims and priorities for the programme; and
 - ◆ establishing a programme of service reviews that will unlock funding for reinvestment in priority, new or remodelled services.
- 187 Plans, as detailed above, are in place to address the first three issues. But there is an urgent need to put in place interim priorities to guide the service review programme until properly researched and consulted aims and priorities can be put in place. The review programme needs to address the question of strategic relevance of services and how value for money and cost effectiveness will be assessed.
- 188 Although late, the council is addressing the shortage of resources to become better equipped to administer the changes. It is also spending time, effort and resources catching up. A significant proportion of the current year's budget is set

aside to research and activities that underpin the development of the Supporting People strategy.

- 189 Borough-wide, the council is re-examining its partnerships' aims, priorities and themes to ensure they are better aligned, cohesive and complement each other. This will provide greater clarity over what matters to the community, the statutory agencies and partnerships and help establish better links.
- 190 Currently there is no clarity about the direction for services. Some initiatives are resulting in improvements for service users but this is not achieved in any co-ordinated or controlled manner. For example, through the home improvement agency and using the regulatory reforms, the council has introduced a system of financial assistance for home improvements for people over 60 who are not on a means tested benefit. However, there is nothing to show which client groups are priority and what is the nature of provision most urgently required, for example low level floating housing support for older people or supported accommodation or floating support for offenders.
- 191 It is too early to see how resources are being re-allocated and there are no targets or guidance for the service reviewers to aim towards. Currently reviews concentrate on examining services within the context of Supporting People general principles. This is beginning to impact on the quality of services provided to users but not to any reallocation of resources.

The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 192 The council is in the process of building up its Supporting People capacity. It is currently recruiting to two additional posts, has already added capacity in the form of financial expertise, and is to restructure to enable all personnel involved with the delivery of the Supporting People programme to be managed as a single team. This should add focus and drive.
- 193 Currently Supporting People has insufficient resources to deliver its programme of service reviews. In addition to more people, it needs to ensure that staff are equipped with the necessary skills to do the job. This means ensuring a full training needs analysis is carried out to identify required and existing skills, then investing in training to bridge any gaps. Forward planning, performance management, risk assessment and contingency planning skills are either evident corporately or under review but not within Supporting People. Supporting People needs to be brought in line and integrated with corporate developments.
- 194 Arrangements are also being put in place to ensure that appropriate advocacy arrangements exist to facilitate user involvement in service reviews.
- 195 Advance training is being provided to some providers, mainly external, on an ad hoc basis to help them prepare for the service review process. This helps them build their capacity to deliver both user focused services and services which meet the overall needs of the programme including ODPM's quality assessment framework. Providers told us that they need more structured training. The Supporting People team need to assess demand for this preparatory work, evaluate the costs and benefits and consider how best these requests can be delivered, and who to. There are a number of bodies who can provide this training on the council's behalf.
- 196 Financial information on Supporting People is inaccessible and not user friendly. Work is ongoing to improve the coding of payments to make the extraction of data easier. In addition a new corporate financial system is due to come on stream from April 2004 which will make information more readily available in whatever form it is desired.
- 197 Despite early start up problems, the current financial system used to make payments to providers is proving to be robust with very little downtime. Balanced

against this is the imminent loss of the Supporting People lead officer to another position locally. Although the post is to be replaced with reorganised responsibilities, much of the Supporting People knowledge and expertise, particularly as it applies to Middlesbrough, will leave with her. This illustrates an over reliance upon individuals rather than having a clear set of plans in backed by a skilled team to drive improvement.

- 198 Additional expertise and capacity, albeit temporary, is being commissioned to deliver the next major stage of the Supporting People programme and one which has been weak until now. Consultants will lead on the development of the five year Supporting People strategy bringing with them a background of work in Supporting People and experience from working with other councils and national groups. It is important that the commissioning body, core strategy group and Supporting People team involve themselves fully in this project, learn from the experience and ensure that the outputs and resulting strategy are what they want, what they expect and is their strategy for Middlesbrough. Measures need to be put in place to ensure that this actually happens.
- 199 There are a number of existing consultation and involvement mechanisms within the borough. These include the BME network, the learning disabilities partnership board, the older peoples housing strategy group amongst others. Whilst use is not currently made of these groups to involve users in the development of Supporting People and feedback, plans are in place to make these links as part of the consultancy brief.
- 200 At a corporate level, consultation is seen as in transition within the council. The new management team are seeking to rationalise activity, develop fuller evaluations of consultation work and co-ordinate activity making use of a central database to ensure maximum use is made of work undertaken. Work is also ongoing to strengthen the corporate approach to financial management, performance management and risk assessment and management. These are all areas where the council's approach to Supporting People is currently weak.
- 201 The council has yet to establish clear local performance indicators that define what Supporting People funding is delivering to the people of Middlesbrough. Links between Supporting People and the achievement of corporate aims and targets and achievement of partner agency targets such as reducing delayed hospital discharges, psychiatric re-admission rates and reductions in re-offending are understood but not clearly articulated or built into existing operations. This area of work needs to be progressed through the commissioning body.
- 202 Performance management is already part of the council culture although it is not yet fully integrated into all areas and is particularly weak with Supporting People. It is one of the areas that is being re-visited by the corporate management team to ensure that mechanisms and measures are most relevant and robust.
- 203 This performance culture includes councillors with portfolio responsibilities. Targets are set for performance improvement and portfolio holders are held accountable by the mayor for performance in their particular area. Whilst performance management is central to work in the social services department, it is not part of the management of Supporting People. Arrangements within Supporting People need to be brought in line with the corporate performance management arrangements operated by the council.
- 204 Financial management within social services has been poor in the past but is improving. The lack of reliable financial information was a major contributor to significant overspends within the social services department in the past two years. With the employment of strategic accountants and renegotiation of the public private partnership contract, the causes are now being rectified. A recovery plan is in place and spending is on track to balance budgets by the end of the next financial year.

- 205 It, however, remains a concern that Supporting People spending is not being monitored. No financial reports are taken to the core strategy group or the commissioning body.
- 206 Forward planning is a major weakness for Supporting People and we are concerned at the lack of any current work plan. The track record is one of crisis management. For example, no lead officer was appointed until a warning from the ODPM, a temporary IT manager was employed at the last minute to assist with implementing the payment system for providers, and no early action was taken to rectify weaknesses in the Supporting People shadow strategy. Whilst we understand that priorities have now changed, it remains a major concern that there is no current plan of actions needed to be carried out, with responsibilities people and resources identified.
- 207 We also have some concerns over the council's management of the Supporting People consultant and the potential risk of the council becoming over reliant on their support. The original brief was awarded to the consultancy under open tender. No contractual agreement has yet been signed. Since then the work that the consultant is being asked to do has expanded considerably, timescales have changed as a result of ODPM relaxing deadlines, and still further changes may be necessary.
- 208 Whilst we accept that the picture is not static and the council needs to invest to catch up, it needs to be prudent in the use of expensive consultancy support. There needs to be an understanding that to be sustainable the council needs to build strength, expertise and capacity into its own team with support structures and the capabilities to deliver the review programme and Supporting People services for the future. The council need to have complete clarity over what it is asking the consultant to do, what will not be done and how the work will be managed and taken forward.
- 209 Having said that, the consultant will bring wider Supporting People experience and additional resource to Supporting People that should enable Middlesbrough to catch up on lost ground and make progress. In addition to carrying out research, pulling together what is known about the needs of Supporting People, advising on strategic direction, and identifying possible links to existing user engagement forums, he is to offer an independent opinion on the effectiveness of the decision making structure of Supporting People in Middlesbrough.
- 210 Another area of concern is contingency planning. Whilst there are emergency plans drawn up for the council as a whole to deal with emergency situations, we are not aware of any plans that exist to cover such eventualities as the sudden closure of a Supporting People funded scheme or the withdrawal from the market of a service provider.

Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management

- 211 The council is becoming engaged in the Supporting People programme. The portfolio holder is showing a keen interest in progress and through the scrutiny process, councillors are proposing to examine arrangements and monitor progress.
- 212 At a corporate level the council opens itself up to challenge and inspection to help it reach its ambitions. In the past it has responded quickly and positively to recommendations made by review bodies and inspections.
- 213 Partnership working is well established across a number of areas, and there are mechanisms in place in many areas to engage with various client groups which are being developed and improved.
- 214 Service planning is developed in the council and the social services department. These set out in clearly defined objectives, and programmes of action to meet

those objectives. Whilst this may on the one hand be regarded as a strength as there are the skills available within the council, it is also a weakness in that the council has failed to learn from what it does elsewhere and apply the corporate systems to all parts of the organisation including Supporting People.

- 215 At a personal level, there are local supervision agreements which assess the performance of individuals, identify training and development needs and links personal to higher level service objectives.
- 216 Much of the corporate support framework for Supporting People is there. However, the features which are essential to integrating continuous improvement into the work are not in place for Supporting People.
- ◆ The links between wider priorities and goals and individual targets for the Supporting People programme are underdeveloped. These need to demonstrate how Supporting People contributes to the priorities and strategic direction of the council, the PCT and probation.
 - ◆ Engagement with current and potential service users to understand their needs does not take place.
 - ◆ Aims and objectives are not in place for the service.
 - ◆ A properly resourced team, qualified, experienced and equipped to deal with service reviews that will challenge services to establish eligibility, cost effectiveness, value for money and drive up performance standards is not yet in place.
 - ◆ Service standards have not been discussed, agreed and set.
 - ◆ Targets to measure and monitor performance are not in place.
 - ◆ Service planning or forward planning is not a feature of the service.
 - ◆ There are no performance management and monitoring arrangements in place.
 - ◆ There is no action plan to drive improvements.

There are proposals to put these in place, and they are at various stages of development.

Summary

- 217 Overall, we judge that Middlesbrough Council has uncertain prospects for delivering top performing improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme. There are some strengths at a corporate level but these do not currently read across into the administration of the Supporting People programme. The absence of a strategic approach with clear outcome based targets, any evidenced action planning to address known weaknesses, and the performance history within Supporting People have influenced our judgement.
- 218 There are now signs of acceptance and ownership of problems in the planning delivery of the programme and, with limited resources, there has been a focus on ensuring a smooth transition for service users at April 1 2003.
- 219 Strengths include a commitment to improve services from all stakeholders including the partnerships. Corporately, the council is ambitious and its new management team is seeking improvements in partnership working and performance management arrangements. At a corporate level, a number of consultation mechanisms already exist to engage people.
- 220 Additional staffing resources are being recruited to increase the size and capacity of the team to deliver Supporting People and the changes it is expected to make. A consultant is being commissioned to supplement the team, and bring expertise particularly in developing a Supporting People strategy and an action plan.

- 221 However, there has been a lack of focus on the bigger picture, such as ensuring consultation mechanisms are in place, a programme to deliver results and a late acceptance that additional resources are required. Proposals are in place to build capacity but are not yet delivered. Continuous improvement is being integrated into corporate systems but the Supporting People programme planning and delivery does not exhibit the same characteristics.
- 222 There are a number of areas in which the council needs to improve. While some have been identified as in need for improvement, we need to consider what confidence can be placed in the council's willingness and ability to deliver those improvements.
- 223 Areas for improvement include consistent systems for communicating with and encouraging the participation of service users, a greater understanding of how the programme will make contributions to the objectives and performance targets of the various statutory agencies and partnerships. Capacity for improvement needs to develop at two levels, firstly strategically to set aims and monitor results, and secondly operationally with the people and systems to deliver the results.
- 224 Without strategic direction service reviews are unable to unlock funding from legacy services for reinvestment or redesign in new or remodelled services. The service review programme is not currently geared to unlock legacy funding. Monitoring is particularly under-developed. Risk appraisal and contingency planning in relation to the delivery of the Supporting People programme are also underdeveloped.
- 225 And lastly but again significantly, there is no action or improvement plan with responsibilities, timescales, targets and resources in place to deliver these improvements. One is planned, but is not in place yet.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Community Strategy.
- ◆ Best Value Performance Plan 2003/04.
- ◆ Supporting People Interim Shadow Strategy.
- ◆ Service Review timetable document.
- ◆ Better Care: Higher Standards Long Term Care Charter.
- ◆ Financial Procedures / Purchasing and Contracting Rules.
- ◆ University of Teesside Research for Supporting People.
- ◆ Older Peoples Services Strategy.
- ◆ User leaflets relating to Supporting People and newsletters issued to users.
- ◆ Minutes of the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body.
- ◆ Terms of Reference for the Commissioning Body.
- ◆ Annual Audit Letters 2001/02 and 2002/03.
- ◆ Homelessness Strategy.
- ◆ Housing Strategy Statement.

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. Our reality checks included a number of mystery shopper enquiries and observing meetings of the commissioning body and core strategy group. We also undertook visits to or interviews with staff from:

- ◆ First Step, drug and alcohol scheme.
- ◆ Middlesbrough women's refuge.
- ◆ High Support sheltered scheme.
- ◆ Community Campus supported housing.
- ◆ Adult Placement services.
- ◆ Creative Support, Oxford road scheme for people with mental health problems.
- ◆ Camphill Village scheme for people with learning disabilities.
- ◆ New Horizons for people with mental health problems.
- ◆ Stonham Services for offenders.
- ◆ Tees Valley Teenage Pregnancy scheme.
- ◆ Letitia House and Wellington Road homeless hostels.
- ◆ My Sister's Place.

List of people interviewed

Andrew Carr	Home Improvement Agency Officer
Ashley Salt	Contracts Manager, Social Services
Bill Pearch	Head of Housing Services
Brian Dinsdale	Chief Executive
Cllr Brenda Thompson	Executive Member for Social Care and Health
Cllr Jan Brunton	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Donna Owens	Supporting People Lead Officer
Focus group	Service users and carers
Focus group	Fairer Charging Staff, Social Services
Halleem Ghafoor	Corporate Diversity , Middlesbrough Partnership
Harriet Booth	Drug Action Team Co-ordinator
Jan Douglas	Executive Director of Social Services
Jan Richmond	Assistant Chief Executive
John Roebuck	Director of Health Investment, Primary Care Trust
John Shiel	Strategic Accountant for Social Services
Ken Davies	Consultant
Kevin Dean	IT Manager
Lesley Williams and Sue Collins	Supporting People Team
Martin Barker	Housing Benefits Manager
Paul Walker	Housing Strategy Manager
Phil Craig	Assistant Chief Officer, Probation
Richard Pink	Planning Officer (Adults), Social Services
Ruth Hicks	Head of Adult Services, Social Services
Saadia Raja	Diversity Manager, Middlesbrough Council
Tony Parkinson	Head of Modernisation and Performance, Social Services

Vicky Whelan

Partnership Manager, Probation

Demographic information

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

Measure	Middlesbrough	England
Population (mid-2001)	134,855	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	14.99	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	7.65	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	5.8	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁷	44	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁸	16 of 25	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁹	0 of 25	-
Households accepted as homeless and in priority need (2001/02) ¹⁰	315	-

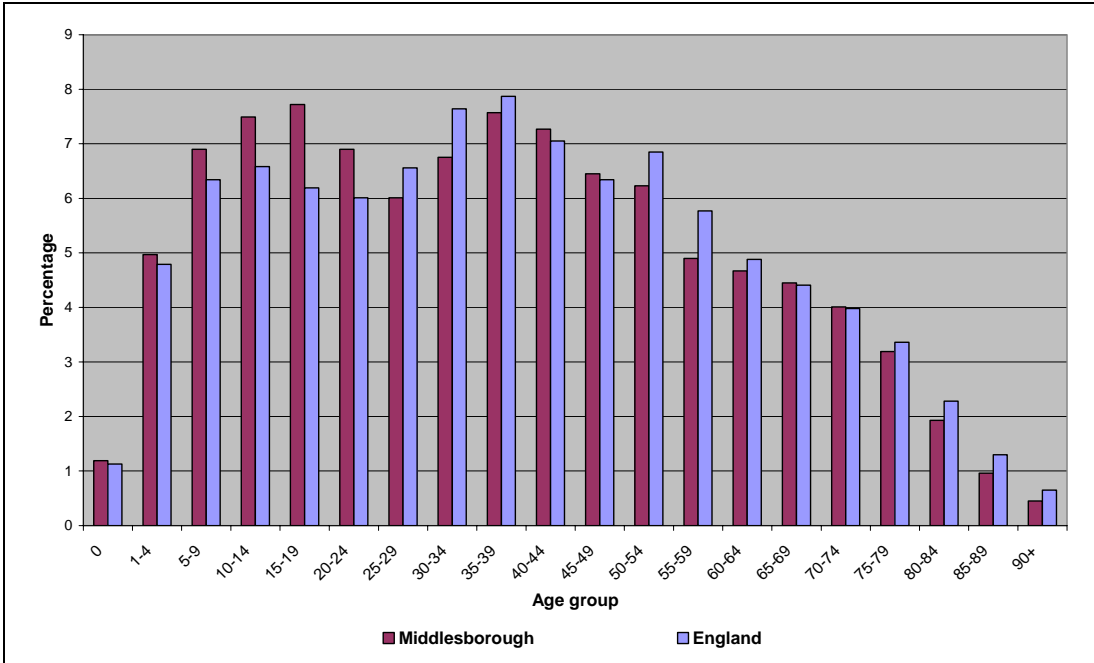
⁷ Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

⁸ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

⁹ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

¹⁰ Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2002.

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



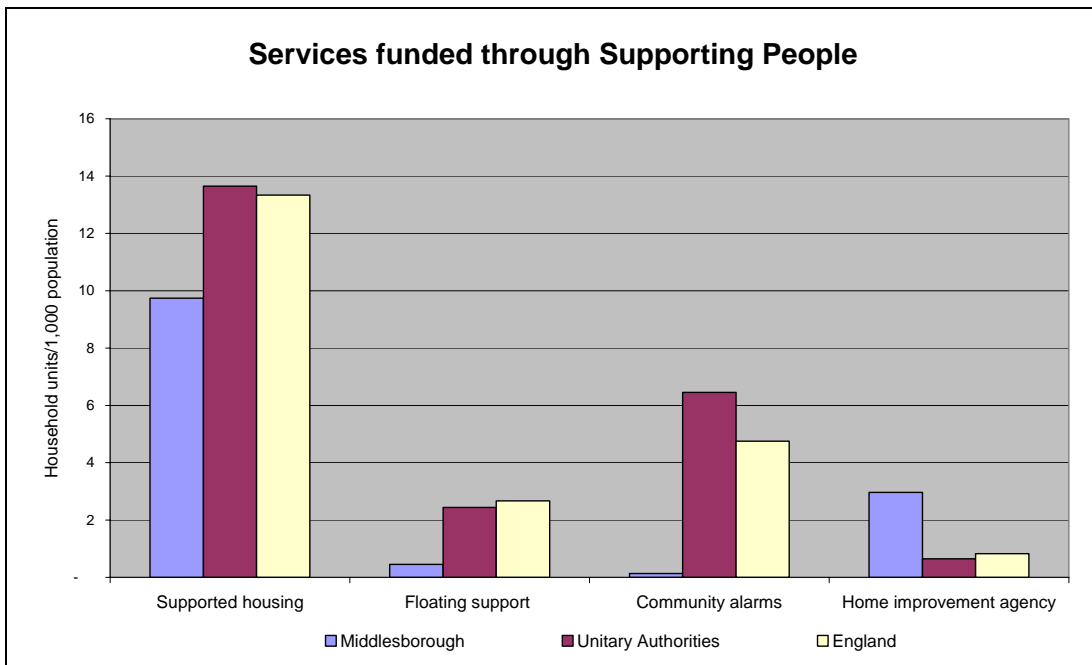
Performance information

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.

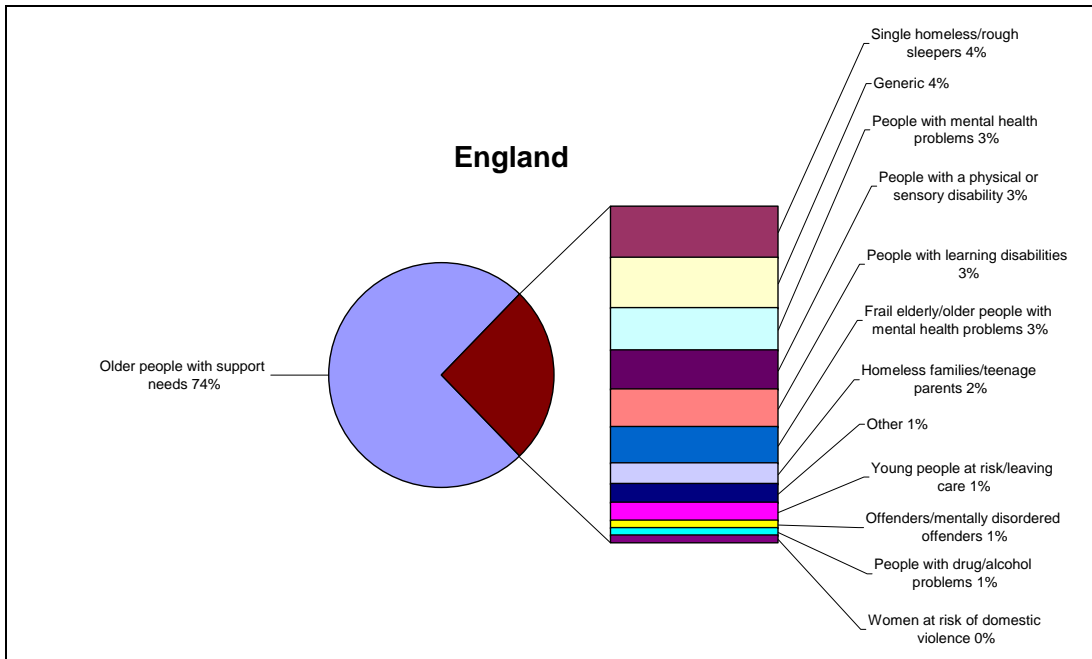
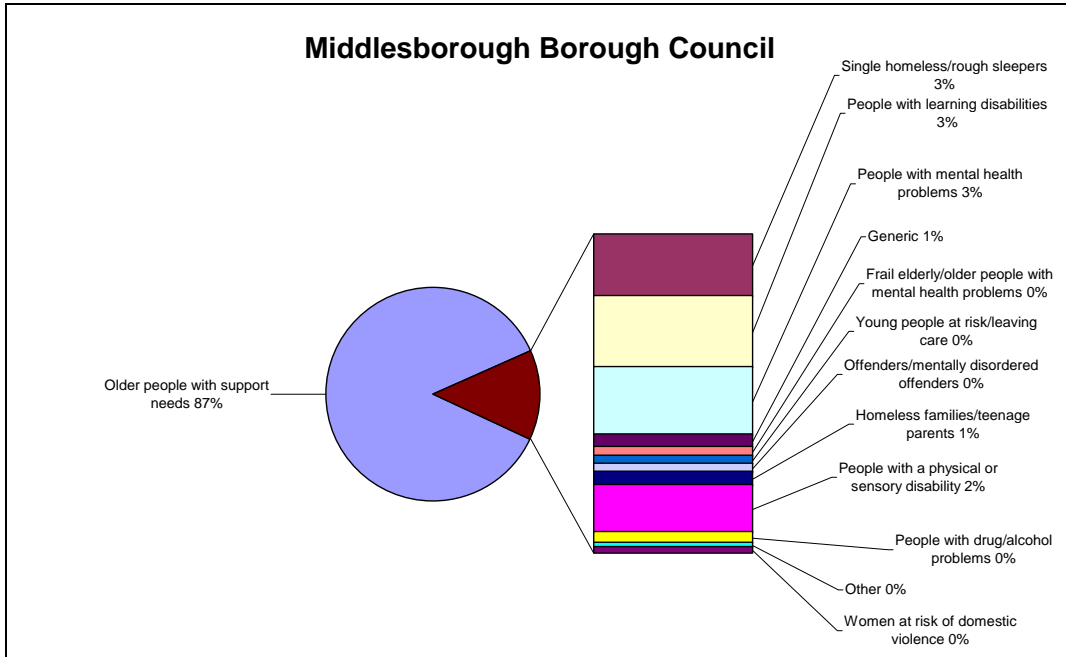
Supporting People data

Service provision funded through Supporting People¹¹



¹¹ Source: ODPM December 2002 supply reporting data, tables 1a, 3, and 4. Floating support includes resettlement and move-on support services.

Percentage of Supporting People-funded provision for specific user groups compared with England¹²



¹² Number of household units. Number of household units. Source: Final 2003-04 Grant Total Funding by Client Group, ODPM November 2003.

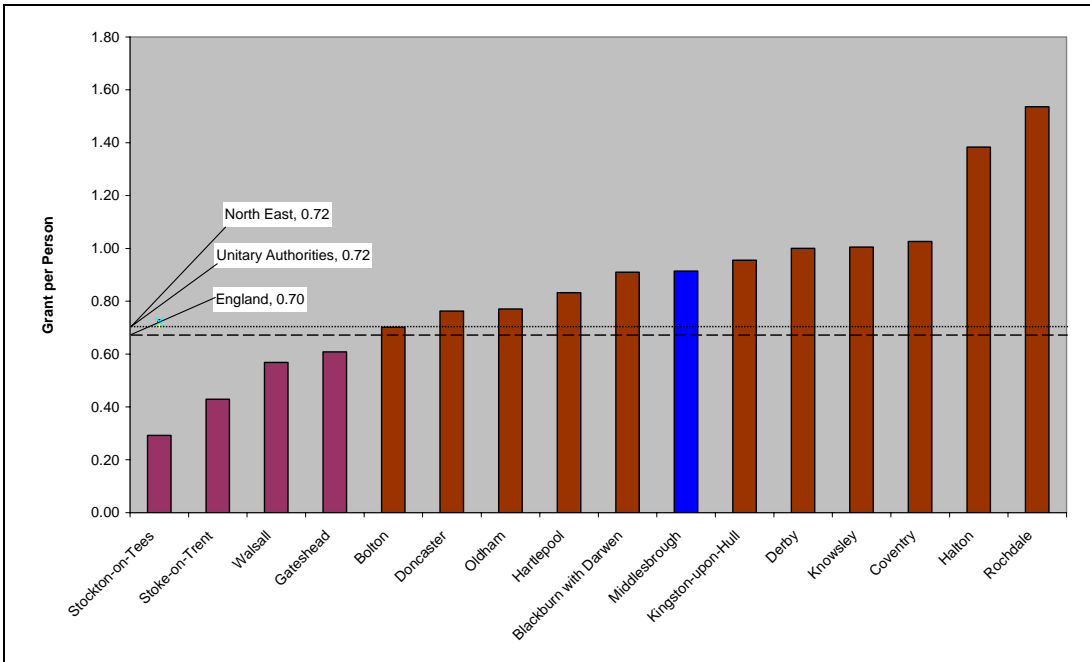
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Estimated Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Middlesbrough BC	£ 6,362,833	£ 66,565	£ 188,856.23

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

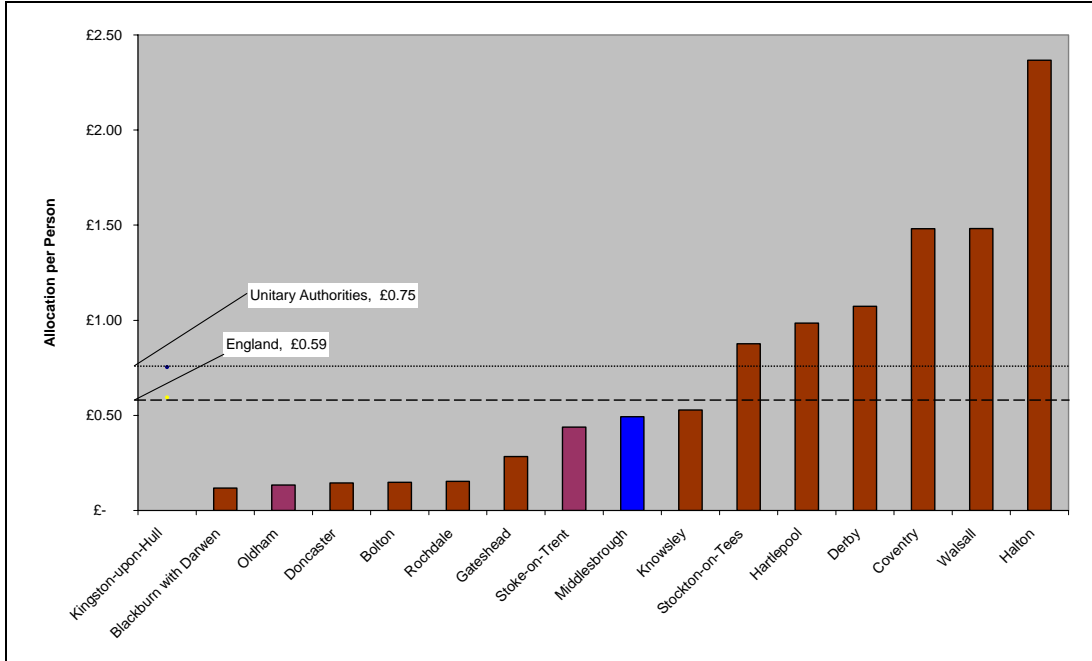
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Middlesbrough	£ 0.91	£ 25.97	£ 27.07	£ 65.78
North East	£ 0.72	£ 17.86	£ 24.71	£ 62.45
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

Estimated Supporting People grant per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹³, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)



¹³ A comparator group of similar councils.

Estimated pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils.



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

Significantly above average (●●●●)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home Older people helped to live at home
Above average (●●●)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care Intensive home care Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations costing

	less than £1000 delivered within 3 weeks
Average (***)	Intensive home care as a percentage of intensive home and residential care Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care Avoidable harm for older people (falls and hypothermia) Waiting time for care packages Delayed discharge (all ages)
Below average (**)	
Significantly below average (*)	

Best value performance indicators

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

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

Within the best 25 per cent	Average time for processing new claims Average time for processing changes of circumstance Local authority dwellings renovated (£5,000 and under) Homelessness decisions within 33 days
Average	The level of the Commission for Racial Equality's standard to which the authority conforms Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings Local authority dwellings renovated (over £5,000) Domestic violence refuge places Unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished Tenant satisfaction with overall service Tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation Renewal claims processed on time.
Within the worst 25 per cent	Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice in rented housing Buildings accessible to disabled people

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.

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