

Supporting People Inspection Report

March 2007



Supporting People Programme

Norfolk County Council

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Supporting People Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. Supporting People inspections are carried out with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Supporting People is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing-related 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 the probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (ALA). Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

Administering local authorities work in partnership, with districts where this is relevant, to agree Supporting People strategies and delivery mechanisms for housing related support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service providers. Negotiation and consultation is also required with service users, 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 former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)¹ has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local authorities and their partners will 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.

¹ Now the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

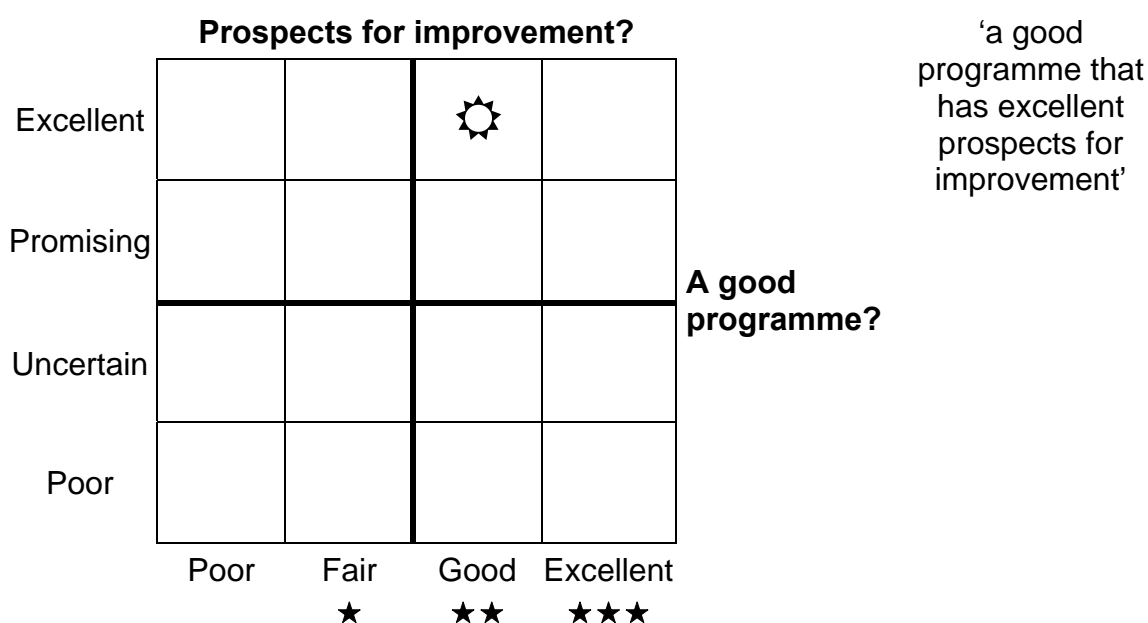
Summary

- 1 Overall Norfolk County Council is providing a 'good' administration of the Supporting People programme with 'excellent' prospects for improvement.
- 2 The delivery of the programme has many strengths. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for a number of service users and driving changes for some client groups. There are positive working relationships with service providers, partners and other stakeholders. The district councils each lead on specific client groups and this has ensured that service users needs and gaps in services have been identified. The programme is being effectively managed by a well regarded Supporting People team.
- 3 The Council and elected members show a high level of commitment to the programme. The governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decisions being made. There are good linkages between the Supporting People five-year strategy and other Council and partner strategies. The approach to value for money is a strength for the programme and the County Council.
- 4 The programme has achieved efficiency savings and has used these to commission new services to meet needs identified by using a prioritisation matrix. New services have been commissioned to meet the needs of traditionally excluded groups.
- 5 Service users have been involved in aspects of the programme that they are interested in. This includes the development of the strategy, the service review process and the commissioning of the new floating support contracts. Service users with a learning difficulty have been trained to involve fellow service users.
- 6 However, there are not strategies in place to deal with the lack of access to move-on accommodation or service user involvement. Access arrangements and information for service users are variable. The PCTs have not been actively engaged in the governance arrangements for the programme and so far there has been no opportunity for service users to be involved in these.
- 7 There is strong corporate commitment and leadership of the Supporting People programme and there are clear links between the programme and other strategic priorities. The programme has expanded and improved services for users. The team is effective and has access to good training and development programmes.
- 8 The programme is aware of its weaknesses and has taken action to address these and new ways of working are about to be implemented. The County Council has a positive track record and can demonstrate some real improvements in services including those for vulnerable children and adults.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 9 We have assessed Norfolk County Council as providing a 'good', two-star programme that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

- 10 We found the programme to be good because it has a range of strengths including:
- the programme is delivering improved outcomes for a number of service users;
 - services have been developed for traditionally excluded groups such as offenders and Gypsies and Travellers;
 - service users are involved in aspects of the programme that they have indicated they are interested in;
 - service users' feedback has resulted in improvements to a number of services;

² The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the programme is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a programme that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent programme (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the programme, also on a four-point scale.

- partnerships across the programme are strong and there are examples of positive outcomes through this, such as the work between the programme and the DAAT;
 - district councils each lead on specific client groups and this has resulted in users needs being identified and strategies being put in place to address gaps;
 - service reviews have resulted in poorly performing services being de-commissioned and other services being re-configured and improved to better meet the needs of service users; and
 - the Supporting People team is well regarded and delivering the programme effectively.
- 11 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- the ease of accessing move-on accommodation for some service users;
 - there is not an effective strategy for service users involvement that would include involvement in governance arrangements;
 - access arrangements and information for service users are variable; and
 - performance management and the identification of outcomes for service users are both under-developed.
- 12 The programme has excellent prospects for improvement because:
- there is strong corporate commitment and effective leadership of the Supporting People programme;
 - the programme has delivered new service provision for some groups, including traditionally excluded groups, and extended services for others;
 - the Council has a positive track record and can demonstrate some real improvements in services including those for vulnerable children and adults;
 - the Supporting People team has the necessary range of skills and experience to effectively deliver the programme;
 - the Supporting People team has completed two large pieces of work and now has the capacity to address identified weaknesses in the programme;
 - effective working between the partners involved in the programme has added to the capacity of the team and improved outcomes for service users; and
 - the programme is aware of weaknesses and has, for example, taken action to improve both the arrangements for the providers' forum and the floating support services.
- 13 However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include:
- performance management has still to be embedded in the programme; and
 - the reporting on outcomes for service users will require further work from the team once national guidance has been received.

Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs³ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with service users, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve the accessibility of services and information by:

- ensuring frontline staff who are signposting customers are aware of the availability of housing related support offered through the programme;*
- ensuring there are robust access and referral arrangements in place that are routinely monitored and reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of service users; and*
- ensuring information for service users is reviewed by service users and presented in a style and format that meets their needs.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- current and potential service users will understand what housing related support services are available and how to access them; and
- frontline staff will be equipped to give appropriate advice and guidance on how to access support services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

³ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Improve the engagement of service users, carers and advocates by:

- *researching and implementing best practice in top performing administering local authorities;*
- *developing an overarching strategy to guide the involvement of service users in all aspects of the programme;*
- *ensuring that service users are appropriately involved in governance and contract and performance management arrangements;*
- *ensuring that contact with marginalised groups is maintained; and*
- *providing regular feedback to service users on the results of their greater involvement in the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the programme will be shaped by service users and services will be developed in the way service users need and want; and
- service users will feel valued and engaged.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R3 Develop a strategic approach to overcoming the difficulties of accessing move on accommodation by:

- *working with the district councils and local housing providers to understand the barriers to accessing move on accommodation;*
- *developing a strategy that will clarify the processes for Supporting People service users to move on to permanent accommodation as they gain skills in living independently;*
- *developing an action plan to implement the strategy; and*
- *reporting on performance through the governance structures of the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved access to accommodation for vulnerable people who are able to live more independently; and
- greater through put in existing services as service users move on in a timely manner.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R4 Report and publicise the key findings of this report to service users; stakeholders; councillors and staff.

Recommendation

R5 Take action to address all other weaknesses identified in this report.

- 15 We would like to thank the staff of Norfolk County Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 4 to 5 and 16 to 20 January 2007

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Report

Context

The locality

- 16 Norfolk is England's fifth largest county with a growing but sparsely distributed population. Outside the main urban areas of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn it is very rural in character.
- 17 The latest population estimate in mid-2005 was 824,200. This is estimated to rise to 854,400 by 2016 with the greatest increases in older age groups and younger age groups changing relatively little. Currently, 20 per cent of the population is aged over 65 which is higher than the national average of 18.5 per cent. At 3.8 per cent, the proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups is much lower than the national average of 13 per cent.
- 18 In terms of deprivation, the county is ranked 97 out of 150 with one being the least deprived. The district councils range between the least deprived which is Broadland which ranked at 302 out 354 and the most deprived which is Norwich City Council, ranked at 61 out of 354. Unemployment at 4.5 per cent is higher than the national average of 2.4 per cent.
- 19 Increasing numbers of migrant workers are coming to work in the county, particularly Poland and other eastern European countries. A proportion of migrant workers will be eligible for and make some call upon public services including housing related support.

The Council

- 20 The Council has a political structure of a leader with a cabinet with the Conservative party in overall control. The Conservative Party has 46 seats, the Labour Party 22, the Liberal Democrats 14, and the Green Party has 2 seats.
- 21 Excluding schools staff, the Council employs 9,729 staff to plan and deliver its services. In 2006/07, the Council had a revenue budget of £794 million, of which £166 million is allocated to adult social services.
- 22 In recent years, the Council has received the following assessments of the performance of its services.
 - Under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2002, 2003, and 2004, the Council's performance was rated as 'good'.
 - Under CPA - the Harder Test 2005, the direction of travel was assessed as 'improving adequately' and the Council achieved a three-star rating (out of a possible four) for its overall performance.

- Under CPA - the Harder Test 2006, the direction of travel was assessed as 'improving well' and the Council achieved a four star rating (out of a possible four) for its overall performance.
- In 2005, adult social services were assessed as 'serving some adults well with promising prospects for improvement'.
- In 2006, adult social services were assessed as 'serving most adults well with promising prospects for improvement'.
- In 2006, children's social care services were assessed as 'delivering a service that consistently delivers above the minimum requirements for users with good capacity for improvement'.

The Supporting People programme

- 23** Norfolk County Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council works in partnership with the Norfolk PCT, the Great Yarmouth and Waveney PCT, the Norfolk Probation Area and Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, Great Yarmouth District Council, North Norfolk District Council, South Norfolk District Council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council and Norwich City Council in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 24** The Council received a Supporting People grant of £16 million in 2006/07 which is a reduction of £281,247 or 1.7 per cent on the previous year. Despite reductions in the annual grant since 2003/04, the Council has accumulated £1.9 million in under-spent grant. The Council also received an administration grant of £508,063 in 2006/07.
- 25** The Supporting People team is located within the Strategic Commissioning Team of the Council's Adult Social Services department. The Supporting People Lead Officer is supported by a strategy and policy section, a planning and contracts section and an administrative section including finance and IT staff.
- 26** One hundred and twenty eight service providers deliver a total of 168 services. In 2006 the programme funded 16,729 units of housing related support which was split between 15,054 units of supported accommodation and 1,675 units of floating support. The highest cost service at £408.64 per unit per week is an accommodation service for women fleeing domestic violence. The lowest cost service is £0.80 per unit per week for an alarm service for older people.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 27 Norfolk County Council has reviewed its corporate objectives, and following public consultation has reduced the number from 40 to 20. In addition, the Council has identified eight of these as key objectives, to enable a stronger focus on what matters most. These are:
- continue to improve educational attainment and aim to help all children reach their full potential;
 - protect children from abuse, support families and keep them together wherever possible;
 - support older people to live at home wherever possible and to lead independent, fulfilling and safe lives;
 - strengthen our contribution towards reducing crime and disorder, and take steps to make local communities safer;
 - strengthen our contribution to road safety in Norfolk and help reduce deaths and injuries on our roads;
 - reduce waste and improve recycling;
 - lead a strategic and co-ordinated approach to the development of the Norfolk economy, including improving travel, transport and information and communications technology (ICT); and
 - reduce deprivation in both urban and rural areas.
- 28 There are also three cross cutting organisational objectives - customer focus, value for money and supporting the workforce.
- 29 The Council and its partners agreed a five-year Supporting People Strategy in January 2005. The strategy contains an overall vision and a set of objectives that clearly support local and national priorities for helping vulnerable people. It also identifies the priorities for the programme and how and when these will be met.
- 30 The vision for the programme is 'To sustain, develop and improve good quality housing support services which help people who are vulnerable or have a disability to live as independently as possible in their communities'.
- 31 The objectives are:
- increase the range of accommodation and support to allow more people to choose independent living;

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- contribute to the agendas for social inclusion and equitable access to services by ensuring that Supporting People funded schemes are integrated with other provision;
- increase community safety by prioritising the development of services for people who are at risk or presenting the most significant risk if their housing support needs remain unmet;
- increase choices for people using services and their carers by developing good accessible information about housing related support options;
- use the review process to drive up and ensure high standards;
- develop appropriate mechanisms for consultation which will ensure the views of potential service users and their carers are central to future prioritisation and development; and
- prevent the need for increased use of residential care and contribute to packages which will allow people to move to independence.

32 The Strategy looked at the supply of services to each client group compared to the regional and national average. It also considered the risks to users, others and other organisations if services are not provided. As a result the following priorities were decided:

- first priority - services for people affected by domestic violence, offenders and ex-offenders and travellers;
- second priority - service for people who misuse substances, young people at risk, teenage parents and refugees; and
- third priority - services for vulnerable older people, people with a learning difficulty or mental illness, homeless people and people with a physical or sensory disability.

Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?

33 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance and partnerships;
- grant compliance, strategy and needs;
- delivery arrangements;
- commissioning and performance;
- value for money;
- service user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance and partnerships

- 34** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is strong corporate commitment to the programme and good involvement of, and commitment from, elected members. Governance arrangements are well developed and there is evidence of strong partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders despite the lack of PCT involvement in the Commissioning Body. However, formal arrangements to involve service providers and service users are under developed.
- 35** The DCLG has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body.
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 36** There is strong corporate support for the programme in terms of both resources and time from officers and councillors. Funding of £60,000 has been added to the administration grant to ensure the effective delivery of the programme. Officers from across the council have been involved in a number of Supporting People projects such as the re-tendering of the floating support service.
- 37** Councillors are involved and supportive of the programme. Elected Member Champions have been identified from the County and District Councils and have a schedule of meetings and activities. These councillors are able to raise awareness of the programme in the districts and in other forums. In addition to this, there is an annual seminar for all councillors. This has enabled knowledge and understanding of the aims of the programme to be widely disseminated as well as ensuring that there are good links between all the councils and their political representatives.
- 38** The Commissioning Body is providing strategic leadership for the programme and the Supporting People team. Its membership is drawn from senior officers from the partner organisations and supplemented by non-voting, advisory members. It is chaired by a senior manager from the County Council. Members of the Commissioning Body are clear about the diverse needs of the vulnerable groups that the programme serves and actively promote these in their own organisations.

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- 39 The local Probation service is actively engaged in the governance of the programme and through this has been able to influence the development of the provision of services for offenders. A member of the Probation Board sits on the Member Champions Group.
- 40 However, although health has been actively engaged on the programme, the PCT representative on the Commissioning Body had not been able to make a consistent contribution to the governance arrangements or fully brief his colleagues in the other five PCTs. The PCTs were re-organised in October 2006 and the county is now covered by two PCTs. Both of these trusts will be represented on the Commissioning Body in the future.
- 41 There is evidence of effective decision making by the Commissioning Body. This includes a decision to decommission a poorly performing service. The decision making process has been enhanced by setting out the principles of what the programme is trying to achieve and having all the Commissioning Body members signed up to these through the strategy and review methodology. The Commissioning Body has also made difficult decisions in relation to the re-tendering of floating support services. This means that the Commissioning Body is taking decisions in the best interest of the programme and ultimately service users.
- 42 There is an effective Core Strategy Group in place that is drawn from a wide range of stakeholders. The work of this group complements that of the Commissioning Body and there is clarity about the separate roles and responsibilities. It is able to challenge both the Commissioning Body and the Supporting People team. There has been effective challenge of the outcomes from service reviews as well as about priorities for the service.
- 43 The Core Strategy Group has driven key pieces of work such as leading on client group based strategies and research. Members of the group ensure that there is regular feedback to their own organisation.
- 44 Provider representation on the Core Strategy Group has been inconsistent. It is currently through an umbrella group that represents hostel providers but attendance at meetings has not been consistent and this has been recognised as a weakness in the programme. This is in the process of being rectified to ensure that there is more consistent involvement of provider representatives from across all types of provision.
- 45 The Accountable Officer performs this role successfully. He is an effective champion for the programme. The role of the Accountable Officer is held by the Council's Head of Strategic Commissioning in Adult Social Services, a post with department-wide commissioning responsibilities and many external links including to health commissioning. As well as providing the line management role for Supporting People, the Accountable Officer champions the programme through a range of groups and forums and ensures that there is the appropriate linkage between the Supporting People strategy and other corporate and partner strategies.

- 46 There are strong working relationships between Supporting People and all partners and stakeholders delivering services to vulnerable people. This is particularly so with partners in the criminal justice arena and includes strong political support for this client group. Through the programme, the probation service now has access to a wider range of forums and policy makers and has been able to raise the profile of offenders' service needs.
- 47 Similarly, the partnership with the DAAT is particularly strong and has resulted in additional services for people with drug and alcohol problems.
- 48 Children's services are effectively engaged with the programme. Staff have been involved in service reviews, supporting service improvement and the decision to de-commission a poorly performing service. It has facilitated improved involvement between the district councils and children's services by, for example, ensuring district council representation on the teenage pregnancy group.
- 49 MAPPA (multi agency public protection arrangements) are in place but need further work to ensure the consistent engagement of housing partners in this process. Training on MAPPA has been provided and there is now greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different parties. There is also now a single point of contact in the districts. However, information sharing arrangements are mixed. There are protocols in place in some areas but these do not cover all of the agencies or geographic areas. As a result, there may be some instances where the best outcomes are not secured for vulnerable people.
- 50 The programme has not benefited from the contribution that an effective providers' forum could deliver. There has been a system of annual inclusive forums held in the three sub regions of the county (rural East Anglia, greater Norwich, and Yarmouth and Waveney) that have been open to providers, service users and other stakeholders. This is not sufficient to actively engage providers in the many aspects and developments in the programme.
- 51 Although there has been some structured involvement of providers through an umbrella group this does not cover all providers. Action is now underway to constitute a provider forum but this is yet to have its inaugural meeting. As a result, not all providers have had the opportunity to formally participate in a provider driven forum.
- 52 However, many of the providers we met through the inspection were positive about the involvement they have been able to have with the programme through different groups and initiatives. They were confident that the work that is currently going on to formalise a new forum would further improve their engagement.
- 53 There is involvement from the voluntary sector within the governance of the programme. An officer from Norfolk's Compact is included in an advisory role to the Commissioning Body. This enables engagement with the voluntary sector to be improved based on advice on how to properly engage with the sector. As a result, the voluntary sector has the opportunity to engage with the programme effectively.

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- 54 Finally, there has been no involvement of service users in the governance arrangements for the programme. This failure means that there are no systematic arrangements in place for service users to fully participate in making decisions that affect them.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 55 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Eligibility criteria are in place and have been used to address ineligible use of funding. The five-year strategy is clear and comprehensive. It links to wider strategies and plans across both the Council and other partners. The district councils being responsible for specific client groups have ensured that their support needs have been identified, updated and prioritised as necessary. However, the programme does not have a strategy to address the problem of the lack of move on accommodation in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
- 56 There are effective eligibility criteria in place which reflect government guidelines. These were developed in 2004 and agreed by the Commissioning Body in early 2005. The eligibility criteria reflect a commitment shared by all partners to promote services that maintain independence and reflect local needs and have been used to fund services for specific minority groups such as Gypsies and Travellers. The eligibility criteria were developed in consultation with stakeholders and are well understood by partners and service providers.
- 57 The programme has successfully addressed ineligible service provision through the service review process. Where costs had been inappropriately apportioned to the Supporting People programme, they were identified and either transferred to the appropriate community care budget or the service was decommissioned. Transfer of ineligible funding has been achieved with minimum disruption to service users through close partnership working, particularly for learning difficulty and mental health service users where most funding transferred to the Council's adult social services department.
- 58 The Supporting People team correctly completed the CLG retraction statement in September 2006. This statement details how ineligible elements of service are being identified within current services and how these costs will be removed from the programme.
- 59 The five-year strategy is an accessible and informative document. It is clearly and logically laid out and easy to follow and understand. The strategy was developed in full consultation with service providers, service users and other partners and stakeholders. The strategy sets out high level objectives to shape service directions. It gives priority to excluded groups, those with few existing services and those where a lack of services leads to risks to themselves and to the community, such as Gypsies and Travellers, offenders and people affected by domestic violence.

- 60 The strategy also provides the framework for a set of many client-based strategies, led by individual district councils. This way of working is a strength of the programme. Individual district councils take responsibility for specific client groups and this way of working has ensured that focus and attention are given concurrently rather than consecutively. The work on the accommodation needs of offenders and Gypsies and Travellers is unlikely to have been completed so quickly or successfully without this approach.
- 61 The individual district councils leading on specific client groups have been the method for identifying and updating information on support needs. The district councils have either funded completely, or contributed funding to, research into needs. Once this research has been completed, strategies have been produced to plan how these will be met. An example of this is the mental health housing and support survey which was a comprehensive piece of work commissioned by the programme to provide a picture of the needs of this client group. The survey provided information about current and future needs for this client group. In this way the programme is ensuring that services are being planned and delivered based on the needs of vulnerable people.
- 62 There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider strategic priorities and these links are identified throughout the five-year strategy. The programme contributes to many of the 'Norfolk Ambition' themes, for example, 'Accessible and well-housed'. The aims and objectives in the five-year strategy complement those of County Council strategies such as 'Living Longer Living Well' for older people and the direction of travel set out in Our Health, Our Care, Our Say. There is also increasing alignment between Norfolk's community strategies, the organisational objectives of partners and the Supporting People strategy.
- 63 The programme has used a prioritisation matrix to determine how it will address unmet needs for the different client groups. This has ensured transparency in the decision making process and wide knowledge of the priority groups for the programme. Providers we met had been involved in the development of the strategy and were clear about the priority groups for the programme and how these decisions had been arrived at.
- 64 The delivery of the strategy is being monitored through the annual plan. This is translated into a plan for the team and both the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group are regularly updated on progress against the plan. The strategy is due to be updated and this process will include partners and stakeholders. This is an opportunity to tell stakeholders of the progress that has been made to date and to engage them in future priorities and planning.
- 65 However, providers also hold information on service users and unmet needs and this is not being regularly accessed or considered by the Supporting People team. This is a missed opportunity in ensuring that information is as complete as possible.

- 66 The programme does not have a strategy in place to co-ordinate the work that is taking place to deal with the lack of move on accommodation. The lack of move on accommodation is being addressed in a number of ways, including the use of choice based lettings and as part of the strategic review of hostel provision. It is expected that this review will make recommendations about how to improve arrangements for accessing move on accommodation. Individual service reviews also looked at providers' ability to effectively sign post service users to move-on accommodation but without an overarching strategy it is unlikely that this issue will be tackled in a co-ordinated and consistent way. This means that service users do not receive the most appropriate accommodation to meet their needs and that accommodation services become silted up.

Delivery arrangements

- 67 This is an area of strength for the programme. The Supporting People team is effective and highly thought of and has good relationships with providers and stakeholders. Financial management of the programme is strong but performance management information of other areas is still developing. Fairer charging is actively promoted and sound risk management processes ensure the effective delivery of the programme.
- 68 There is an effective Supporting People team in place. It is placed within the Strategic Commissioning Team in the County Council's adult social services department. This means that the programme can benefit from specialist commissioning skills and helps ensure that the links between the commissioning of housing related support services and health and social care services are strengthened.
- 69 The team is highly thought of by partners, service providers and other stakeholders. They have the necessary skills and knowledge and have benefited from being a stable group. Contract officers are responsible for specific client groups and link to the district councils that carry responsibility for these groups. This ensures that there is a good flow of information and knowledge. Team members who have left the team have moved to other positions within the Supporting People arena and one member of the team has been seconded to the probation service. This has meant that skills and knowledge have been strengthened rather than lost from the programme.
- 70 The lead officer is also highly thought of, particularly for his knowledge on supported housing issues. He has, for example, played a pivotal role as Chair of the Regional Housing Delivery Group in ensuring high quality bids were submitted for capital funding of supported housing projects. The submission to the Housing Corporation was of a high standard and resulted in positive outcomes in terms of the level of allocation received by the county and the region which totals £31 million for the period 2006-2008.
- 71 Additionally, there is good partnership working between the Supporting People team and housing teams in the District Councils which ensures that sound commissioning decisions are being made with the full engagement of all the relevant partners.

- 72 Relationships with service providers are strong. Service providers were very positive and complimentary about the team. Just under 100 per cent of providers we surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the advice and support they receive from the team. Again, the knowledge of specific client groups was seen as a strength.
- 73 Work planning is in place and is consistent with the priorities set out in the five-year strategy. The annual plan, which is derived from the five-year strategy, has been translated into a work plan for the team. Individual members of the team understand the plan and the priorities and these are translated into their individual work plans. The plan is monitored through team meetings and regular supervision of staff. Both the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group are regularly updated on progress against the plan.
- 74 The links between the programme and the County Strategic Partnership, the seven Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) are well developed. Targets relating to the Supporting People programme are included within three of the four blocks of the LAA and members of the Commissioning Body sit on working groups looking at how these blocks are being delivered. For example, involvement in the safer and stronger communities block has resulted in the commissioning of additional drug intervention schemes with Supporting People grant. The involvement in the LAA is helping to strengthen partnership links and multi-agency working to address specific priorities.
- 75 Performance reporting against the five-year strategy and financial monitoring are strong. Performance information covering other areas such as service delivery has been reported to the Core Strategy Group since October 2006. This is an area that is still developing with the Core Strategy Group looking at how it can effectively use the information it receives to manage performance.
- 76 Fairer charging is actively promoted across the service. There are a range of procedures in place to ensure that service users are informed of the service charging policies including awareness raising sessions provided by the team for providers. Claims have risen steadily over the life of the programme and 117 claims have been successful during this current financial year. As a result, service users are given a number of opportunities to ensure they are able to benefit from the fairer charging regime.
- 77 Risk management arrangements are strong. There are clear processes in place, linked with the County Council's risk processes to record and manage risks. The approach the Commissioning Body takes to its work, particularly around service reviews, means that risks are appropriately raised and discussed. The programme has experience of a service provider suddenly ceasing support and through the risk management processes, arrangements were put in place to ensure that service users' needs were appropriately provided for. As a result, risks are well managed and the delivery of the programme is ensured.
- 78 DCLG data extracts are produced on a quarterly basis and submitted on time. This means the data available to the DCLG for the programme is up to date.

Commissioning and performance

- 79 This is an area of strength for the programme. Service reviews were undertaken in a consistent and robust manner and have led to positive outcomes for the programme and service users. There are arrangements in place to ensure services continue to improve and these are being effectively monitored. Services have been successfully commissioned to meet agreed priorities. Cross authority work is strong and providers have benefited from regional approaches to contracts and accreditation. However, progress on issuing steady state contracts has been much slower than we would have expected.
- 80 Service reviews were undertaken in a consistent, robust and timely manner. There was a clear timetable and all reviews were completed by the March 2006 deadline. Providers were kept informed of key dates and the progress of their review. Reports and any action plans were issued promptly after the completion of the review.
- 81 Providers were generally positive about their service review, particularly the transparency of the process and the professionalism of the review officers. Providers received support and guidance from the team throughout the process. The process was robust and both the team and providers believe that the application of the quality assessment framework (QAF) has been successful in driving up standards in the county.
- 82 The Core Strategy Group was effective in challenging the outcomes from service reviews with contentious reviews being referred to the Commissioning Body. However, although the methodology was sound, there was no external validation of the service review process. Peer reviewing was undertaken within the Supporting People team but there was no use of external moderation or quality assurance using partner agencies or other regional authorities. This has meant there was a lack of independent scrutiny of the service review process.
- 83 Service reviews have improved the provision of services for users. Some services were decommissioned that were either ineligible services or were poorly performing services that did not, or could not, improve following the issuing of improvement plans. This means that vulnerable people are now receiving the type and quality of services they need.
- 84 Service providers were able to challenge the results of the review through the agreed appeals procedure. Two providers appealed but these were resolved at the first stage of the process and did not need to be referred to the Commissioning Body. This has ensured the providers views and responses to the review are able to be fully addressed.

- 85 Provider improvement plans are effective at ensuring that services continue to improve. There are improvement planning and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that services continue to improve. There are a high number of services which scored C or D in the QAF. Out of 168 services, 110 action plans were issued. Approximately half of these were to services which scored a C or above and the other half to services which scored a D in one or more elements of the QAF. The team has prioritised supporting services that scored Ds and to date half of these have sufficiently improved the service for the action plan to be signed off. This means that service users are beginning to benefit from better standards of provision.
- 86 Now that the individual service reviews have been completed, the Supporting People team has started a programme of strategic reviews. The approach to this is sound and inclusive but these have not yet been completed. Future commissioning and restructuring of services will be based on the results of these reviews and the priorities identified in the revised five-year strategy.
- 87 Procurement practices are sound and the programme has commissioned new services in response to the priorities in the strategy. These include services for traditionally marginalised groups such as Gypsies and Travellers, offenders and women working in the sex trade. The programme has used a priority setting matrix to ensure consistency and transparency in decision making.
- 88 The re-commissioning of floating support services across the county has been a major piece of work that the team has worked on. This has been successful in a number of areas including partnership working, service user involvement, risk management, access and information arrangements and value for money. It is briefly outlined in the case study below.

Case study 1

Floating support services re-commissioning

In September 2003, a conference with service providers established a case for changing the provision of floating support services. Issues that had been identified included the large number of contracts that were in place to provide these services, complex and confusing access arrangements for potential service users and that the services were solely tied to social housing.

A working group was set up to manage this project. This was led by the Supporting People team and included partners, service providers and other stakeholders. This group considered a range of issues, including the geographical areas that the new contracts should cover and whether new services should be specialist or generalist. As part of the work, an impact assessment was undertaken to identify providers who would be at risk through this process.

Providers and service users, who were supported by an independent agency, were involved throughout this process. Feedback from service users influenced the design of the contract. Specialist support on procurement and legal advice was provided by the County Council.

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The outcome was to recommend that three new contracts were established to cover the housing sub-regions across the county. These will be generalist in nature but staff providing existing services will be transferred to the provider through TUPE arrangements and will include staff with specialist skills. It is envisaged that these staff will provide advice and training to other staff so that skills are shared more widely amongst all support workers.

Once the tendering process to let the new contracts began, the project was scrutinised by a neighbouring authority to review how it had been undertaken and what lessons could be learned for future, similar exercises.

The contracts are outcomes based so that the benefits to service users can be monitored and measured. The new contracts also provide a single access point that will be easily understood by potential users and professionals wanting to refer people to the service.

The new contracts have resulted in savings to the programme of 16 per cent of the previous contracts costs as well as simpler administrative arrangements.

- 89 The programme has not made the progress expected in issuing steady state contracts. To date only 17 have been issued. This is due to a number of reasons, including awaiting the outcomes of strategic reviews and the re-commissioning of floating support services. However, it has now been decided that full contracts, as opposed to interim ones, for a fixed period will be issued by March 2007.
- 90 Cross authority working is strong and productive. The Supporting People Eastern Region Group (SPERG) is an effective group and has implemented streamlined processes for providers such as a regionally agreed accreditation process and steady state contract. Norfolk has made a valuable contribution to this group and leads on a number of areas including the regional work on value for money. Regionally agreed policies and processes improve cross authority working and benefit providers with consistent services across the region.

Value for money

- 91 This is an area of strength for the programme. The approach to securing value for money is robust. There is an agreed methodology in place that has been applied through the service review process. Benchmarking data has been used to assess costs. Savings of £2.6 million have been achieved over the life of the programme. Regional work on value for money is well developed and has been led by the Norfolk Supporting People team. Sound procurement arrangements are in place and there is a strong and effective corporate approach to securing value for money.

How do costs compare?

- 92** Cost comparisons have been undertaken in a robust manner. The programme has looked at costs locally, regionally and nationally and has a good awareness of how its costs compare. The costs per unit, set out in the table below, shows that Norfolk's costs compare well with the region but both are generally lower than costs nationally. However, these figures should be treated with some caution as there have been many changes since this data was produced by the DCLG from material sourced in 2003/04.

Table 1

| | Per head of population | Per unit | Per unit excluding community alarms | Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Norfolk | £ 0.41 | £ 18.25 | £ 24.15 | £ 54.16 |
| East of England | £ 0.46 | £ 22.73 | £ 28.11 | £ 65.57 |
| England | £ 0.70 | £ 28.30 | £ 34.71 | £ 76.37 |

How is value for money managed?

- 93** The County Council has developed a robust approach to assessing and determining value for money. It has achieved ambitious efficiency savings well above government targets. It has also set itself challenging targets for the future. The efficiency programme is robust and is actively managed by both senior managers and councillors. The Council has scored three out of four for its approach to value for money last year as part of its annual Use of Resources assessment.
- 94** The approach to assessing and scrutinising the value for money of the Supporting People programme is also robust. There is a value for money methodology in place that assesses quality as well as cost. This has been used in the service reviews and is understood by service providers. High cost services were among the first to be reviewed and costs have been reduced.
- 95** There has been effective use of benchmarking data to inform service prices. A review of service review files has demonstrated how the methodology has been used in practice to adjust contract prices to achieve greater value for money. As a result, both increased service provision for the same money and reduced price services have been achieved.

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- 96 The service review process and other negotiated savings have helped secure efficiencies in service delivery. For example, a number of services have been re-modelled with resulting increases in the number of service users supported at no extra cost to the programme. A number of services have been decommissioned, and others transferred to the Social Services Adult Placement Scheme. Savings of £2.6 million have been achieved over the life of the programme. These have been used to commission new services to meet identified priorities and to award inflationary uplifts on existing contracts.
- 97 There are appropriate procurement arrangements in place. The use of these is evidenced in the approach taken to procurement by the re-tendering of the floating support services. The Council's approach to procurement has enabled the establishment of a level playing field which ensures equity in procurement.
- 98 The Council is currently providing good value for money. Overall expenditure on services compares favourably with other councils. The Council has improved services against a backdrop of a reduced financial settlement from the Government. The Council can demonstrate a positive relationship between costs and the range of services it provides to local people. Overall, costs reflect policy decisions as stated in the County Council Plan.
- 99 Regional work on value for money is well developed and has been led by the Norfolk Supporting People team. The regional group is taking an active role in achieving a consistent approach to identifying efficiencies in the programmes. The group is also considering how it can progress work on joint commissioning across the region.

Service user involvement

- 100 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Service users have indicated what they want to be involved in and there have been opportunities for this. Effective involvement in the service review process has resulted in issues being raised and services improved because of this. They have also been involved in developing the five-year strategy and in shaping the new contract for floating support services. However, there is no effective strategy to guide and shape involvement across all areas of the programme. This and the fact that service users are not involved in regular monitoring or governance arrangements are weaknesses.
- 101 A mapping exercise of service users' networks throughout the county has been used to compile a database of service users. The Supporting People team has used this to contact service users. Supporting People service users have indicated that they want to be involved in issues that affect them and not the wider provision of services. They have therefore been involved in the programme through project based work relating to their own needs. This included involvement in the production of the five-year strategy.

- 102** The programme has used innovative methods to reach and engage service users. An example of this is the use of an interactive theatre company comprising people who have had direct experience of homelessness. This group put on an interactive theatre piece about the links between homelessness and conviction and offending behaviour at the launch of the offenders accommodation strategy. Similarly, the programme has used theatre involving people with learning difficulties to engage and involve service users with learning difficulties. Such methods ensure that service users are able to engage in a positive way by seeing people with similar backgrounds to themselves leading and facilitating inclusive events.
- 103** There was good contact with service users throughout the service reviews. Reviewing officers used a variety of methods to contact and inform service users of the review. For example, the Supporting People team trained around ten service users with learning difficulties to undertake validation visits to learning difficulty schemes in conjunction with an advocacy group. They also sought the advice of service providers for specific client groups to ensure they were using the best method to make contact and, for example, produced the service user questionnaire on audiotape for people with a visual impairment.
- 104** The approach to involving very vulnerable service users was clearly thought through at the beginning of the service review process. The team was aware of the limitations of just sending standard letters and questionnaires and advocated a more direct approach with very vulnerable service users. Letters that were sent were easy to read and understand. This ensured that service users' consultation was at the heart of the process and not a 'bolt on activity'.
- 105** Service users' involvement has directly improved service provision. The service review consultation process enabled users to identify both areas of poor practice and practices they were unhappy with. Examples include identifying poor practice in the way support was provided to homeless families and punitive practices in a hostel for young women such as locking the lounge if residents had not done the washing up. Where there were such concerns, the team has re-visited the service to ensure that the provider had fully addressed the action points and resolved these. This demonstrates the success of the review programme in both formally raising service standards and in being a conduit for service users to raise issues about the service they receive.
- 106** Despite this success, service users are not consistently involved in monitoring the performance of service providers. This is a missed opportunity as they have already demonstrated their ability to raise issues and the positive impact that this has had on the programme.
- 107** Service users have influenced contract specifications. Service users have been involved in the re-tendering of the floating support contracts and through the comments they made, were able to influence the contract specification. Service users were supported through an external agency in doing this.

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- 108** However, there is no effective overall strategy for service users' involvement in the programme. Although the team has developed a Service Users & Carers position statement, this does not contain a clear vision or set of objectives. The statement details what has been achieved so far. It lacks a clear set of measurable objectives and actions for the future and there are no milestones to demonstrate how progress or achievements will be monitored. As it stands, this is not an effective driver for improvement.
- 109** Nor are service users effectively represented in Supporting People governance structures. There are no representatives from service users taking part in the governance arrangements for the programme. This means that service users are currently excluded from consistently contributing to, and making, decisions that affect them and other vulnerable people.

Access to services and information

- 110** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Access arrangements are variable but the programme is addressing these. There is good information available in hard copy and on the website. The County Council's website is clear and easy to use with links to it from the district councils' websites. Information for service providers is good but signposting for potential service users is variable and housing advisors in two district councils knew nothing about the programme.
- 111** Access and referral arrangements are variable. The Supporting People team is aware of this and it was one of the drivers for changing the floating support services. Currently, access to floating support services is tied to social housing and is not tenure neutral. From consultation with service users it was clear that they have been confused about what services there are and how to access them. The new contract for floating support services will have a single point of entry and will be available across all housing tenures. The new contracts will start in April 2007 and will be widely advertised as part of the formal launch in June or September 2007.
- 112** Access to hostel services was identified as an issue by service users through the strategic review of hostels and new arrangements will be put in place here. However, as a positive feature of the programme, short term services are accessible by all who need them and these do not discriminate on the grounds of local connection. This is important to ensure that people who move around are not discriminated against and services are accessible to people who want to move from one area to another.
- 113** Information to potential service users is not consistent. We made mystery shopping enquiries about accessing a night shelter or hostel out of hours and during office hours we made enquiries about a woman and her son fleeing domestic violence. The out of hours services that were accessed were unable to give information on services that are available through the supporting people directory. This means that potential service users would not be aware of what services would be available to them and this could lead to someone having to sleep rough or remain in a dangerous environment.

- 114** During office hours, the responses to our calls about refuges and the support available through the programme were of concern. We rang the housing advice service of the seven district councils. Two were not aware of the programme; two thought the programme was only provided floating support; two had heard of the programme but could not give us any information about it; and one thought the programme was only to do with help filling in forms. This means that the effectiveness of the service could be compromised leading to vulnerable people not being able to access relevant services.
- 115** Leaflets on the programme are clear and helpful. The Guide to Supporting People in Norfolk includes examples of schemes funded by the programme, eligible tasks, the priorities for the programme and how to get more help and information. Leaflets include advice on how to access the information in other languages and formats. However, they are not always available and one district council, where we had to queue for leaflets as none are displayed, was unable to supply a copy. This can be a barrier to accessing services, particularly if housing advice staff in that district do not know anything about the services funded through the programme.
- 116** Better Care: Higher Standards, the publication on the range of health, social care and housing for vulnerable people has been up dated in December 2006. It now contains information on the new PCTs that came into being in October 2006 and includes clear and accessible information on the Supporting People programme.
- 117** The County Council's website is accessible and informative. The information on the programme for service users is comprehensive and well written and includes information in two community languages, plain English and pictorial formats. The website is easy to navigate and gain information on what the Supporting People programme is about, how it is funded and how to access services. There is evidence that some service users have been involved in making the information accessible, such as service users with a learning difficulty. This means that service users are able to access relevant information from the Norfolk County Council's website to be able to make informed choices about housing support.
- 118** There are links to the County Council's Supporting People web pages from the seven District Councils' websites. This means that service users are able to access information about housing and support from either website. There are also links from all the websites to the service directory and to the national SPK website.
- 119** There is comprehensive information for service providers on the County Council's website including information on service reviews and value for money. There is a quarterly Supporting People newsletter that is informative about what is happening in the local and regional areas and information on research and pilot projects happening within Norfolk. This means that providers have a good understanding of what is available from the Supporting People team. However, the newsletter is addressed to both service providers and service users and in our view is unlikely to be accessible to users.

- 120 Information about Supporting People services is available through the easy to follow web links on the County Council's website to the national directory on the SPKweb. Local directories are available by client groups and geographical areas. Following consultation with service users the local directories are in the process of being redesigned. This information is also available on the CLG sponsored website, the spkweb.

Diversity

- 121 This is an area of strength for the programme. Corporate leadership in this area is strong and there is progress being made with the diversity agenda. The programme has a range of information on the diverse needs of the local population and services have been established to meet these. Services have been developed for traditionally excluded groups and the programme has supported the provision of culturally sensitive services.
- 122 There is a clear recognition of the breadth of this issue by the Supporting People programme. The 2001 census showed that people from black and minority ethnic (BME) populations, including white non-British people, made up 1.5 per cent of the Norfolk population. Since 2001 the population has changed significantly as large numbers of economic migrants, mainly from Portugal and Eastern Europe have come to work in the county.
- 123 The Council has responded to this positively and the 'Welcome to Norfolk' website, developed by the Norfolk Constabulary has been set up. This helps new arrivals, including migrant workers, access appropriate services and includes information in five languages. There are links from this to the Supporting People pages of the Council's main website.
- 124 The Interpretation and Translation for Norfolk (INTRAN) service was originally set up as a pilot project in 2000. It looked at the communication needs of agencies providing frontline services, service providers and other educational and developmental projects. It has had a positive impact on the voluntary sectors ability to ensure non-English speaking and hearing impaired service users can access services throughout the county. The project has also served to raise awareness about different cultural groups in Norfolk.
- 125 Corporate leadership of the equalities and diversity agenda is strong. The Council is currently at level two of the Equalities Standard and is aiming to achieve level three by March 2008. The Council is 70 per cent towards achieving this target. It is also working on its Gender Equality Scheme and is confident of meeting the target publication date of 30 April 2007.
- 126 The Council published its Disability Equality Scheme on time and has taken a comprehensive approach to producing both a county-wide partnership scheme and a County Council scheme. Consultation was widespread and included all members of the Council's citizens' panel who received a generic questionnaire. Disabled members of the panel received a more detailed questionnaire. The Council's action plan is based around comments received from this survey. This means there is a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to equality in this area.

- 127** There is a good range of information collected about the diverse needs of service users. The Supporting People team have undertaken work to look at the diversity of BME groups accessing support services in Norfolk. This shows that people from these communities are over represented in supported accommodation. Survey work is currently being undertaken to identify the future needs of BME service users. This work should be completed in April 2007 and will be used to inform future commissioning decisions.
- 128** A service provider undertook a county-wide survey of people with mental health problems, funded by the Supporting People programme, to identify the needs of this client group. This was done in collaboration with an independent support group to access as many service users as possible. Again, this work will inform future commissioning decisions for the programme.
- 129** Extensive work has been completed on the support needs of offenders and this has resulted in the Norfolk Offenders Accommodation Strategy. Offenders, because of the level of need and the low level of provision are currently one of the top priorities for the programme. As a result of this, additional services have been developed, including a pilot floating support service to support high risk offenders. This is resulting in improved access to services for this group.
- 130** Members of the Supporting People team are actively involved in groups and networks that are established to meet the needs of a wide range of service users. For example, they regularly attend the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum based in Norwich, which has established Asylum Voice and gives service users an opportunity to voice their problems and concerns. The Migrant Workers Forum has also organised an event for February 2007 which will include an opportunity for the team to give information and advice to migrant workers about Supporting People services.
- 131** Services for traditionally excluded groups are being delivered through the programme. The strategic priorities in the five-year strategy have focussed on excluded groups. The first priority was given to Gypsies and Travellers, offenders and victims of domestic violence. There are now pilot services operating for other excluded groups including migrant workers, women in or leaving prostitution and people with a dual diagnosis. Such services help ensure that the programme reaches all vulnerable people.
- 132** Culturally sensitive services are supported by the programme. The Council has commissioned a support service for Gypsies and Travellers in response to service gaps identified in the Gypsies and Travellers strategy. This service has followed best practice in this area by recruiting from within the community and building capacity. The service has a culturally sensitive approach. This service has national and regional significance in working with this community and in 2006 won a BME Spark award.

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- 133** The programme has also used the service review process to challenge service providers and ensure that services are culturally sensitive and really are accessible to all vulnerable people. For example, the Supporting People team has ensured that a Christian based organisation is open to all potential service users regardless of their faith. This ensures that potential service users are not excluded from accessing a service because of their religion.
- 134** Despite the fact that the programme is working to ensure it is responsive to the diverse needs of the local community, it has not carried out equality impacts on all its strategies and services. However, it has carried out an equalities impact assessment for the re-commissioning of floating support including considering the gender impacts of the changes before being formally required to do so. Other funded services would benefit from this approach which would further ensure the equity of access for all vulnerable people in the county.

Outcomes for service users

- 135** This is an area where strengths outweigh weakness. New services have been commissioned to meet identified needs. Existing services have been both remodelled and improved through the service review process. Work is progressing on measuring outcomes for service users and there are examples of service users who have improved their quality of life through the programme. Support planning is effective. However, there are still many services operating at level C and D and service users in these services have not necessarily experienced better services yet.
- 136** Services are being commissioned to meet identified needs. Gaps in service provision have been identified through the five-year strategy and new services commissioned, for example, move on accommodation for offenders. Changes have been made to the range of provision through the service review process.
- 137** Additional services have been commissioned. There are a number of pilot floating support services that have been targeted at excluded groups to meet the identified priorities in the five-year strategy. These include:
- a County-wide Gypsies and Travellers project;
 - a project supporting sex workers in Norwich city centre;
 - a project supporting migrant workers in King's Lynn; and
 - a project providing accommodation support to migrant workers in Norwich.
- 138** Services for people with learning disabilities have been reconfigured to better meet the user's needs. The provision of assistive technology is now undertaken through a contract whereby each user sources the help they require rather than having one overall contract. This enables the service to be centred on the individual and improve the services they receive.

- 139** The floating support re-tendering exercise was undertaken with a primary objective of improving services for users. Floating support was in the main tied to social housing and was not tenure neutral. Referral arrangements were complex and the services were difficult to access. The new contracts will ensure that access to these services is open to all vulnerable people. Moreover, a single point of contact will make access easier and clearer for potential service users and other professionals.
- 140** The Supporting People programme, along with adult social services, is involved in three pilots around service users taking more direct responsibility for the provision of their own support services. These include the direct payments scheme, individual budgets for service users with mental health problems and the 'in control' scheme for service users with a learning difficulty. The Council is working with central government in evaluating these schemes but sees them as a way of improving services for users.
- 141** The five-year strategy was robust in identifying service gaps and has prioritised the client groups where these will be met first. There are no accommodation services currently for refugees or people with HIV/AIDS. The programme has been advised by agencies that work with these groups that specialist support is not needed and that services can be provided through generic floating support services. Now that the floating support has been re-commissioned, it will be easier to access these services as they are needed.
- 142** Service improvements have been driven by the QAF and service reviews and have resulted in benefits to service users. A number of contracts have been re-negotiated so that additional services are being provided for the same level of funding. In other cases, money has been withdrawn from ineligible tasks and used to commission new services. However, there are still many services that are operating at level C and D. Until these services are improved there will remain a number of service users who are not experiencing better services.
- 143** There are effective support plans in place. These plans are comprehensive and are agreed with service users and are subject to regular review. This means that service users are clear about what the service is helping them to achieve and that they are able to measure their progress over time in reaching these goals.
- 144** The programme is progressing towards an outcomes framework to establish the benefits that service users are gaining from services. It is recognised that ALAs are awaiting further guidance from CLG but in the meantime, Norfolk has started to address this through its commissioning processes.
- 145** The floating support re-commissioning exercise introduced an outcomes based contract. The draft service specification for homelessness services also includes a section on outcome measures and the responsibility of the provider in being able to assess the positive changes that come about through the service.

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- 146 The pilot floating support services described above will be using the St Mungo's Outcome Star to assess the impact on service users. St Mungo's works with very vulnerable clients and developed the star as a method of assessing the progress and achievements of its service users. It has been developed specifically for the social housing sector. Use of this assessment tool will give the programme evidence of positive outcomes for service users.
- 147 One service that is using the St Mungo's Outcome Star has found it to have positive benefits. It demonstrates progress in a pictorial way so service users can easily see the improvements that they have made. This has been particularly beneficial for service users with limited written and verbal skills. As a result of this, the provider feels that users have been able to fully engage with the service as they can see the results of this.
- 148 There are many stories and testimonials that show the positive outcomes that can be achieved through the programme. The following two case studies illustrate what can be achieved with the appropriate support.

Case study 2

Service user is a 17 year old female who at age 16 was homeless. She moved into a hostel where she was initially scared of being on her own. However, the staff at the hostel supported her and helped her develop independent living skills such as filling in forms, cooking, budgeting and paying bills.

She also had advice about how to access further education and has started a college course to complete her A levels.

She has also moved into more permanent accommodation and is now increasing her independence and living skills. She is still receiving support to manage her tenancy but says herself that her life is much better now. She is more confident and independent and has been able to re-establish contact with her family.

Case study 3

Service user is a man in his late 40s. He has mental health problems and has had many long admissions to psychiatric hospital in the past. During these admissions he has lost tenancies. While he was in hospital he was referred for support as his tenancy was at risk again due to an accumulation of rent arrears.

The support worker helped him claim benefit to which he was entitled so that he could pay off his arrears. He was also supported in transferring to a property more suitable to his needs.

He continues to receive support to help him develop his financial and budgeting skills so that he can maintain his tenancy and pay his bills. Without this support, it is likely that his pattern of regular hospital admission would be repeated and he would be in danger of losing his tenancy.

Summary

- 149** We have assessed the administration of the Supporting People programme by Norfolk County Council to be a 'good' two-star service.
- 150** The delivery of the programme has many strengths. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for a number of service users and driving changes for some client groups. There are positive working relationships with service providers, partners and other stakeholders. The district councils each lead on specific client groups and this has ensured that service users needs and gaps in services have been identified. The programme is being effectively managed by a well regarded Supporting People team.
- 151** The Council and elected members show a high level of commitment to the programme. The governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decisions being made. There are good linkages between the Supporting People five-year strategy and other Council and partner strategies. The approach to value for money is a strength for the programme and the County Council.
- 152** The programme has achieved efficiency savings and has used these to commission new services to meet needs identified by using a prioritisation matrix. New services have been commissioned to meet the needs of traditionally excluded groups.
- 153** Service users have been involved in aspects of the programme that they are interested in. This includes the development of the strategy, the service review process and the commissioning of the new floating support contracts. Service users with a learning difficulty have been trained to involve fellow service users.
- 154** However, there is not a strategy in place to deal with the lack of access to move-on accommodation or for service user involvement. Access arrangements and information for service users are variable. The PCTs have not been actively engaged in the governance arrangements for the programme and so far there has been no opportunity for service users to be involved in these.

What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

What is the Council's track record in delivering improvement?

- 155 This is an area of strength. The Supporting People programme has delivered new, key services for some client groups and improved services for a number of users. Key programme milestones have been delivered on time along with the service review programme. The Supporting People team are addressing identified weaknesses, for example in the floating support service and the establishment of a new providers' forum. The Council has a strong track record in delivering improvements to services and securing value for money.
- 156 The Supporting People programme in Norfolk has delivered additional services for a number of clients who have been identified as a priority in the five-year strategy. For example, there have been additional services for offenders, for Gypsies and Travellers, for women suffering from domestic violence and for migrant workers. Some services have been reconfigured through the service review process improving how they meet the needs of existing and potential service users.
- 157 The Supporting People programme has achieved its key milestones on time which have led to service improvements. The Supporting People strategy was developed in partnership and through effective consultation. This has identified gaps in provision and agreed priorities for how these will be addressed.
- 158 The service review programme was also delivered on time and in a robust and consistent manner. This has led to ineligible funding being withdrawn and used to meet service gaps, poorly performing services being de-commissioned and other services being subject to action plans to guide and shape improvements.
- 159 The Supporting People team has effectively delivered the majority of the requirements of the programme. It has established sound governance arrangements, developed and maintained positive working relationships with providers, and supported research into client needs.
- 160 Although the programme does not have an effective User and Carer Involvement Strategy, it has actively engaged with service users and their contributions have helped shape both existing and newly commissioned services. The voluntary sector is involved in the Commissioning Body and this has ensured that the views of this sector have been taken into account in the development of services.

- 161** The programme is aware of the difficulties in accessing floating support services and has taken action to address this. The process for re-commissioning these services was robust and service improvements should result from the new contract. Most importantly will be the single point of contact for referral into these services and that they will be provided to vulnerable people, whatever their tenure, which was always the aim of the programme.
- 162** However, our mystery shopping exercise showed weaknesses in the provision of information that is supplied to potential service users. Since our inspection, the Council and its partners have taken steps to address these issues. Service standards are in place across the County and information is available in different languages and formats.
- 163** The lack of a fully functioning providers' forum has been addressed. The new Provider Elected Panel will be provider led and consist of elected provider representatives from all sectors. The first meeting was held on 23 February 2007. Two members of this group will be elected to sit on the Core Strategy Group. This new arrangement will ensure that providers are able to make a more consistent contribution to the programme.
- 164** The Council can demonstrate a considerable track record in improving other related services. Both children's and adult social services have significantly improved and are now providing a good service. In children's social care services outcomes have significantly improved. The numbers of looked after children have fallen, and those remaining are getting better qualifications, fewer changes in placement, and increasing numbers of adoptions. Fostering services are providing excellent outcomes and more carers are being appointed. There is good progress in developing services for the reduction of teenage pregnancies and local indicators say the numbers are falling in line with LAA targets.
- 165** Services to older people have significantly improved. The older person's strategy is already delivering noticeable improvements. Fewer people are going into residential care and more are receiving care in their own homes. Many more people have taken control of their own care by using direct payments. CSCI inspections of services for older people and people with mental health needs show improving performance and better outcomes for local people.
- 166** The Council is currently providing good value for money. The Council has improved services against a backdrop of a reduced financial settlement from the Government. The Council can demonstrate a positive relationship between costs and the range of services it provides to local people. Overall, costs reflect policy decisions as stated in the County Council Plan.
- 167** This is equally true of the Supporting People programme where a robust value for money methodology has resulted in saving of £2.6 million over the life of the programme. These savings have been used to commission new services and pay an inflationary increase to providers.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 168 This is an area of strength. There are clear links between the programme and the wider strategic priorities of the Council. The Council has improved its performance management arrangements but this is not yet fully embedded for the programme. The Commissioning Body regularly monitors the Supporting People's annual plan. There is effective leadership of the programme and a well developed approach to learning.
- 169 There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider strategic priorities. These links are made throughout the Supporting People five-year strategy. The strategy contains a clear vision and a set of objectives that support local and national priorities for helping vulnerable people. The strategy has identified priorities and shows how these will be translated into deliverables, taking into account realistic timescales, resource implications and managing risks. The objectives and priorities enable an assessment to be made as to how well the programme has delivered against these.
- 170 The Council has significantly improved its performance management arrangements and this is contributing to better service delivery. It has reviewed its corporate objectives, and following public consultation has reduced the number from 40 to 20. In addition, eight of these have been identified as key objectives, to enable a stronger focus on what matters most.
- 171 Executive scrutiny focuses on delivery of declared priorities and outcomes. It makes good use of well-constructed reports, invites a challenging dialogue and provides good opportunities for questioning from opposition councillors and members of the public. Target setting and delivery against target is rational and improving. Managers and staff make satisfactory and improving use of data and measures to manage performance.
- 172 Performance management of the Supporting People programme will now be through the Council's PRISM software system. The use of PRISM has brought more rigour and discipline to performance management and outcomes are monitored and managed by chief officers on a monthly basis. However, performance management for the programme as a whole is not yet fully embedded.
- 173 The annual plan, derived from the five-year strategy has been translated into a plan for the team. Progress against this is monitored through regular team meetings and individual supervision of staff. The Commissioning Body manages performance through regular reports and discussions. The annual plan is reviewed at the Commissioning Body every quarter along with financial management reports. This ensures that effective management can take place and action taken to where slippage is identified.

- 174** However, due to the under-development of outcome measures for service users there is no reporting on how successful the programme is in achieving its aims and objectives. This is a national issue and the Council is awaiting guidance from the CLG. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.
- 175** There are effective improvement plans in place to ensure that services continue to improve following service reviews. Plans are regularly monitored and services are improving because of this. But the team has focussed on improving the services that scored 'C' or 'D' in the QAF and because of this does not yet have plans in place to ensure higher scoring services also continue to improve. This is not ambitious for all service providers to be top performers.
- 176** Risk management arrangements are robust. There is a separate risk register for the Supporting People programme and a comprehensive risk assessment has been undertaken. Risk was well managed through the process of re-commissioning the floating support service and an impact assessment was carried out to identify service providers who would be vulnerable to the impact of this. Such a sound approach means that service users are safeguarded against potential risks that can be identified and planned for.
- 177** Leadership of the programme is effective and there is strong corporate commitment to the programme. The Commissioning Body is providing clear strategic leadership to both the team and the programme. Members of the Commissioning Body demonstrate understanding of the diverse needs of vulnerable groups and they are ensuring that there are shared priorities to deliver positive outcomes for service users. Elected members have been consistently involved in the programme and champion it in a variety of different forums. The Accountable Officer has raised the profile of the programme in the County Council and in the health arena.
- 178** The approach to learning is well developed. The programme can demonstrate examples of learning from top performing administering local authorities and has plans in place to implement positive practice that inspections have identified. The use of a neighbouring authority to peer review the re-commissioning of the floating support service is an example of the positive approach that the Council has. Different approaches will be introduced in any subsequent exercises to overcome the issues that were identified. The programme is also open to learning from SPERG.
- 179** The adult social services department is equally open to learning from the Supporting People programme and is looking to introduce the approach to assessing and improving service quality that has resulted from the service review process. It is also using the experiences of the Supporting People team in looking at best practice for the commissioning of care services.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 180** This is an area of strength. The Supporting People team have the necessary skills and experience and are supported by an effective training and development programme and support from partners and corporate services. There are appropriate procurement arrangements in place and cross authority working provides additional capacity. The team's capacity has improved now that it has completed two large pieces of work and it should now be able to deliver on all of its ambitions for the programme.
- 181** The members of the Supporting People team have the necessary range of skills and experience to successfully deliver the programme. The team had been stretched by the volume of work required for the successful re-commissioning of the floating support service and the robust approach it took to the service review process. This has meant that slower progress has been made in some areas such as developing a strategy for service users' involvement in the programme. However, the team has used temporary staff where appropriate and has met key milestones. It is also confident that now these two major pieces of work are completed, capacity can be released to make progress in other areas.
- 182** The team is well managed and operates effectively. There are regular team meetings and all staff have regular supervision meetings with their manager. The team has been stable so members have built up a lot of experience in the operation of the programme. Contract officers leading on specific client groups and linking to the district council that also has the lead for this group has enabled a considerable amount of knowledge and experience to be developed.
- 183** One member from the Supporting People team has been seconded to the Norfolk Probation service and has been working on the offenders' accommodation strategy. This has been a positive experience for both agencies and has enabled skills and knowledge to be consolidated and shared.
- 184** Training and development opportunities are available to the team. Members of the team have been on a variety of courses for developing skills in their current role as well as developing skills for future roles as part of a career development programme. The County Council also has a programme of enabling staff to undertake recreational courses outside of work demands as a positive approach to the work-life balance.
- 185** The programme has benefited from a good level of corporate support. For example, officers from the corporate procurement and legal teams have played a full part in the re-commissioning of the floating support service. This has provided additional, specialist capacity to support this work.

- 186** The strength of partnership working is a positive driver for the programme. Work is shared between the county and the districts. This report has already noted the benefits that have accrued to service users through this approach. Another outcome of the sound relationships that have been established is how different agencies have been brought together and further benefits have come from this. For example, the probation service, the YOT and the DAAT have contact with a range of different organisations and this has further raised awareness and mutual understanding. Direct benefits that have come from this are the increases in services for offenders and people with drug and alcohol problems.
- 187** The restructuring of the six PCTs into two PCTs means that it will be easier to identify representatives to participate in the governance of the programme. Both PCTs are in the final stages of being re-organised and have agreed to nominate a senior manager to join the Commissioning Body. The PCTs are both keen to be more actively involved in the programme as they can see the benefits that housing related support will bring to their aim of improving the health of the community overall.
- 188** The programme has made savings through the service review process as well as through slippage accrued by late starting projects. The contractual commitments of the programme balance the current Supporting People grant and this surplus will be used to fund pilot projects to meet identified priorities for the programme. Additionally, the region has secured £31 million of funding from the Housing Corporation to develop additional supported housing schemes.
- 189** Although the current IT system used by the programme is working as required, the Council is in the process of up-grading this. The new system, which will go live in November 2007, will be integrated with the Council's financial system which will improve management accounting. The same system will be used by the adults' social services department which should bring about joint commissioning benefits.
- 190** Procurement arrangements with the Supporting People team and the County Council are strong. Both parties worked effectively on the procurement of the new floating support contract which will improve services for users, provide a greater level of service and make savings on the original contract prices. The Supporting People team has its own procurement strategy which complements that of the county. Such arrangements ensure that services are thoroughly market tested and provide optimum value for money.
- 191** Cross authority working is a strength for the programme. Other ALAs in the region look to Norfolk because of the level of knowledge of its team. It also has gained in terms of working with other authorities to achieve benefits of scale. This improves the capacity of the team to take forward issues such as the work that is currently going on across the region on joint commissioning.

Summary

- 192 Our judgement is that Norfolk's Supporting People programme has 'excellent' prospects for improvement.
- 193 There is strong corporate commitment and leadership of the Supporting People programme and there are clear links between the programme and other strategic priorities. The programme has expanded and improved services for users. Key milestones have been met and value for money efficiencies and savings have been made. The team is effective and has access to good training and development programmes. The robustness of the partnerships across the programme is a real strength and this has improved capacity.
- 194 The programme is aware of weaknesses such as the lack of a fully functioning providers' forum and the issues in the operation of the floating support contracts. It has taken action to address these and new ways of working are about to be implemented. The County Council has a positive track record and can demonstrate some real improvements in services including those for vulnerable children and adults.
- 195 However, there are still areas of the programme that need improving such as access and information arrangements and the development of a users and carers involvement strategy. The team has been working on the completion of two large pieces of work and now has the capacity to address these issues. The reporting on outcomes for service users is another area that will require further work from the team once the CLG has issued national guidance.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

The data is currently being refreshed and this will be available later on the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 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 questionnaire based survey sent to all providers of housing related support services;
 - a focus groups with service providers;
 - meetings with service users and voluntary organisations;
 - visits to supported housing services, to talk to service users, scheme managers and frontline staff;
 - file checks of service reviews;
 - telephone calls to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the County Council, the borough and district councils, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
 - interviews with councillors and with the relevant portfolio holder;
 - review of the website; and
 - mystery shopping visit.

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

‘The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources’. (Seeing is Believing)

District councils leading on specific client groups

- 1 The individual district councils have been nominated to take the lead for specific user groups. Each district council has taken responsibility for identifying and updating information on support needs for the groups on a county wide basis. The district councils have either funded completely, or contributed funding to, research into needs. Once this research has been completed, strategies have been produced to plan how needs will be met.

Fairer charging promotion

- 2 Fairer charging is actively promoted across the service. There are a range of procedures in place to ensure that service users are informed of the service charging policies including awareness raising sessions provided by the team for providers. Claims have risen steadily over the life of the programme.

Prioritisation matrix

- 3 The Council has used, and shared, a prioritisation matrix to determine how it will address unmet needs for the different client groups. This has ensured transparency in the decision making process and wide knowledge of the priorities for the programme.

Service users assessing their services

- 4 The Supporting People team trained around ten service users with learning difficulties to undertake validation visits to learning difficulty schemes in conjunction with an advocacy group.