

Supporting People Inspection

Northumberland 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

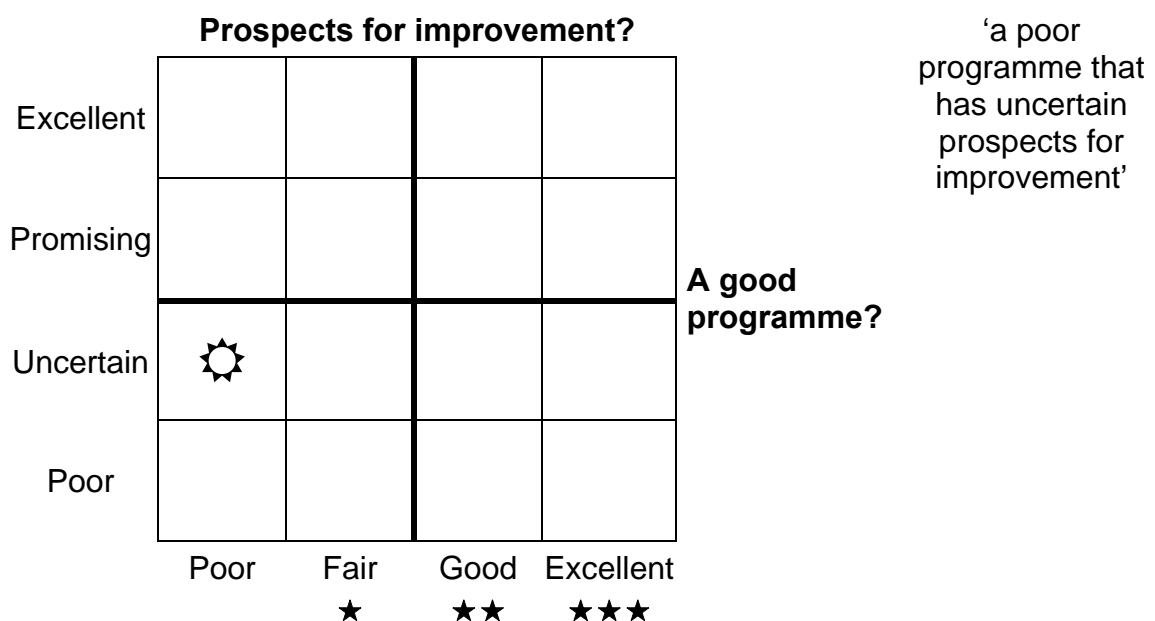
- 1 Northumberland County Council is providing a poor no-star Supporting People programme that has uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Council has demonstrated a lack leadership of and responsibility for the programme. The programme itself has lacked a purposeful drive in its delivery. As a result progress towards an improving provision of support for vulnerable people within the county has been slow and unambitious.
- 3 Governance arrangements are not functioning effectively. There is a lack of clarity in the structures, limited membership, variable engagement and poor monitoring of both the programme and changes and outcomes from it.
- 4 Whilst there is a strategy for the general direction of the provision of services there is a lack of detail about how this will be achieved, due in part to the lack of a robust determination of housing and support needs and the need to further review services for older people and those with learning disabilities. Partnership working is underdeveloped.
- 5 There are no opportunities for service users to become involved in shaping and tailoring the strategic aims and arrangements for the programme to meet their needs and not enough attention has been given to diversity issues to ensure that services are available to the whole community.
- 6 Positively the review process and a robust contract monitoring system delivered by a committed and enthusiastic Supporting People team has delivered improvements in services that will have impacted on users.
- 7 Also, positively, there are good working relationships with probation, the drugs action team and MAPPA arrangements are in place and working well.
- 8 The prospects for improvement to the service have been judged as uncertain. There are several barriers in meeting the aims and addressing the priorities of the programme. The record of delivering improvements is mixed. Whilst there have been improvements in individual services, low levels of service re-commissioning has not altered the provision of support across the county. This means there has been limited progress in addressing service provision gaps and priorities.
- 9 Performance management arrangements are weak and do not drive improvement.
- 10 There is a very recent impetus at all levels to rapidly progress the programme. This is in part driven by the increased profile of Supporting People within Northumberland County Council and other partner agencies. There is improving awareness among stakeholders and partnership working is strengthening. This has resulted in three recent activities being instigated to take the programme forward including a review of governance, robust needs information gathering and the development of a service user involvement strategy.

- 11 Recommendations have therefore been made in the areas of governance, service user involvement, performance management and diversity and access to services which if followed should improve the services available to those who need housing support within the county of Northumberland.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 12 We have assessed Northumberland County Council as providing a 'poor', no-star programme that has uncertain 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

- 13 We found the programme to be poor because it has a range of weaknesses including:
- lack of corporate commitment and leadership from Northumberland County Council including not taking responsibility for ensuring compliance with the requirements of DCLG. Whilst there are some indications this is changing the mechanisms for this are not yet embedded;
 - a governance structure with a restricted membership, limited engagement and a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities that gives a poor lead to the Supporting People programme;
 - little consideration of diversity issues resulting in no understanding of where services may not be reaching all potential users;

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.

8 Supporting People Inspection | Scoring the Supporting People programme

- no user involvement in the development and focus of the programme, thus not providing a tailored service that meets the needs of individuals;
- limited access to a limited service. Although overall priorities for development of services are identified a lack of robust needs data and analysis and underdeveloped commissioning plans has meant modest progress has been made in the reconfiguring and provision of new services;
- limited performance monitoring making it difficult to identify the areas in which actions have been taken and progress achieved; and
- lack of robust application of eligibility criteria within the service review programme, with some services still at the initial assessment of these.

14 However, there are some areas with positive performance. These include:

- clear contract monitoring and review processes which drive improvements for service users;
- a committed and enthusiastic Supporting People team; and
- effective links with the probation service and MAPPA arrangements which are working well.

15 The programme has uncertain prospects for improvement because there are several barriers to improvement. These include:

- the historic lack of strategic leadership;
- current poor governance arrangements;
- lack of user involvement in the delivery of the service;
- insufficient analysis of needs to determine future service commissioning;
- lack of engagement by district councils;
- poor performance monitoring and scrutiny; and
- poor track record of delivering reconfigured services to meet identified need.

16 However, there are some drivers for change:

- the review of governance currently underway;
- the development of the service user involvement policy;
- the increased profile of Supporting People in Northumberland Care Trust Northumberland County Council Northumberland Strategic Partnership and other partner agencies;
- the strengthening of partnership working; and
- the current needs assessments and strategic sector reviews being carried out to inform the updating of the five year strategy.

Recommendations

- 17 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 Complete and implement the current review of governance ensuring that it addresses issues of:

- broadening membership to include key partners, members and an independent representative from the PCT;*
- roles and responsibilities of both individuals and the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group ensuring the Commissioning Body business relates to strategic issues only;*
- performance management and monitoring requirements and structures;*
- non engagement of some DC partners;*
- ensuring that provider and service users are represented effectively; and*
- improving attendance at governance meetings with mandated deputies.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a broader spectrum of views and interests will be represented;
- improved strategic and commissioning decisions; and
- partners, providers, stakeholders and service users will have more influence in the delivery and development of the programme.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

This should be implemented by June 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 To agree a performance management framework for monitoring progress, identifying slippage, and driving improvements by:

- *introducing quarterly performance reports which contain analysis of performance, and action taken to address performance;*
- *developing local performance indicators to monitor delivery of the programme and to demonstrate the contribution towards the achievement of the Council's priorities and to those shared with the district councils, health and probation;*
- *developing indicators that will measure the outcomes and benefits for service users;*
- *developing indicators that will measure progress against indicators that the programme shares with other partner agencies; and*
- *measuring progress against the five year strategy and annual plans.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the programme will know how it is progressing;
- the programme will know the contribution it is making to wider objectives;
- investment decisions will be better informed; and
- plans will be deliverable.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

This should be implemented by June 2007.

Recommendation

R3 Develop and deliver a programme to fill gaps in the understanding of housing support related needs by:

- *establishing systems for the ongoing capture of needs information from partners;*
- *working with providers and partners to identify and prioritise current gaps in needs analysis;*
- *developing and publicising a programme to fill existing gaps;*
- *completing needs analyses to address gaps and priority areas and use this to develop a robust commissioning strategy;*
- *prioritise the completion of the strategic reviews and use the outcomes to inform the delivery of the strategic aims; and*
- *expanding the Home Improvement Agency to ensure the services it provides are available county wide.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the needs of all vulnerable people will be understood and prioritised for future;
- investment will be determined based on robust information;
- improved outcomes for people who are the most vulnerable; and
- improved service configuration which meets the needs and demands of service users.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.

This should be implemented by December 2007.

Recommendation

R4 Improve opportunities for service user involvement in the development and delivery of the programme by:

- *developing and implementing the service user involvement strategy;*
- *working with partners, advocates and service user representatives to develop methods of involving previously excluded and vulnerable service users;*
- *improved engagement with service users to inform delivery of the programme;*
- *involving service users in the monitoring of services; and*
- *involving service users to assess published information and access to services.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- information will be more suitable for customer requirements; and
- services will be developed and improved in line with service user priorities.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.

This should be implemented by December 2007.

Recommendation

R5 Address the difficulties service users are having in finding suitable accommodation to move on from supported accommodation by:

- *identifying the level of need to move on;*
- *identifying options for improving the availability of accommodation;*
- *challenging inappropriate exclusion policies or practices;*
- *developing systems that ensure support for individuals is linked to preparing to move on ahead of their exit from the scheme; and*
- *set targets and monitor the position regularly.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- vulnerable people will be able to move on to less intensive support or independence when they are ready to do so;
- maximum benefit will be achieved from available service provision; and
- support not being provided for longer than a person needs.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

This should be implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R6 Improve the availability of information about the Supporting People programme by:

- *ensuring leaflets are widely distributed across the Districts and on display;*
- *improving the directory of services to include information on availability and physical accessibility and the cultural sensitivity of service; and*
- *making the council website easier to navigate for service users.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- vulnerable people will find it easier to find out information on services;
- people will know what choices they have; and
- people will be better directed to the services they need.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.

This should be implemented by June 2007.

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

Dates of inspection: 24 to 25 October and 30 October to 3 November 2006.

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Report

Context

The locality

- 19** Northumberland is a county situated in the North East of England. It is a large, mainly rural area extending from the North Sea coast in the east to the Scottish border in the north. There are 12 major population centres.
- 20** 20.9 per cent of the 307,186 (2001 census figure) population are aged 65 or over, significantly above the national average of 18.5 per cent. Around one per cent is from black and minority ethnic communities (BME), well below the national average of 10.4 per cent. Of these 48 per cent live in the south east corner of the county.
- 21** The area has high levels of deprivation in two of its districts.
Rating out of 354 councils where 1 is the most deprived.

Alnwick	196
Berwick upon Tweed	107
Blyth Valley	88
Castle Morpeth	219
Tynedale	212
Wansbeck	46

- 22** The traditional mining industry has disappeared and for a rural area few people are engaged in agriculture and related employment. Key employment sectors are now the public sector and small manufacturing. Many people travel to work in neighbouring urban authority areas.
- 23** Unemployment levels have fallen consistently over the past 20 years. At 2.5 per cent, the current rate is slightly higher than the national average.
- 24** Northumberland is a two tier local government area. Under the county level, there are six district councils. Below that there are a number of town and parish councils. There is one Primary Care Trust and Northumberland is part of the Northumbria Probation Service.

The Council

- 25** The Council has a political structure of leader and Cabinet. It is Labour controlled with the party holding 35 of the 67 seats.
- 26** The county has an overarching strategic partnership, Northumberland Strategic Partnership, which sits astride the six local strategic partnerships established within each district council area to bring together statutory, voluntary and charitable agencies.
- 27** The Council has identified four strategic corporate aims. Within these are a number of key objectives that link with the Supporting People programme:
- supporting families, children and young people and communities;
 - helping people live in healthy and safe communities;
 - developing our economy while protecting our environment; and
 - delivering better services for local people.
- 28** In addition the Northumberland Strategic Partnership has identified the following six key corporate priority areas:
- Achieving Excellence in Education and Training;
 - Protecting and Transforming Local Environments;
 - Being Confident and Secure;
 - Being Healthy, Feeling Good;
 - Delivering Economic Prosperity for All; and
 - Getting from A to B.
- 29** Whilst retaining its role as the administering local authority, Northumberland County Council has delegated the provision of the Supporting People service to Northumberland Care Trust which has a mission to:
- provide a high-quality, primary and community care-centred service to the people of Northumberland that is:
 - focused on the needs of local people;
 - integrated across health and social care;
 - founded on four strong localities;
 - planned and delivered in partnership; and
 - delivered by a skilled, motivated and integrated workforce.
- 30** Excluding schools staff, the Council employs around 5,500 full-time equivalent staff to plan and deliver its services. In 2005/06 the Council has a net revenue budget of £350.4 million.

- 31 In previous assessments, both Council and service performance was rated as follows. Under CPA in 2005 the Council achieved a three-star rating for overall performance. The use of resources assessment for 2006 rating was a three overall, indicating that the authority is performing well. Within that the value for money assessment was given a score of two. These are an improvement on previous assessments. In its performance rating for 2006, the Commission for Social Care inspection (CSCI) assessed Northumberland County Council's adult social services as 'serving some people well' with 'uncertain capacity to improve'. This meant the council was awarded one-star in November 2006, less positive than the previous year. An inspection of older people's services in June 2006 made the same judgement for that service.

The Supporting People programme

- 32 There are six underpinning objectives of the Supporting People programme:
- focus provision on local need;
 - improve the quality, performance and VFM across all services;
 - monitor and inspect quality and service;
 - integrate support with wider strategies;
 - introduce effective decision making and administration; and
 - develop effective planning mechanisms.
- 33 Northumberland County Council (NCC) acts as the administering authority (accountable local authority - ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area.
- 34 The grant at the beginning of the Supporting People programme in 2003/04 was £7,463,100.

GRANT	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Supporting People	£7,083,603	£6,963,007	£7,054,329
Admin Grant	£286,689	£286,689	£286,689
NCC via NCT for HIA service	£53,100	£53,100	£53,100

- 35 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £ £6,963,007 for 2006/07, which is a reduction of £120,000 or 0.9 per cent on the previous year's allocation. The Council also received an administration grant of £286,689, the same amount as the previous year.

- 36** The Supporting People team consists of eight staff made up of:
- Lead Officer;
 - Commissioning, Contract and Performance Management Officer;
 - Quality Monitoring and Contracts Officer x 4;
 - Policy Information Development Support Officer; and
 - Administration Officer.
- 37** Fifty one service providers deliver a total of 290 schemes including a county wide Home Improvement Agency. In total, the programme funds 4,518 units of housing-related support of which 61 per cent is accommodation-based and 39 per cent is floating support. In addition there are 5,543 community alarms and 100 units for the Home Improvement Agency.
- 38** A breakdown of spending in 2004/05 shows:
- 93 per cent of services are for older people receiving 33 per cent of annual grant;
 - 1.5 per cent of services are for people with learning disability amounting to 33 per cent of annual grant; and
 - 5.5 per cent of services for all other users amounting to 33 per cent of annual grant.
- 39** There is no provision for refugees or people with HIV/AIDs and the Supporting People grant does not fund any services to gypsies and travellers. In addition there is under-provision of services in a number of areas including offenders and single homeless people.
- 40** The highest cost service at £1,180.00 per unit per week is an accommodation-based service for people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.65 a week for a community alarm service.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

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

41 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

42 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; and
- Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

- 43 There are more weaknesses than strengths in this area. Delegation of the Supporting People programme to the Northumberland Care Trust has led to Northumberland County Council not providing a corporate commitment or taking adequate responsibility for their role as the accountable local authority in understanding and managing the programme. Within the Northumberland Care Trust the Supporting People programme has not been appreciated as a key player in the cohesive delivering of services to vulnerable people, evidenced in a lack of corporate commitment.
- 44 The lack of a Commissioning Body until 2005 has led to an absence of early strategic leadership. The lack of cohesion and clear lines of demarcation between the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group has contributed to this. The limited membership of those groups means diverse views and interests are not represented. Engagement by district councils is variable which has contributed to the slow progress of the programme.
- 45 Positively there are recent improved links into the work of other partners. County council members have a raised awareness of the programme and its value, probation and the drugs action team are engaged in the programme and there is an effective small provider forum. The Accountable Officer is at an appropriate senior level and well placed to move the programme forward.

Corporate commitment and links

- 46 The Supporting People programme within Northumberland County Council is delivered by the Northumberland Care Trust as part of the overall arrangement, entered into in 2002 for the Northumberland Care Trust to provide all adult social care services for the county. The formal annual agreement between Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust is the delivery vehicle and includes processes and monitoring arrangements.
- 47 There is a lack of strategic leadership at a senior level within both Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust. This, combined with the late setting up of a Commissioning Body has led to a lack of clarity, vision and robust implementation of the programme.
- 48 The Northumberland Care Trust board are not engaged in the Supporting People programme. There is no reporting to the board on performance and progress of the Supporting People programme. Officers recognise this and are addressing the need to improve board knowledge and understanding. Supporting People has had neither a high profile nor corporate support.
- 49 There is inconsistent engagement by district council partners in the programme. District councils are at different levels of involvement. It has taken too long to address this lack of engagement. It is only now that intervention is being made by the Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council. Two district councils have only recently signed off the five year strategy (agreed in early 2005). It is therefore difficult to gain agreement and push a programme forward.

20 Supporting People Inspection | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 50 Relationships between members at County and District levels are mixed. Some members spoke of poor communications from the County and unexpected increases in charges for care packages. No members had heard of fairer charging. Poor communications will reduce the effectiveness of the programme.
- 51 District council housing strategies are inconsistent in their referencing to Supporting People. Housing Strategies of the district councils refer to Supporting People but vary in how they link with Supporting People priorities. Some authorities clearly link their strategies to such priorities whilst others only relate their strategies in passing. A coherent strategy for the county is difficult to establish.
- 52 The Supporting People programme has some links with the strategic work of key partners which helps to ensure that the programme is integrated into the delivery of key priorities. The Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) is the overarching strategic body which co-ordinates the delivery of the Community Strategy. The partnership is structured as a partnership board supported by several sector boards that represent the strategic aims of the Community Strategy. Supporting People formally links into the Health and Well Being Sector Board which is chaired by the Director of Public Health, who is also a staff member of the Care Trust. The Chair of the Commissioning Body is a Board member of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership. Despite these key links there is no evidence yet that the Supporting People programme is benefiting from broader initiatives.
- 53 It is a weakness that there is no reference to Supporting People in the existing Community Strategy. The Strategy was published in 2002 before the commencement of the Supporting People programme but long after the national intentions of the programme were known in 1999. Work is currently being undertaken to consult upon and to refresh the Community Strategy. The revised strategy is due to be published by March 2007 and will clearly reference Supporting People and focus on outcomes for people. It is evident in the workings of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership that Supporting People is considered as a key area of work that contributes to the Community Strategy.
- 54 Key County Council members demonstrate a good awareness of the key objectives and challenges for the programme. Training has been provided for members thus improving their understanding of the service. Key challenges are considered to be; delivering on service users' expectations, providing for unmet needs and ensuring that all districts are engaged fully. The recently appointed portfolio holder for Adults and Well Being, who is the Supporting People champion, meets regularly with the accountable officer to discuss the range of issues across the work stream including Supporting People.

- 55 Supporting People objectives are not treated with sufficient priority in the County. There is insufficient evidence of member scrutiny and challenge in the areas of performance improvement and in delivery of key strategic objectives. There is a reasonable expectation that routine performance management of the programme will be undertaken by the Care Trust, but that key issues would be reported to members of the accountable local authority. To date this is only provided in a statistical form relating to national key performance indicators. Northumberland County Council cannot be sure of the quality of the programme that is being delivered on their behalf.
- 56 There is inconsistency in the engagement of Supporting People in statutory and voluntary partnerships and tangible outputs from those partnerships have been limited to date. Supporting People is recognised as an important player in the delivery of other strategies. All Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group members are members of many associated partner strategy and programme development groups. Whilst this assists the spread of knowledge of the potential benefits Supporting People can deliver, positive outcomes from these that can point to service improvement are limited to work on an ad hoc basis rather than evidencing positive approaches and plans derived directly from strategic objectives.

Commissioning Body

- 57 There has been a lack of strategic leadership in the programme. The Commissioning Body was not set up until 2005, leading to a lack of strategic guidance in the early stages of the programme. This was in breach of DCLG guidelines which require this body to provide a strategic direction and oversee the work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme. This, combined with no clear acceptance of responsibility for the programme by Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust has left the current position considerably less developed than it should be, with a number of key activities still not in progress.
- 58 The Commissioning Body has not complied with all of the terms of reference. The terms of reference of the Commissioning Body are basic and include forward strategic planning, the service review process, decision making and governance. There are additional documents relating to authority, declarations of interest and dispute resolution protocols. Two areas where the Commissioning Body have not fulfilled their responsibilities relate to ensuring consultation with service users and managing performance across the team.
- 59 DCLG guidelines indicate that the Commissioning Body should make all decisions about service reviews. The Commissioning Body has delegated authority to make a number of routine commissioning decisions where there are no significant changes to the service to the Core Strategy Group and Supporting People team, retaining decisions about non compliance and remodelling to the Commissioning Body. The Commissioning Body should however retain the responsibility to sign off summary papers outlining non-contentious decisions. The current arrangement does not allow scrutiny of and challenge to routine decisions at a higher level.

22 Supporting People Inspection | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 60 Membership of the Commissioning Body is restricted and does not fully reflect those with interests in the programme. They are drawn from a narrow base of authorities and partner agencies. There is no representation from members or the Care Trust other than the Accountable Officer, who is also their designated health representative. The interest of Northumberland County Council is represented at an appropriately senior level and the representative has clear reporting lines back into the authority. There is only one member representing the non-statutory sector. There is recent representation from the families and children's care trust. Valuable contributions will not be input into the programme.
- 61 The chair is a member of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP). This independence, neutrality and expertise is valued by the group. It is a useful mechanism to ease any tensions between the group members including those representing the county and district councils.
- 62 There is potential for conflicts of interest at the Commissioning Body. District Council representatives are the same on both the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group, leading to lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities. These are both providers of housing support services, some of whom represent or chair other key partner groups such as the Drugs Action Team, and thus responsible for commissioning decisions that could adversely affect them as providers. There is insufficient separation of commissioning and contracting functions to conclude with confidence that conflicts will not occur. As the programme moves into a commissioning phase in which difficult decisions will need to be taken there is a possibility that these decisions will be delayed or avoided.
- 63 Levels of attendance by members are inconsistent. There is poor attendance by some district council representatives. In the last year one attended only one meeting of the Commissioning Body and another none. Whilst there are arrangements in place to allow substitutes to attend the Commissioning Body meeting that option has rarely been used. Where councils have a poor engagement record the County Council have only recently taken steps to address this.
- 64 There is current confusion between Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group as to where decisions are to be made. This is not assisted by the overlap of membership between the two groups which can lead to a lack of rigour about recommendation and information requirements of the Commissioning Body as there is an understanding by members of issues gained at the Core Strategy Group.

Core Strategy Group

- 65** The Core Strategy Group is not effective, pro active, productive or challenging. There is no work plan for the group. Tasks are not agreed with the Commissioning Body and the group tend to work on an ad hoc basis dealing with issues as and when they arise. Members of the group do not have individual areas of responsibility or tasks. The absence of a work plan reduces the effectiveness of the group and diminishes members' commitment to it. Observation of a meeting found that important decisions were deferred or referred to staff, and decisions referred to the Commissioning Body with no clear recommendations. An accountable and high performing Core Strategy Group drives improvement within the Supporting People programme.
- 66** Representation on the Core Strategy Group is limited. There is no provider or service user representation. The district council representatives are the same as those on the Commissioning Body. The PCT is represented by the Accountable Officer who is also the chair, and there are no representatives from the voluntary sector.
- 67** Attendance by some members is poor with three district council representatives and the probation representative attending only one meeting in the last year.
- 68** There are basic terms of reference, but no details as to how conflicts of interest will be dealt with and no description of the relationship between the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group.
- 69** The mechanisms by which the Core Strategy Group steer and determine the work priorities of the Supporting People team are not in place. There is agreed annual plan for the team in place, but this is not monitored by or reported to the Core Strategy Group to allow them to assess slippage or reprioritise work.

Accountable Officer

- 70** The Accountable Officer (AO) is at an appropriate senior level within the Care Trust and is an advocate for Supporting People. He has line management responsibility for the team. Since his appointment eighteen months ago the programme has seen some improvements. The potential conflicts of interest in his role as both the Accountable Officer and the Director of Social Care are managed at this stage. They will become more acute when commissioning decisions need to be made. He also chairs or sits on a range of other strategic and planning groups, where the profile of Supporting People is raised in appropriate forums to include it as a key player in developing strategies.

Health Housing Social Care and Probation/Criminal Justice wider partnership arrangements

- 71 There is robust Commissioning Body engagement with probation and the Drugs Action team. Probation representation on Commissioning Body meetings has been strong and has ensured the engagement of Supporting People in the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings where appropriate.⁴
- 72 MAPPA arrangements are in place and working well. There is a strategic management board, for Northumberland County Council with local strategy groups. These link via probation into the Supporting People agenda. Examples were given where the joined up arrangements had worked well in dealing with potential issues. Effective working ensures the public are protected.
- 73 There is good engagement in the programme from the Drugs Action Team, the Drugs Intervention Project and the National Treatment Service. Joint proposals are in place between the Drugs Action Team and Supporting People to develop new provision. Appropriate cost effective services will be procured.
- 74 Involvement of the Youth Offending team is lacking. There has been no involvement in the programme through needs assessment or considerations of future provision. The Crime and Disorder Partnerships have not in their own assessment been very well involved and need to be more so in the future.
- 75 There has been no interest or involvement from top NHS management until recently, with the potential for closer working with Supporting People. This will raise the profile of the contribution Supporting People can make to the delivery of health outcomes.
- 76 Health organisations have only limited familiarity with and engagement in Supporting People agendas, with more emphasis on preventative agendas requiring a more consistent focus. Although housing and housing-related matters have new prominence in the mental health field, and the Supporting People team are connected with this, the capacity to represent health interests in the governance of Supporting People is limited, as there is no dedicated representative on the Commissioning Body.

⁴ Police and Multi Agency Protection Panel arrangements (MAPPA) were set up in England and Wales in 2001. Police and probation take the leading role with other agencies such as housing health and social services. Agencies share information to ensure accurate assessments of risk are made about potentially dangerous offenders and plans put in place to robustly manage those risks.

Service providers

- 77 The lack of service provider representation on the Core Strategy Group is a weakness. There is no mechanism other than via the Supporting People team for their views to be heard by the Core Strategy Group and thus to the Commissioning Body. An early approach to providers to consider their representation in governance structure led to providers not being able to agree on appropriate mechanisms. The providers expressed concerns that a provider representative on the Core Strategy Group would not be able to represent diverse client groups. Another approach has now been to providers to progress this. This can lead to insufficient challenge by the Core Strategy Group of Supporting People policies and procedures and means that the governance structure does not make use of their expertise.
- 78 Opportunities are missed to encourage more provider involvement in Supporting People. There are irregular meetings of a provider forum, led by the Supporting People team, who also set the agenda. This has largely been used to disseminate information and in the early days provide training around key operational issues. There has only recently been a consideration of alternative ways in which a forum could operate. The current approach is less effective in promoting a two way dialogue.
- 79 Some provider views are fed into the Supporting People function. Providers have only recently been involved in strategy development, via the provider forum. Recent meetings have considered needs analysis and data collection to inform future priorities. This recent development has been welcomed by providers who now feel in a position to influence Supporting People going forward.
- 80 There is an effective small provider forum. The forum is in addition to the Supporting People provider forum and is provider led and received some funding from Housing Associations Charitable Trust for its establishment. The forum meets regularly and provides training on issues which small providers may find difficult to access such as health and safety and risk assessments. Small providers confirm this has helped them provide services in competition with larger providers and has increased choice of service providers for users.
- 81 There is limited engagement with the voluntary and community sector. Whilst there are linkages on an individual basis with service providers there is no overall strategy to enhance the engagement in the development of strategy.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 82 This is an area where there are more weaknesses than strengths. Whilst the five year strategy is clear and comprehensive and outlines the main intentions for the programme it lacks detail as to how these needs will be met. Comprehensive needs mapping is late in the programme development. Issues around the lack of move on accommodation have not been addressed. Positively clear eligibility criteria are in place and now being used within the review and contract monitoring processes.

Grant conditions and eligibility criteria

- 83 Eligibility criteria are clear and understood by all parties. The criteria are based on DCLG guidelines the summary of which was published in the five year strategy in 2005. There is currently a comprehensive document which provides clear information about the interpretation of these criteria which due to an oversight has not been approved by the Commissioning Body. This will be rectified. This document has been in use throughout the review process as the basis for discussing and making judgements. There was no provider involvement in the development of the criteria, however, opportunities were taken to ensure providers were aware of these.
- 84 The approach to identifying non eligible support costs has been inconsistent and slow. Whilst some provider visits showed that the eligibility criteria have been applied effectively in another five services, this process has now only just commenced with the current programme of contract monitoring. Currently there is one identified service where eligibility criteria are not met that has been notified to DCLG as a retraction plan. To date these costs have not been transferred to other budgets, but services have been reshaped and costs contained. There are no current plans in place to transfer any identified ineligible costs to other budgets. Full opportunities have not been taken to investigate whether additional funding might be available for reconfiguring services.

Five year strategy

- 85 There is a clear and easily understood five year strategy. This was agreed prior to the DCLG deadline, and is a well presented public document. The five year strategy sets a firm framework for the direction of Supporting People programme in Northumberland. It gives a detailed and clear picture of strengths, weaknesses, financial constraints, gaps and overprovision in services and the geographic spread of support. It sets out the planned activity for the period, which includes provider and user engagement, cross tenure provision, re-alignment of services to meet identified gaps, outcome measurement and purchasing plans. The strategy also aims to deliver benefits to the wider agendas of crime and disorder, health and housing and produce positive outcomes for service users in a number of areas. There is a lack of detail as to how these priorities will be met and it is not robust in terms of need assessment or commissioning intentions. It is supplemented by annual plans, which provide more detailed information about the scheduling of work to meet those strategic aims. The public, partners and staff will be aware of the strategy and priorities.
- 86 The promotion of the strategy has been effective. There is a general awareness of the existence of the strategy if not the detail held within it. For example district council members were aware of it and how it linked in with their housing strategies.

- 87 Opportunities were not taken to involve the broad spectrum of interests in the development of the strategy, resulting in limited involvement in its development, although partners and stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment on the draft, and some felt their views were taken into account. The five year strategy was developed in isolation from the Northumberland Strategic Partnership., which offered the opportunity to ensure that the five year strategy was well integrated with partner's plans and objectives. There is no evidence that this opportunity was taken which raises doubts about how thorough the strategy development was. There are key features such as robust needs assessments and commissioning intentions that are not included in the strategy.
- 88 District housing providers have not been well involved in the development of the five year strategy. Although they were involved in the needs and supply analysis, there is little evidence of their involvement in determining commissioning priorities and of the strategy being informed about changes in the provider market as, for example, some districts explore ALMO and LSVT options. The work to refresh the strategy has so far failed to engage the districts who are not aware of the milestones and targets for completion. The limited engagement of some of the districts in the strategic direction of the programme means they do not own the strategy. As their support is essential in ensuring the delivery of service improvement this reduces the certainty that users will benefit.

Needs mapping, analysis and review

- 89 Needs mapping is not yet fully informed and robust. At the inception of Supporting People services were mapped to establish existing provision. As a county council with no direct service provision Supporting People were reliant on district councils to provide information, and that information was difficult to source in some areas.
- 90 Needs mapping has not been systematic in the past and at the inception of Supporting People it was decided more benefit would be obtained from appraising existing services rather than progress rapidly on needs mapping. Information has gradually been collated from a number of sources and a recent consultation event about future Supporting People investment priorities was well attended. These events positively inform and validate findings and secure ownership/understanding across key partners and stakeholders of investment priorities for the programme.
- 91 Strategic sector reviews of learning disability and older persons support services are planned. These have been budgeted for and a methodology agreed for their implementation. This review will also capture any current provider review of their services and will inform and be informed by their plans for reconfiguration of services. The work will also link to other relevant reviews such as the review of homecare and travelling wardens and the development of assistive technology. The outcome of these reviews will inform the update of the five year strategy. Earlier strategic reviews would have benefited vulnerable people and helped to shape decisions around funding priorities.

- 92 Appropriate use of planned needs analysis work is made. In partnership with Northumberland Strategic Partnership and district councils a Sub-Regional Housing Strategy is being developed. To inform this there is an analysis of housing need in progress. Part funding by Supporting People has ensured that the needs of vulnerable people will be included in this. There is some recognition of the role Supporting People has played in supporting commitment to such a countywide strategic needs assessment, bringing districts and county council together. This work will inform the Regional Housing Board's allocation of capital funding and enable the linking of revenue and capital investment decisions. Robust data for the whole area will be available for the first time.

Strategy for access to move on accommodation

- 93 Access to move-on accommodation is inconsistent across the County and is an issue for service users in accommodation based services. Some work to address this has been completed on an ad hoc basis with, for example, some properties allocated to specific need groups and individual arrangements between providers and housing providers. There are also some examples of the positive stance that some districts have taken in securing move-on accommodation. Further work which will also improve the provision is under way in the joint working on a sub regional housing strategy and the consideration of choice based lettings schemes.
- 94 The Supporting People team have not taken a co-ordinating role in this area and have failed to negotiate protocols in all districts to ensure that service users can have access to suitable mainstream housing with an appropriate package of floating support. A third of service providers responding to the Audit Commission survey indicated they were dissatisfied with arrangements for their service users to move on. More analysis is needed to fully understand the issues. The potential of the programme to benefit vulnerable service users is reduced if services are full and people cannot move on to suitable accommodation. This silting up of accommodation based services also has a negative impact on effective support planning.

Delivery arrangements

- 95 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People team are effective and have productive working relationships with providers, risk management is robust, and although staff do not have individual work plans in place the overall annual plan is well structured and comprehensive. However, performance management is weak both within the programme and at a corporate level within Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust and fairer charging has not been adequately addressed.

Supporting People team

- 96 The Supporting People team has the appropriate skills and has accessed support and specialist advice where necessary from other departments in both Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust. The range of skills within the team are suited to contract monitoring and management with several team members coming from quality assurance backgrounds. Although the range of social care experience is not extensive, the team have accessed where necessary specialist assistance for example, when considering the quality of learning disability services and also in the area of drug and alcohol misuse. Providers identified that their knowledge and understanding of issues relating to particular client groups was underdeveloped and evidenced in the review process. Positively for the next reviews it has been agreed that there will be more involvement from specialist advocates. The team recognise where their skills need to be supplemented and their approach has helped them to better understand service user needs and concerns.
- 97 The Supporting People team has reasonable access to appropriate training. The team members have collectively considered their development needs at team meetings and away days and appropriate training has been provided or accessed. This helps to make sure that individuals have the necessary skills to undertake their roles well. There is no formal performance appraisal system in place for the Supporting People team. Since the Supporting People function and staff became the responsibility of the Care Trust there has been no formal performance management and appraisal system in place. Supervision meetings do however take place on around a six weekly basis. The lack of a formal system does not appropriately support staff or encourage a rigorous personal development culture.
- 98 There are productive working relationships between team and providers. This is confirmed by the majority of the providers we spoke to. Training and coaching were provided particularly in the early stages of the programme to clarify procedures and expectations. The team are supportive and helpful. Queries are answered and support given where requested, although some did not always find staff were ready sources of authoritative advice. The team are approachable and knowledgeable about their policy and procedures.
- 99 The lack of agreed service standards in place for the Supporting People team is a weakness. Although several providers refer to prompt and appropriate responses from the Supporting People team, the lack of stated performance commitments is a weakness that does not enable the team to state its commitments or target improvements.

Work planning

- 100 There is a well defined and clear work plan for the Supporting People team. The Supporting People annual plan is a working document that clearly links actions to the strategic goals within the five year strategy and wider corporate documents. It sets out milestones and timescales for the actions required. This ensures all staff are aware of the work needed during the year.

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- 101 Linkages to the work plans of other departments and partners are lacking. Whilst the plan recognises the contribution Supporting People can make to achieving partner objectives there is no consideration of whether actions that will be needed by them can be contributed in a timely manner. Achievement of all the outcomes may not be possible.
- 102 There is limited evidence of effective monitoring of programme delivery. The annual development plan is not monitored nor delivery challenged either at governance or operational levels. The plan provided did not indicate whether or to what extent initiatives had been delivered by for example the inclusion of update information or traffic lighting. The lack of a rigorous approach to performance monitoring and management means that improvements are less likely to be delivered.
- 103 The annual Supporting People development plan does not translate consistently into personal action plans. Although there is a clear link at the strategic level between Directorate Service Plans, the Councils Performance Plan and the Community Strategy, there is little to demonstrate that personal action plans make clear the roles of individuals in delivering the objectives. This weakness lessens the likelihood of improvements being delivered.

Local area agreements

- 104 At present there is no formal inclusion of the Supporting People programme within the Local Area Agreement (LAA). Although there are clearly shared priorities, the five year SP strategy has been compiled in isolation from the LAA. It is intended that this is rectified shortly with the LAA being planned for update around the time of the inspection. As the Northumberland Strategic Partnership oversees the LAA and as Northumberland County Council is a key player in both monitoring and reporting upon progress, there is a reasonable expectation that the Supporting People programme will be well integrated into the review of the LAA. At present however, further work is required to ensure that priorities and targets are appropriately shared and both the five year strategy and governance bodies will need to be updated to reference both Supporting People and the LAA targets and priorities.

Performance monitoring and management

- 105 This is an area of weakness. There is routine reporting on financial issues but limited reporting on any other performance measures. To date the only measures of outcome for service users are the national key performance indicators (KPIs) which have limited value to capture the Supporting People experience. There are no local PIs in place although some are being developed, and it is the intention to utilise the DCLG nationally defined outcome measures due for issue in April 2007 to reduce the burden on providers. Performance and services will not be under scrutiny to improve.
- 106 There is no regular analysis of trends and movement in relation to stated priorities and the reporting of these to Core Strategy Group or Commissioning Body to monitor the overall programme and the impact commissioning and decommissioning (by whoever) has on this.

- 107 There are no shared indicators with other partners. Although the strategy acknowledges the key contribution SP can make to the delivery of these, information is not captured that demonstrates this contribution.
- 108 There is reporting to the Commissioning Body on the progress of the service review programme to ensure that the deadlines would be met. A similar progress report on the current contract monitoring and review programme will be provided.

Fairer charging

- 109 Fairer charging has not been effectively promoted or progressed. Take up of fairer charging is limited and elected members met during the inspection and at least one District Council officer had not heard of fairer charging. The three fairer charging applications in progress at the commencement of the inspection process (August 2006) had not been completed by November and no further applications had been received. Supporting People service users are not receiving access to assessments they are entitled to.
- 110 Arrangements for claiming fairer charging are not clear. It is dependant on service providers to identify service users who may be entitled to fairer charging. A limited amount of information is available to providers about who may be entitled. The information does not explain the assessment process or any appeals process. Potential claimants are unsure of their entitlement.
- 111 An information exchange protocol has been agreed with District Councils around fairer charging. Information gathered for Housing Benefit applications can, with the claimants consent, be passed to the County for use in fairer charging assessments. This means that claimants only have to complete one form.

Risk management

- 112 Risks to the programme are identified and managed. A comprehensive risk management policy and procedure is in place. This includes a scoring mechanism, considering likelihood and impact, and covers the areas financial risk, providers and market changes, service users and strategic planning. A traffic light system is used and the assessment is reviewed on an annual basis. Controls are in place to manage the risks and contingency plans are in place. However it is not made clear the extent to which they are shared with partners. Awareness of potential threats to the programme is assured.
- 113 A robust risk assessment approach is used in other aspects of work. The review and contract monitoring programmes have been developed on a risk basis, exit strategies are in place and financial risk management is addressed in the budgeting process. Risks to the programme are identified and dealt with.

DCLG monitoring

- 114 Accurate and complete information, including milestones and SPLS data uploads and performance monitoring information is submitted to DCLG on time. Support is given to providers to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the returns and they are given reminders of due dates. Appropriate mechanisms for chasing up returns are in place. There is a high level of accuracy and reliability of such returns.

Commissioning and performance

- 115 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Service reviews were completed and reported on time. There is a robust contract monitoring and review process in place to carry this quality assurance forward. Improvement planning is in place and monitored leading to improved services for users. However movement to steady state contracts has been slow, the complaints system is basic, outcomes for service users are not captured and there are limited outputs from cross authority work.
- 116 Movement to steady state contracts has been slow. Steady state contracts are now being issued to providers for checking and signature. To date 27 have been issued. Interim contracts will remain in place for the remaining services where either grant compliance is still under review or they form part of the strategic reviews of learning disability and older persons. Steady state contracts give certainty to providers and allow for robust service planning.
- 117 An integrated and robust contract monitoring and review process is now in place. From April 2006 there is an annual contract monitoring programme based on clear criteria relating to contract value. Providers whose annual contracts are in the upper quartile at over £150k receive two visits a year, whilst all other providers receive an annual visit. Providers are informed and clear about the rationale and are aware when visits are scheduled. Monitoring covers KPI performance, strategic relevance, contract compliance, value for money, complaints and incidents. However mechanisms to drive up performance are not included. All visits are carried out by two staff members to assist consistency. Areas of concern will receive action plans. Providers are clear about the expectations they will have to meet.
- 118 A three year review programme is also in place. The rationale for the ordering of this is based on a risk matrix, considering the client group, the number of units, the date of the previous review and whether an improvement plan had been issued previously. Providers are aware of the programme and the dates of their reviews. This round of reviews will use supplementary QAFs chosen by users within schemes and will put an emphasis on service user involvement and participation.
- 119 The contract monitoring and review processes are integrated with the ability for concerns raised at either forum to instigate an earlier consideration of the other aspects of the provision. This ensures regular contact with providers.

- 120** It is a weakness that contract monitoring was not introduced earlier in the process. Although it is clear that there is regular contact between some providers and the Supporting People team, for example when there are specific queries, the lack of routine assessment of contract performance until recently is a weakness. Improvement is not being checked or encouraged over time so long as minimum QAF standards have been met. This approach does not encourage continuous improvement.
- 121** Difficult situations have been managed well. Issues around exclusions of some challenging service users from housing, poor quality provision, protection of vulnerable adults, financial instability have been dealt with in a robust way with the interests of service users at the forefront. A direct access hostel was decommissioned following review, where there were issues relating to diversity, inappropriate support and lack of facilities for users. Users are protected and quality of service is maintained.
- 122** Appropriate alternative arrangements have been put in place where services have been de-commissioned. Funding has only been withdrawn where the Commissioning Body has been properly informed and reassured about the alternative arrangements for service users. The approach taken has reduced the risks for service users from their service being de-commissioned.
- 123** In some cases poor quality services have been de-commissioned but there is insufficient consideration of the need to commission alternative services to meet the needs. £356,266 has been saved by de-commissioning some services and whilst arrangements were put in place for the sensitive removal of funding, the capacity to meet needs has been reduced. Other providers to the same service user groups commented on an increase in referrals to them. There have been recent steps to look at the further expansion of existing schemes to address this.
- 124** Insufficient action has been taken to date to assess costs or value for money of all high cost services. In some cases Supporting People rigorously challenged high cost services, requiring providers to justify the costs. Remaining high cost services have been identified and Supporting People are currently seeking information about the support provided. The possibility of carrying out joint reviews with care is being pursued in some cases.
- 125** Low cost services were appropriately queried. Costs and quality were studied and confirmation sought that all costs had been included and that the quality of services met the required standard. In one case the lowest cost provider withdrew from the programme and is now providing the service with no Supporting People funding. Quality of services is assured.
- 126** The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) is intended to be a County Wide provision but is not currently operating across the County. The development of a HIA was a priority within the Supporting People strategy and was formed in January 2006. However, the service is currently only resourced to operate in one of the six districts fully. Until further funding is secured from these districts or elsewhere the service cannot provide assistance for people across the County in accessing grants, undertaking home improvements and Movement to steady state contracts has been slow.

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- 127 Procurement mechanisms are in place. The Northumberland County Council procurement strategy was agreed in 2004, following a Best Value review. It is comprehensive and includes Northumberland Care Trust, and therefore Supporting People in the scope of its compliance. However, no new services have been commissioned using procurement at this stage, and detailed procurement procedures for the Supporting People programme have not yet been developed.
- 128 The five year strategy has had limited impact as a commissioning tool. The 2005/06 annual action plan identified the development of a commissioning plan as a priority but the action has been limited to a refresh of needs data. This is not yet in place and the 2006/07 plan has a new target to develop a detailed plan by March 2007, some two years after the publication of the strategy. As a result the range of needs met are broadly the same as those at the commencement of the programme and significant gaps in provision remain. Currently opportunistic ad hoc decisions about additional or replacement services are made by the Commissioning Body. Whilst these relate to services identified within the strategy as priorities they are not being progressed as part of a coherent and integrated plan to meet identified needs.
- 129 Effective use of resources between adult social care commissioner's activities and the Supporting People team is not in place. This has been affected by the widespread view that Supporting People resources had not been, and were not, available to new schemes resulting in some compensatory funding arrangements being made. This meant that options for more varied use of Supporting People resources had not been scoped. The needs of prospective Supporting People users are not being addressed as envisaged.
- 130 Opportunities are missed to make use of the benefits of cross authority joint commissioning. There is no current joint commissioning in place although opportunities are being explored with the drugs action team and National Treatment Agency (NTA).
- 131 Encouragement is given to new providers who can offer services. Whilst the majority of the re-configuring and introduction of new services has been provided by existing providers, one new provider of a specialist service has been introduced. This approach will strengthen and test the market.
- 132 Prompt and accurate payment mechanisms are in place. Providers receive payments on time. Providers are therefore assured of cash flow to enable the effective running of their business.

Review process

- 133 Opportunities were not taken in the review process to robustly challenge and redefine services. The review programme to a large extent concentrated on the assessment and improvement of legacy services. It is only now with the contract monitoring process that value for money, benchmarking, eligibility and other wider issues are being systematically addressed.

- 134** Providers felt well informed and prepared for the service reviews. Information was sent to providers in advance of the reviews which explained the approach that would be taken. This included deadlines for information requirements, and explanations of the process, including guidance for provider preparation.
- 135** There is variation among providers' responses to the style and approach taken throughout the reviews. The majority thought the style was appropriate and supportive and that they were promptly informed of the outcome of the review and any need for improvement. However, there was a minority view that the interpretation of the quality assessment framework (QAF) had been applied in a rigid manner and that there was some lack of understanding of the complexity of the needs of some client groups and a lack of appreciation of the difficulties some providers were experiencing.
- 136** Some small providers felt that the service review process would have been more effective if the Supporting People team had facilitated joint working between providers on common issues.
- 137** Stakeholder involvement in the review process was routine. Providers were asked to identify three stakeholders, such as referring agencies who were contacted by the Supporting People team, including the following up of non responses. There is evidence in the review files and reports that these comments were taken into account in the process. External and independent verification of providers is obtained.
- 138** There is an adequate internal moderation process, established by review and contract monitoring being carried out by a rotating team of two people and with file review and discussions with the Contracts, Commissioning and Performance Management Officer. There is no external moderation process and because review results are only reported to the Commissioning Body by exception there is no challenge to routine decisions from this accountable body.
- 139** Limited use was made of the post review evaluations carried out. These indicated that a large percentage of the providers were happy with the reviews (confirmed by the Audit Commission's own survey which indicated a satisfaction rate of 74 per cent). Whilst concerns and comments from individual providers were addressed there was no systematic analysis to establish common concerns and inform improvement planning.
- 140** The service review methodology was thorough. Out of 190 services 163 scored D on the QAF. This is a high proportion however no benchmarking was carried out to compare this to other ALAs.
- 141** Action against providers who have failed to respond to agreed action plans have been dealt with slowly. This lack of urgency has led to service users being subject to services that fall below the minimum standards in specific areas for longer than would have been the case if a greater sense of urgency had been applied to this work. In one instance where the review took place in April 2005 it is only now that a default notice has been served.

- 142** There is an appropriate use of accreditation. Northumberland Supporting People will accept most local accreditation. They will also accept Investors in People (IIP) as part of the accreditation process. They investigated the accreditation offered by the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies, but made a decision not to accept it in the first stage reviews. This decision was based on the outcomes of a reality check when they visited a scheme belonging to an accredited provider they found it lacking in that no support plans were in place. That decision is currently under review.
- 143** Passporting of QAFs has not been used by Northumberland County Council. Despite the additional workload this places on the team and providers it was deemed appropriate to ensure that all services were visited and comparative judgements made.
- 144** Improvement action plans have been used appropriately. The plans issued to the providers who failed to meet the minimum standards were clear in the detail of what had to be done. Timescales for improvement were felt to be realistic by the providers and the follow up visit ensured compliance. Where necessary further advice and guidance has been provided, extensions to timescales agreed and follow up visits undertaken. Appropriate action has been taken where providers have not progressed improvement plans. Additional monitoring and default notices have been used where appropriate.
- 145** Improvement plans were a useful tool for providers. As a result of the review process 153 services have improved from level D to level C on the Quality Assessment Framework. The Supporting People team have encouraged providers to improve in key areas. For example one service we visited stated that they were encouraged to review their access criteria and in particular improve the information available to applicants. The provider views this positively in that it has helped them to better advise potential service users and to agree levels of services.
- 146** A move to drive continuous improvement is lacking. Providers were given action plans to bring them to the minimum level C and whilst 25 improvement plans were issued to those who already reached this level or above, the implementation of these has not been followed up. Larger organisations have undertaken improvement work using their own continuous improvement processes. A programme to improve services above the minimum level of C on the QAF will drive up standards locally and lead to better outcomes for service users.

Reporting

- 147** Service reviews were completed on time. The DCLG deadline of 31 March 2006 was met with all reviews being completed by that date. There are ten services where improvement plans have not yet been achieved and appropriate support and monitoring is in place.

Complaints

- 148** The complaints procedure is lacking in key areas. It lacks clarity as to how users and providers access the complaints procedure. The policy does not set out standards for response times, offer a staged mechanism or have a right of appeal to an independent body. There is a guidance note on complaints although it is unclear how and to whom it is distributed. The information is also included in the general Supporting People leaflet. A review of the policy is underway with user involvement. In the first instance the policy requires service users to complain through the providers own policy. In reviews the providers' complaints policy is assessed and the registers are monitored.
- 149** Users can and have accessed the Supporting People complaints procedures, which have resulted in, for example, early reviews of services and in one case to decommissioning of a service. Complaints directly from service users are also received and addressed with providers through the review process. For example issues about repairs to property, lack of information about available services and neighbour problems. Supporting People officers also assist users to access the complaints system of the providers. There have been no formal complaints about the Supporting People team. Without a robust complaints procedure opportunities to learn from these and identify service improvements are lacking.

Appeals

- 150** The service review appeals process lacks independence. There is an appeals process in place which is publicised in the provider pack, in default letters and termination letters. Three members of the Commissioning Body constitute the appeals panel and as such will be the same people as made the original decisions. There are clear guidelines and provision to identify and minimise conflicts of interest. However it is a one stage process, with no further appeal to an independent body, such as a neighbouring authority, or Care Trust or Northumberland County Council members. To date there has been one appeal from a provider against the closure of a service where the action of the Supporting People team was upheld.

Outcomes

- 151** Service reviews have been used as a means to improve services. A direct access hostel has seen significant improvements in the quality of its service following the review. This included such things as personal support plans and improved health and safety for staff and service users. National providers have also seen improvements in their manuals and working practices following reviews. Reviews have been an effective means of improving services in Northumberland.
- 152** Appropriate mechanisms are in place for approaches from providers for new services. There is a standard procedure and informal approaches are supported by discussions with the Supporting People team.

Value for money

- 153 There are a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. There is value for money guidance in place. Costs of services are closely scrutinised and challenged with providers. There is overall good budgetary planning and scrutiny. However there is a lack of balance in the consideration of the quality of services and their outcomes, how this is recorded and fed into the final judgement made about value for money.

How do costs compare?

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Northumberland	0.47p	£14.28	£26.38	£129.06
North East	0.72p	£17.86	£24.71	£62.45
England	0.70p	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

Data at platinum cut 2003

- 154 From the data included in the strategic plan Northumberland County Council had a per unit cost of £14.25 in 2005. They have not carried out any more recent assessments of changes and trends in costs.

How is value for money managed?

Defining value for money

- 155 The principles of VFM that are in use in Supporting People are in the public domain. The five year strategy sets out a methodology for consideration of value for money which balances cost and quality considerations. This is supplemented by a detailed working document, which whilst it gives detailed guidance on the mechanisms for financial assessment, for example guidance on what would be considered a high cost service, and suggests links between quality and outcomes it does not provide a mechanism for weighting the various elements of an assessment.

- 156** There is not a balance in the consideration of cost and quality in the current assessment of value for money. In service reviews and subsequent data collection the emphasis was placed on costs, with queries about daily routines and benchmarking to similar services. Providers were informed whether their service was deemed to be costly and some felt they were not given the opportunity to explain the service and the added value they gave. There was a general lack of awareness by providers of how value for money judgements were being made. Some service reviews were carried out prior to the development of a clear and agreed framework for assessing value for money. Costs of services were compared to appropriate benchmarks. The stated considerations on value were the QAF scores, of which few were above level C, strategic relevance and local demand for services, which is difficult to assess when the needs information is not available, user satisfaction, although there was no statistical analysis of this, and user outcomes which are only measured by the two national KPIs. This is a narrow assessment of value that does not enable high costs to be assessed against improved outcomes.

Methodology for contracted services

- 157** A thorough approach has been taken to understand the costs of service provision. The Supporting People team has used regional and national benchmark costs as the initial basis to compare providers' costs. They have then refined their approach to compare costs of provision for similar services in similar settings and identified high cost outliers for further investigation. Where costs have appeared to be high they have requested diary sheets from providers detailing the tasks that they undertake over a period of time. This work is ongoing with several providers but indicates the Care Trust's intention to properly examine the costs of services.
- 158** There has been limited emphasis in service reviews of assessing quality. There has been an appropriate approach taken to considering costs but quality considerations have been more limited. However, some high cost services have not been identified and investigated until recently. This has resulted in an ongoing review of ineligible costs and whilst this gives potential for further savings this could have released money earlier in the programme. There are no examples of where for example high cost services have been requested to justify costs through improved outcomes. Because value for money considerations have not been comprehensive, limited savings have been identified and there has been relatively little emphasis on continuous improvement of quality and outcomes for service users.
- 159** Service providers are given an appropriate degree of discretion in allocating Supporting People funds. Services are allowed to vire Supporting People money between different budget headings within their services. For example a homeless hostel service which also provides floating support is permitted to vire money between aspects of its services which are over allocated funds to areas which are presently under allocated. This shows a good understanding of the pressures facing different services, the flexibility required to be able to respond to changing levels of need and is an effective use of funds.

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- 160 Services are contracted in an appropriate manner, accounting for such variables as voids. One service provider with a contract for 20 bed spaces has a voids variance of 10 per cent built into the contract. This reflects the nature of some services and allows providers to effectively plan and develop services.

Benchmarking

- 161 A thorough approach has been taken to understand the costs of service provision. The Supporting People team has used regional and national benchmark costs as the initial basis to compare providers' costs. They have then refined their approach to compare costs of provision for similar services in similar settings and identified high cost outliers for further investigation. Where costs have appeared to be high they have requested diary sheets from providers detailing the tasks that they undertake over a period of time. This work is ongoing with several providers but indicates the Care Trust's intention to properly examine the costs of services.
- 162 The Supporting People team work in a strategic manner by supporting services which are vital for the area. A direct access hostel which was struggling to meet the standards required of it was given sufficient time and leeway to improve its service. The service is still operating and has well developed improvement plans.
- 163 Appropriate mechanisms were put in place to ensure budget compliance. Inflation increases were given to all providers in 2003/04, but not for the last two years. Special arrangements were put in place for small providers who might have problems of sustainability. Steady state contracts have been issued to providers at the current level of payments.

Improving value for money

- 164 The approach to dealing with high cost services is mixed. In some cases it is clear that costs and value have been considered closely and collaboratively. However, we noted other examples of providers who attended recent contract and performance monitoring meetings and were surprised to hear that there were significant concerns about the level of their costs. They were not prepared for this kind of challenge, which had not been raised in earlier service reviews.

Cross authority approach/procurement

- 165 Joint commissioning of services has not been developed. No services are commissioned across the county boundaries and the only jointly commissioned care and support services are legacy services. Separate QAF arrangements for care services and support services are still operating but there are some proposals to combine them. Jointly commissioning services is an effective means of reducing administration costs and achieving improved VFM.

Administration grant

- 166** There is an appropriate use of the administration grant. There have been budgeted savings in the grant which are being used to fund the two strategic reviews and provide a contribution to the strategic housing needs review in Northumberland. This evidences robust management and clear priorities for the use of resources. However there has been no benchmarking of the use of the grant to compare costs and expenditure with other ALAs.
- 167** Northumberland have an effective IT system. The system meets the requirements of the team and service providers. Information is easily produced and in the prescribed format. Service providers are supported in using IT and arrangements are made to meet the needs of small providers with limited IT capacity.
- 168** Inward investment has been successfully secured for the programme:
- HACT funding of £7,000 to support the small provider's forum;
 - £46k (from Northern Rock, YOT and the Crime and Reduction Partnership) to extend a local provider's work with young people (focused on prevention and positive activities);
 - £93k funding for the HIA (from NCT, FISHNETS and Tynedale DC) to compliment the £67k SP Grant;
 - £41k towards the Housing Needs Survey (£5k from DEFRA and £36k from the DCs, with SP Admin Grant contributing c. £10k); and
 - Funding for a Children's Worker at the Women's Refuge £54k.

Service user involvement

- 169** There are more weaknesses than strengths in this area, where service user involvement is significantly underdeveloped. The involvement of service users in development of the strategy and governance structures is not in place. There have been delays in the achievement of this aim, clearly stated in the five year strategy in 2005. Work is only now starting with the establishment of links with existing customer groups and the organisation of events to establish service users preferred methods of involvement. Whilst individual outcomes have improved there is no evidence of users playing a larger role in driving improvement and development. Individual service user involvement in the reviews of their particular service has been robust, with clear outputs and improvements in the services they receive.

Opportunities

- 170 Service user involvement, whilst a stated aim of the programme is not translated into action. In the five year strategy, whilst there is a clear stated aim to improve the outcomes for service users in a variety of measures there is limited mention of user involvement to ensure these are developed in the most appropriate manner. In the 2005/06 plan there is a stated priority aim for the facilitation of a programme of user consultation. However this was not achieved and the 2006/07 plan now includes a more strategic thrust to consider the development of a service user involvement strategy. This is, however, still in its infancy. Service users are not able to influence developments and priorities in the services they receive and therefore opportunities are missed to obtain views from service users about Supporting People.
- 171 There is no service user representation on Core Strategy Group. The Council are only at the initial discussions about the opportunities to improve user and carer involvement. An advocacy group who are already working with the Care Trust will be used to undertake advocacy in relation to Supporting People helping in strategic consultation, service reviews, enhance the capacity of the team and facilitate complaints. Supporting People officers have not engaged with events to seek user views.
- 172 Appropriate use of existing user groups is not in place. Existing user groups have been identified, such as the Older Person's and Learning Disability Partnership Boards, and contact has been made with some of them. To date these approaches have not resulted in action plans. No use is made of Northumberland County Council's existing consultation and engagement structure. Existing groups may be unaware of Supporting People and of the role they can play in improving services.
- 173 There is undue reliance on service providers to undertake consultation on Supporting People matters. Service providers are expected to use their existing structures to consult service users, and are seen as the primary means of seeking detailed feedback. However this approach gives no indication of the level of user involvement or if their views are reported back to the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body. There will be inconsistent opportunities for users to make their views heard.

Involvement in contracting and monitoring

- 174 One area where service users have been effectively engaged is in service reviews. In every review the views of service users were sought and a total of 596 individual interviews were conducted by the reviewing officers. In provider visits undertaken service users generally praised the way that they were involved stating that the team were sensitive to their needs and that they involved their carers or advocates where this was needed. This is a positive feature that demonstrates that the team has sought to involve service users in assessing the service that they receive. Existing service users have been able to influence the services they receive through this mechanism.

- 175** Despite the positive comments opportunities have been missed to develop relationships with service users. Users were not given feedback on the results of the reviews or the impact their comments had. Positively this has now been addressed for later reviews and feedback is given in the current round using both individual letters and scheme reports. Detailed feedback helps providers improve services.
- 176** Innovative mechanisms have been introduced for each provider to choose supplementary QAFs for use in next round of reviews. Providers were asked to consult with users about which supplementary QAFs they wished to be measured against during the next three year review process. Whilst this mechanism is praiseworthy and the methodology welcomed by providers for the opportunity it offered it places reliance on providers to explain both SP and give guidance on the QAF standards. Where short term services are provided it is possible that those users who took part in this exercise will no longer be in receipt of services at the time the review is undertaken.
- 177** There are a range of QAFs identified which will ensure familiarity with the range of standards by the SP team. However no general feedback has been given to providers on the results of this exercise. Service users are enabled to identify those areas of the services that are most important to them.
- 178** Service user involvement is not embedded in the implementation of the monitoring work of the Supporting People team. There is no provision for service users to be involved in contract monitoring arrangements. Service user involvement in a continuous monitoring process will assist improvement and consistency.

Outcomes from user involvement

- 179** Positive outcomes for service providers have resulted from service reviews. Support plans were examined as part of the review process. Comprehensive support plans are in place, developed and agreed between users and providers and reviewed at appropriate intervals. In appropriate cases these are developed with third parties acting as advocates with the involvement of the service user.
- 180** On an individual basis some issues raised by service users with the review team have been addressed, ensuring higher standards in the future. In one service a service user indicated they had experienced difficulties with another service user, who was difficult to share with and made them feel uncomfortable. As a result, the provider was required to develop new approaches to checking out information on new applicants and to ensure proper risk assessments were undertaken before accepting them into shared accommodation.
- 181** At other reviews, service users were not sure how to complain, or what happened once they had made a complaint or suggestion. Providers have subsequently improved their complaints policies, made them more widely available to service users, and included clear timescales for responses.

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- 182 Service user involvement is not representative. The County is not reaching some under or unrepresented individuals and user groups. Whilst specialist support is being sought from USER/Carer voice, this has not yet commenced or produced outcomes for either the programme or users.
- 183 User involvement is not a priority for the Core Strategy Group. It is not an agenda item for Core Strategy Group. and as there is no reporting on the progress against the annual plan this is not noted there either. Users are not able to shape the services they are offered or provided with.

Access to services and information

- 184 This is an area where there are more weaknesses than strengths. There is only one basic information leaflet available to the public. The directory of services is not available as a paper based document, the website is under developed and access to fairer charging information is very limited. The leaflet can be accessed in different formats on request. There is a good understanding of services available at public enquiry points and appropriate signposting is in place.

Access to services and referral to services

- 185 A variety of access arrangements are available to users. Users are able to access services by a number of routes, including self referral. However the Supporting People team are not involved in any referrals to services, which limits access routes for users and does not routinely collect or monitor this information to establish whether all services are genuinely available to all.
- 186 There has been progress in the development of cross tenure services. Some services are now being provided cross tenure, for example the Home Improvement Agency and a floating support service for ex offenders, but there is no monitoring of this by the Supporting People team to establish trends and coverage. Users must be able to benefit from accessing housing related support services irrespective of their housing tenure.
- 187 Active challenges and clarifications are made to exclusion policies in service reviews. These are challenged robustly and providers required to amend policies and practices. For example following a review a provider had to make explicit their age criteria and develop a mechanism for allocating a high demand resource.
- 188 Effective signposting by frontline staff dealing with the public is in place. Staff are aware of Supporting People and able to effectively direct people to the appropriate help. However the lack of a paper based directory of housing related support services that the public can view creates a gap.
- 189 Effective use is made of available opportunities to advertise the Supporting People programme. Members of the Supporting People team pro actively seek and take opportunities to talk to partner agencies, housing officers, front-line staff and wardens to ensure appropriate signposting of users and potential users of services.

Information

- 190** There is limited information available to the public, service users and potential service users. There is a poster and one general leaflet about SP. The information is well presented and easy to understand and was developed with the assistance of an existing reader panel. It includes reference to the complaints procedure. However the generality of this leaflet means that users with specific needs might not identify it as a service that would apply to them.
- 191** The leaflet does not publicise its availability in other formats, and does not carry straplines. There is inconsistency within the Supporting People programme approach to information as to the use made of this feature, as the five year strategy is offered in a variety of formats. It was established however that this could be accessed on demand. An illustrated 'easyread' leaflet is under development assisted by users on the learning disability partnership board.
- 192** Innovative mechanisms are in place to promote wider awareness of Supporting People. For example information is distributed with council tax bills in two of the district councils. It is unfortunate that this approach is not county wide.
- 193** Leaflets are available at an adequate range of access points. Leaflets are available in the network of council and other offices in the County and District network. However not all outlets indicated on the recent distribution list had information available. With a large geographical area, information needs to be available in outlying offices as this is many customers first point of contact.
- 194** Communication from the Supporting People team to service providers is regular and helpful. Regular newsletters and emailed information keep service providers and other agencies up to date with changes to the Supporting People programme and upcoming events and issues. The newsletter is easy to understand and service providers consider they are kept well informed.
- 195** The strategic aims and objectives of the service are well publicised. The five year strategy is a comprehensive and wide ranging document. The document is offered in other formats and languages. It is not however available in summary form, although the annual plan is a fair substitute as a shorter public document.

Directory

- 196 There is a lack of easily accessible and comprehensive information about the services available in Northumberland. The Council's local directory of housing related support services is limited in the information it provides. It complies with minimum government requirements and is available on the national Supporting People web site. It provides a list and contact details for all the housing related support services available in Northumberland. However, it makes no mention, for example, of the detail of services available, how to access them, whether services are accessible to people with mobility problems or if accommodation based services are designed to be sensitive to all religions, cultures or diverse dietary requirements. The directory is not available as a paper copy and is therefore not available to the general public at service user points without internet access. No opportunity has therefore been taken to provide additional information to further detail services available. Users, carers, relatives and advocates will not easily be aware of services that exist in the county.

Website

- 197 Web sites are underdeveloped and not tailored to the needs of users. The Northumberland Care Trust website immediately refers enquirers to the Northumberland County Council site, where there are further links to charging information and the national website. The Northumberland Care Trust website does not have a search facility and the Northumberland County Council site did not provide information on a range of Supporting People service queries when searched. There is adequate information on the national site, but a lack of information for service users. The sites are therefore not focused on the service user

Better care higher standards

- 198 Users will not obtain relevant information from the Better Care: Higher Standards which is the Government's national Charter for adults who need long term care or support. The local charter provides information on what services are available, how to access them, and what standards can be expected. The Better Care Higher Standards local charter was produced by Northumberland Care Trust in 2002/03 and has an outdated reference to the planned changes to be introduced by Supporting People, only providing information about social care services. Users and advocates will not be informed of the services available.

Service charges and access to fairer charging

- 199 Information on charging for services is not widely available. The generic Supporting People leaflet contains information about charging for services but makes no specific reference to fairer charging. A limited amount of information is available to service users who maybe entitled to fairer charging. The information does not explain the assessment process or any appeals process. Leaflets are not, for example, made available through the Citizen's Advice Bureau network and no information was found in the local offices visited. Service users and their advocates will not easily be able to access information.

- 200** Fairer charging has not been effectively publicised in the County. However, take up of fairer charging is limited and elected members interviewed during the inspection, and at least one District Council officer, were not aware of fairer charging.
- 201** Arrangements for claiming fairer charging are not clear. It is dependant on service providers to identify service users who may be entitled to fairer charging. A limited amount of information is available to providers about who may be entitled to this assistance.

Diversity

- 202** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. There is no corporate lead from either Northumberland County Council or Northumberland Care Trust that has impacted on Supporting People. Information is not collected to ensure services are delivered equitably to all demographic and user groups. Provision for underrepresented groups has not been addressed. Links with representative groups are not in place and issues of building compliance with Disability Discrimination Act were not covered in service reviews.

Identifying diverse needs

- 203** The recently formed strategic equality and diversity groups in place in Northumberland County Council have not impacted on Supporting People. There is an opportunity for a strategic lead to be given by these groups, however to date this has not influenced Supporting People and their performance delivery.
- 204** There is a lack of clarity about the Care Trust's approach to championing diversity and to ensuring that there is fair and equal access to newly commissioned services. The Home Improvement Agency has been sent a detailed provider pack that establishes Care Trust expectations but this is silent in the area of diversity. The absence of such requirements is a clear weakness which means that the Care Trust cannot be certain that the agency is indeed accessible to all in the community.
- 205** No attention is given to assessing whether the services are accessed and used by BME service users. In an area where it is unlikely that there would be BME providers of services, there is no monitoring of the ethnicity of service users and no use of providers own information to inform and influence policy. Those responsible for the Supporting People programme cannot give assurances that commissioned services are available and accessible to all members of the community.
- 206** The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group are not informed about diversity issues. Because no information is collected there are no reports to either body relating to take up of services, breakdowns of user satisfaction by gender, diverse groups, or opportunities for promotion of diversity within the programme.
- 207** No use has been made of equality and diversity impact assessments yet. The corporate function in Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust are rolling these out with a training programme and there is a target to have 75 per cent completed by mid 2007.

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- 208** Opportunities to link into existing groups serving the BME community are not used. For example the County Council has a people's panel from BME communities but no use is made of that to inform and explore Supporting People issues. Neither are efforts made to contact other representative community groups.

Excluded groups

- 209** No systematic move has been made to provide Supporting People services to currently excluded or underprovided groups. Whilst the reconfiguring of services has made some provision for excluded groups such as people with alcohol problems this has not been systematic. This is despite the fact that needs surveys have identified groups of users for whom there are no services available such as travellers, and those with HIV/AIDS and groups where limited services are available such as substance misuse and domestic violence.

Cultural sensitivity

- 210** The Care Trust has not effectively promoted its stance on diversity. Whilst there are challenges to providers to ensure they complied with the requirements of level C on the Quality Assessment Framework, there was limited focus in service reviews upon culturally appropriate service provision or questioning of the accessibility of services to a range of diverse needs groups. The provider's pack which includes information about the Care Trusts requirements and priorities is silent on diversity.
- 211** Service reviews have not examined issues of diversity thoroughly. There was a rigid and unimaginative application of minimum standards. There is no evidence for example that the cultural appropriateness of services was questioned at reviews. The low BME community in the County where there are no services specifically for members of diverse communities makes it more important that existing providers are culturally sensitive. Whilst improvement plans were issued to 53 per cent of providers to bring them up to a level C on the Quality Assessment Framework that has a mechanistic approach to documentation and does not in itself ensure that diversity is at the heart of the service. Some practices may be present that effectively exclude some people from diverse communities.
- 212** There is appropriate access to translation and interpreting services. These are accessed when needed either to communicate with service users or to translate the Supporting People leaflet. There are no service standards in place to give enquirers an indication of how speedily this will be produced.

DDA compliance

- 213** Insufficient attention has been paid to the physical accessibility of properties from which Supporting People services are delivered. DDA compliance did not form part of the review process however some providers pointed to improvements they have made to comply with DDA requirements as a result of prompting from the Supporting People team. New scheme developments are however accessible and a stronger focus is to be placed on this issue in the next phase of service reviews. Access to services is limited for vulnerable people who have mobility problems.

Outcomes for service users

- 214** This is an area where strengths and weaknesses are balanced. There are notable improvements in service quality and standards, some new units of provision have been created but more have been lost through decommissioning and the withdrawal of services. A Home Improvement Agency has been set up expanding the range of services available. There is, however, still a lack of choice in the type and variety of provision and no monitoring of outcomes to reflect the overall user experience. The Council does not yet have a comprehensive profile of the needs of vulnerable people in the County for housing related support.

Supporting People service improvements

- 215** Service users are benefiting from improvements in service quality. Many of the Supporting People funded schemes have made qualitative improvements as a result of the review, validation and action planning process using the QAF as template for focused, structured development. Service reviews have assessed all service providers against a range of quality measures including health and safety, protection from abuse and involvement in service delivery.
- 216** Some services are clearly assisting some people to maintain or to develop their ability to live independently. For example services for drug and alcohol misusers were very well regarded by the service users that we spoke to. They believe that the support they receive is assisting them to cope and to manage their own affairs in the knowledge that they can access housing support enabling their independence. Service users viewed the 'handyman' service as essential in assisting them to avoid having to move into sheltered housing provision.
- 217** Individual service users are benefiting from changes that the Supporting People programme is bringing. Benefits include:
- introduction of Home Improvement Agency services for disabled and older people to cover the whole county, although this is currently operating only within one district; and
 - a planned transfer of services for women fleeing domestic violence to a new provider in new purpose built accommodation within same area. The new service includes floating support for resettlement purposes.

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218 Since 2003, 62 new units of new service provision have been introduced. These include:

- 19 units for people with a physical or sensory disability;
- 28 community alarms;
- an additional 5 units of accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence;
- 3 units for teenage parents; and
- 4 units for people with alcohol problems.

These developments are in line with strategic priorities.

219 There has been an overall fall in the number of units available. There has been a net loss of 33 units to the programme and the resupply of units has not matched in all cases the services for particular user groups that were withdrawn. This has led to increased pressure on remaining providers and the SP team are actively addressing these concerns.

220 Services that were of unacceptable quality have been decommissioned. In eight schemes providers withdrew the service and six were decommissioned. In total 14 schemes were affected with the funding for three schemes transferring to a different source. Service users no longer receive poor quality services and ineligible services are no longer supported.

221 Services have not been reconfigured to ensure they meet the priority needs of the locality. The lack of a comprehensive needs assessment means the programme is not in a position to do this. Overall there has not been a marked change from the inherited legacy services in terms of numbers or type of provision, or the user groups provided for.

Choice for service users

222 There is limited choice for service users. A range of specialist and generic schemes are available, including some that offer different levels of service for floating support tailored to individual needs. However, the overall lack of availability of schemes limits the options users can access.

Support plans

223 There are well developed support plans in place with regular reviews. The Supporting People team have given support and guidance to providers where necessary. As a result of both reviews and improvements driven by providers support plans are now more comprehensive and developed to ensure the support they receive is targeted at their needs. However, other than service review, there is no contractual mechanism in place to ensure support plans are reviewed on time and used appropriately. Users may not receive the tailored support that they need.

- 224** A local connection barrier is not placed in the way of vulnerable people accessing short term services. A local connection would mean that potential services users would be restricted to using a service within the district council area where they were currently living. The Cross Authority Group has confirmed that a 'local connection' requirement is not necessary to access Supporting People funded short term services. This ensures users can access services where they need them.

Outcome measurement

- 225** The lack of attention to service user outcomes is stark. The only performance monitoring arrangements in place are the national Key Performance Indicators, which record planned move-ons and the number of people supported to live independently. These are now reported through the new reporting structure to Commissioning Body and Northumberland County Council, but not to providers or service users. Although the team are awaiting DCLG guidance in this area there is an opportunity for the Council/Care Trust to agree with providers measures of outcomes that in some cases are already in place but not utilised by the Supporting People team. Further local indicators that for example identify outcomes by individual client groups could be developed.
- 226** Key national priorities for Supporting People services such as promoting independent living cannot be appropriately considered if they are not measured, making it difficult to capture the varied outcomes the programme delivers for service users and to monitor overall trends or effectively measure achievement. The Council is not yet in a position to make a thorough evaluation of the value for money secured from contracted services.
- 227** Outcomes measures for the newly commissioned Home Improvement Agency (HIA) are not well focussed upon improved outcomes for service users. Modular targets that relate to processing applications have been agreed with the service provider but there is no focus upon the difference that the service makes for example in assisting people to maintain their independence. This is a missed opportunity to demonstrate how new services will be assessed on the basis of the difference they make for users.
- 228** Visits made by the inspection team included a range of service providers. At each service, service users were able to confirm how the support they were receiving was improving their lives. The Supporting People programme is having a positive impact on those service users it currently captures. There are vulnerable people in Northumberland however whose needs have not been assessed and others for whom no services are available.

Summary

- 229** The Council has been assessed as providing a poor no-star programme. There is a lack of strategic leadership from both Northumberland County Council Northumberland Care Trust and the Commissioning Body. Governance arrangements are not functioning effectively and there is a lack of clarity in those structures. There are limited opportunities for service users to become involved in the development and delivery of the programme. Gaps still exist in needs analysis to inform the progression of the commissioning plans. There is a lack of performance monitoring to allow scrutiny of the programme. Diversity is an area of particular weakness and opportunities have been lost over the past four years to establish the equity of existing services and engage all vulnerable groups in the development of the programme.
- 230** Positively there is an annual plan which clearly identifies the aims and priorities for the programme and supports the targets within the five year strategy. Eligibility criteria are being used appropriately and ineligible spend dealt with. There is an understanding of value for money. However, whilst there has been an emphasis on costs, quality has not been effectively considered in the approach. The review and validation process has been effective and encouraged providers to improve their performance although there is a lack of ambition in promoting higher standards. Service users report positive outcomes from individual providers but there is a lack of clarity about how services will be reconfigured to reach a wider range of needs in the future.

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

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

- 231** There is a limited track record of driving improvements. Lack of ownership, strategic direction and scrutiny within both Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Care Trust contributes to this. The overall balance of provision between types of accommodation and those groups benefiting from the services remains largely unchanged. There are a number of barriers to improvement. These include a lack of ambition, inadequate needs information and underdeveloped cross authority and partnership working. There are, however, noted and significant improvements in individual services that will immediately impact on users.
- 232** Ambitions for the programme to date have been limited. The emphasis of the programme has been upon maintaining stability in the provider market, addressing issues of costs addressing quality through service reviews and supporting the capacity of providers to cope with the Supporting People regime. These aims have been achieved. Opportunities to further raise standards across services have not been seized following service reviews and some weaknesses in approaches to partnership working have limited the added value that can be achieved through more extensive joint commissioning of services.
- 233** There is a divide in the track record in delivering improvement. Whilst improvements have been demonstrated in individual services there has not been progress in delivering a reconfigured programme of services that meet, appropriately and proportionately, the needs of all user groups in the county.
- 234** The Supporting People programme has a good record of delivering some outcomes on time. DCLG implementation milestones have been achieved in the required timescales. All legacy services have been robustly reviewed within the timescale set and without additional support. The five year strategy was developed and submitted within the required timescale.
- 235** Individual services visited provide in the main quality services to users. Quality and standards of the support services have been reviewed and minimum standards met. Of the 153 services that did not reach level C on the Quality Assessment Framework all except ten have now achieved this. Those ten have been receiving support over a long period of time to implement the improvement plans but with little progress. Potentially difficult decisions have been avoided and the Commissioning Body have been slow to take default action against those remaining providers.

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- 236** There has been limited reshaping of services to reflect demand, for example across District Council boundaries or from accommodation based to floating support. There are still areas of need that are unmet and some where there is underprovision. An analysis of spend indicates significant under and over provision compared with the government formula. The current work being undertaken on needs analysis will inform the Commissioning Body as to the extent to which these guidelines are appropriate for Northumberland.
- 237** Supporting People have not taken a strategic lead in tackling issues of move on accommodation and cross authority working has yet to produce any meaningful outcomes.
- 238** The planned timescale to achieve outcomes has not been met. The 2006/07 work plan incorporates and refines a number of actions from the 2005/06 plan, for example the development of a user involvement strategy and a purchasing plan. Services will not improve as quickly as they should.
- 239** Northumberland County Council shows a track record of improvement. It is a three-star authority, and has clear corporate priorities and is building its local strategic partnership. There is evidence of positive responses to previous inspections in other fields of operation. Although it has been criticised in the past in relation to Use of Resources assessments this area has now been recognised as improving. These improvements have not however translated into the Supporting People programme. Links with District Councils have varied, and require more consistent development.
- 240** The Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) has recently concluded that performance across adult social care has weakened, relative to expectations. An inspection of social care services for older people, undertaken summer 2006, concluded that some people were served well, but that capacity to improve was uncertain. Specific issues for focus included leadership, direction and modernisation of services. In the performance rating for 2006 one-star was awarded, less positive than the previous year.
- 241** The recording of national KPI measurements was started in 2004/05 and has improved over time.

Key Performance Indicators	2004/05	2005/06	Q1 and Q2 2006/07
KPI 1	98.08	98.39	98.79
KPI 2	67.11	68.87	89.08

KPI 1 is the percentage of Service Users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living KPI 2 is the number of service users moving on from temporary accommodation in a planned way.

- 242** Internal monitoring also takes place from data included in returns from service providers. These are considered on an individual basis and concerns and issues raised with the providers. The overall picture is however not considered to review movements and address issues in the programme. Those indicators have improved since 2004/05 when they were instigated.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 243** This is an area where barriers outweigh drivers for improvement. There is limited performance reporting at any level either within the Supporting People programme at Commissioning Body level or at corporate level within the County Council. The lack of strategic leadership by both the County Council and the Commissioning Body has not led to challenging questions being asked about performance. There are clearly identified priorities in the five year strategy which translate into annual plans, however the progress of this is not monitored to ensure actions are completed. There are no agreed performance measures. However the risk management environment and financial planning and monitoring is robust.
- 244** Performance monitoring and management is not well developed. A high level performance reporting structure has just been agreed, however, at this level only the two national KPI indicators relating to the percentage of people supported to live independently and the percentage of people moving on in a planned manner will be fed in from the Commissioning Body's reporting structure. This process is already in place within Northumberland County Council although not within the Northumberland Care Trust. Performance monitoring is not comprehensive.
- 245** To date there has been no evidence of cabinet/scrutiny challenge. It is the responsibility of all Commissioning Body members to report to the relevant member structure within their organisations. However, there is no indication of this being done consistently or the work of Supporting People being challenged.
- 246** There is limited performance information considered to inform the progress of the programme or measure achievement against key objectives. Currently the Commissioning Body receive progress reports on the review process and outcomes are reported on an exception basis. The new programme of contract monitoring and reviews will be reported in a similar way. Financial information is considered on a regular basis by both Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body. Whilst there are progress reports on the service review programme there is little information relating to the programme as a whole and how decisions made have affected its overall configuration. For example, there is no recording/analysis of the changes in service or of how average costs of provision of service for different client groups has changed over time.

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- 247** There is no effective monitoring of programme delivery. It is not clear where and when the annual development plan is monitored and delivery challenged either at governance or operational levels. The plan provided did not indicate whether or to what extent initiatives had been delivered by for example the inclusion of update information or traffic lighting. The lack of a rigorous approach to performance monitoring and management means that improvements are less likely to be delivered.
- 248** Progress to establish performance indicators is slow. There is no current agreement over lower level monitoring that is required to inform the programme. Suggestions for local performance indicators and their measures and targets are under consideration as part of the current governance review. In particular other than the national KPIs there are no measures to ascertain the outcomes for service users, the beneficiaries of the programme. The Council is also awaiting the DCLG suite of service user outcomes currently being piloted.
- 249** Financial planning and monitoring are key features of the work of the Commissioning Body. Regular budgeting reports are received and considered. Under-spends are built into the budget and are carried forward to the coming year. Under-spends in 2003/04 and 2004/05 are being used sensibly. For example, a hardship fund was established for small providers struggling to cope without inflationary increases; a small contingency reserve has been set up for unforeseen events or challenges. However the lack of comprehensive and robust needs assessments does weaken the basis for decision making.
- 250** Careful financial management has left the Council well-placed to deal with any reductions in budgets or unexpected variations in costs. Working within a strict budget framework the County Council has given an undertaking to underwrite any SP overspends. Budget control is tight and any overspends would likely come from an unforeseen incident rather than poor management. No overspends have been made to date. Such undertakings will help protect services to vulnerable people.
- 251** Northumberland County Council does not recognise the importance of the Supporting People programme in commissioning services to meet its objectives. The Northumberland County Council performance plan 2006 makes no reference to Supporting People. The Supporting People programme has only recently been incorporated into corporate targets. Opportunities have been missed to integrate Supporting People into the core objectives of Northumberland County Council.
- 252** Work is in progress to update the five year strategy in April 2007. The milestones for this are included in the annual plan. Work has very recently begun to consult with providers and partners regarding needs and supply as an element of the strategy refresh. To meet the target of April 2007 all relevant actions need to be completed in line with the proposed timescales. There is no monitoring of progress against this plan by Core Strategy Group which is tasked with overseeing the direction of work of the Supporting People team. Progress is therefore also not reported to the Commissioning Body. Targets for the review of the strategy may not be met, leading to further delays in the reconfiguration of services to ensure the needs of all users are met.

- 253** The Supporting People annual plan is not SMART. Although the plan is a detailed working document with milestones and timescales for the completion of work, desired outcomes in the main measure processes and not outcomes in terms of benefits to service users that the action will bring. There is no external progress monitoring or updating of this plan to ensure its completion within the year.
- 254** The annual Supporting People plan does not translate consistently into personal action plans. Although there is a clear link at the strategic level between directorate service plans, the Councils performance plan and the community strategy, there is little to demonstrate that personal action plans make clear the roles of individuals in delivering the objectives. This weakness lessens the likelihood of improvements being delivered.
- 255** The lack of a work plan for the Core Strategy Group is a weakness as is their direction of the work plan of the Supporting People team. Progress against the annual plan is not monitored by the Commissioning Body and therefore they cannot assess progress, identify issues or intervene when needed.
- 256** Limited learning from other authorities has been demonstrated but this is not embedded within practices. In the current review of governance, examples of structures from other two tier authorities have been considered. Supporting People officers have also shared their provider pack with other authorities. Good practice is not however considered as a routine element of work carried out. Opportunities are missed to improve the services.
- 257** There is a stable and competent team who access specialist support when required. Members receive regular supervision, albeit there is no formal performance management and appraisal system in place within the Care Trust.
- 258** Steps are being taken to develop a service user involvement strategy. Positively a general consultation event has been arranged for November 2006, sponsored by Supporting People and facilitated by User, Carer Voice, which acts as an advocacy group for people with mental health and substance abuse issues. This will ascertain user preferences for consultation and involvement. The event will provide incentives for attending such as relaxation therapy workshops. Users can express their preference for the level and type of involvement that best suits them.
- 259** However the plans for the development of the service user involvement strategy are not SMART. There are milestones and timescales in place against which progress can be measured. However, there are no outcome measures that will demonstrate service improvements. Effective carer and user involvement can significantly improve services.
- 260** The Supporting People team is integrated into the Council's business planning and budget setting processes. Estimates of expenditure for administration and services are made and worked into budgets for the year. The plans identify savings that will be required. Financial support is provided by the County Council finance directorate. Good financial planning is essential to the long-term sustainability of services.

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- 261** Resources are not identified at a lower level. For example within the annual plan there are requirements for staff time, both within Supporting People and within other partner agencies and no indication of how or whether this has been secured. Regular updating and review of the plan would identify if lack of any of these resources becomes critical.
- 262** Plans to improve the needs assessment data that will determine priorities to improve the programme delivery are well progressed. Starting from a low base information has been collected from a number of sources to improve the data. Final steps in this process are the strategic reviews of the older persons and learning disability sectors, the county wide housing needs survey and the recent well attended priority setting meetings. Robust data should be available to refresh the five year strategy in April 2007.
- 263** Improvement planning to ensure continuous improvement of services is in place. The integration of the annual contract monitoring programme and the 2006-2009 review programme will ensure continual contact with providers to both monitor and improve performance.
- 264** Risk management planning is well developed. A comprehensive risk management policy and procedure is in place. This includes a scoring mechanism, considering likelihood and impact, and covers the areas financial risk, providers and market changes, service users and strategic planning. A traffic light system is used and the assessment is reviewed on an annual basis. Controls are in place to manage the risks and contingency plans are in place. Awareness of potential threats to the programme is assured.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 265** There are more drivers for improvement than barriers. There is enthusiasm and recognition by all parties of the need to rapidly progress the programme to ensure positive outcomes for users. There are four major activities under way, the review of governance, the development of the service user involvement strategy and the completion of strategic reviews and housing needs analyses to inform the revision of the five year strategy. The completion of these will place Northumberland County Council in a stronger position to drive improvement. Capacity barriers to such improvement are the limited engagement of some district councils and a lack of effective cross boundary and partnership working.
- 266** Lack of robust leadership at the start of the programme led to a slow start. The County Council having delegated the function to Northumberland Care Trust did not adequately ensure governance and other requirements of the programme were met. The Commissioning Body was not put in place until 2005, although the Core Strategy Group was established at the beginning of the programme. There was also instability at a senior level in the Care Trust and it is only in the past 18 months that there has been a consistent lead from the newly appointed Accountable Officer.

- 267** There is now improving leadership and guidance from both the Commissioning Body, Northumberland Care Trust and Northumberland County Council. In the past year efforts have been made to give Supporting People the focus and direction it needs to deliver successfully on the programme. Recent work is increasing the profile of Supporting People and their contribution is now recognised in a number of key documents.
- 268** There is improving direction given by the Commissioning Body. The appointment of a chair from the strategic partnership ensures that it is linked into key strategic developments and opportunities. The current review of governance is addressing issues of membership of Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group, with recognition of the need to incorporate a wider range of partners, terms of reference to include clear differences in responsibilities between Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group and requirements for reporting and monitoring information. These proposals are in line with best practice identified in high performing authorities.
- 269** Following the reorganisation of three Primary Care Trusts there is now a joint Chief Executive who has responsibility for Supporting People in Northumberland. The Care Trust now indicate that the value of Supporting People is recognised and it is becoming an integral part of the service which will help them deliver on health outcomes. There has been a recent joint appointment of a director of adult services by the County Council and Care Trust. Improved joint working between health and adult social services will deliver benefits to service users.
- 270** The County Council has realised the importance of driving improvement in the delivery and development of the Supporting People programme and performance is now fed into the high level monitoring process carried out by the Chief Executives department. The Council representative on the Commissioning Body is at an appropriate level and has access to elected members and portfolio holders.
- 271** The Accountable Officer is at an appropriate level in the Care Trust, as he is the Director of Social Care and Countywide Services. In such a position he chairs or is a member of a number of other partner groups and is able to feed information into discussions and plans about the contribution of Supporting People. Conversely he is aware of initiatives in the wider environment to which Supporting People can make a contribution.
- 272** Northumberland have an effective IT system that can assist in achieving improvements to the programme's processes. The system meets the requirements of the team and service providers. Information is easily produced and in the prescribed format. Service providers are supported in using IT and arrangements are made to meet the needs of small providers with limited IT capacity. Efficiency gains are to be secured through developments in the IT systems. IT systems are to become web based. This will allow service providers to enter returns directly into the Supporting People system thus avoiding the 'double handling' of data.

- 273** Plans to improve partnership working with service users are progressing, albeit at a late stage in the process. Whilst there has been service user involvement in the review processes there has been none to date in the governance structures or the shaping of the programme. The use of existing consultative groups as channels to reach and represent the service users makes good use of resources. The initial focus will be on how users would best like their views to be represented.
- 274** The current restricted membership of the Commissioning Body will be addressed in the current review. There are proposals to extend the membership of both the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group. The Commissioning Body will add to its membership provider, partner and community representation, including a health representative, members, and different district council representatives to those on the Core Strategy Group. The Core Strategy Group will be reformed to include provider, partner and service user representation. However, there has been no review of the staffing needs of the team to meet the changing needs of the programme.
- 275** There is sound financial planning. Given the tight budgetary situation Northumberland County Council along with other ALAs find themselves, it is clear that only efficiency savings will be available to fund reconfigured and new schemes. The Supporting People team is integrated into the Council's business planning and budget setting processes. Estimates of expenditure for administration and services are made and worked into budgets for the year. Good financial planning is essential to the long-term sustainability of services.
- 276** It is encouraging that one new provider has been contracted with to provide a new service. Whilst the majority of the re-configuring and introduction of new services has been provided by existing providers, one new provider of a specialist service has been introduced. This approach will strengthen and test the market.
- 277** Procurement arrangements for Supporting People are under development but are not yet in place or tested. Procurement follows the general principles set out in the corporate procurement strategy, developed in 2004. This is a high level strategy and robust detailed procurement policies are not yet in place for the procurement of Supporting People services.

Summary

- 278** Overall, Northumberland County Council is providing a poor no-star Supporting People programme that has uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 279** The Council has demonstrated a lack of ambition and purposeful drive in the delivery of the programme. As a result progress towards an improving provision of support for vulnerable people within the county has been slow and uninspired.

- 280** The lack of strategic leadership by both the County Council and Northumberland Care Trust at the onset of the programme has led to a lack of vision and purpose to the programme, resulting in poor governance arrangements. Whilst the Supporting People team has concentrated on the quality of the provision of legacy services there was no impetus to consider the broader programme at an early stage.
- 281** Governance arrangements are not functioning effectively. There is a lack of clarity in the structures, limited membership, variable engagement and poor monitoring of both the programme and changes and outputs from it. Whilst there is a strategy for the general direction of the provision of services there is a lack of detail about how this will be achieved, due in part to the lack of a robust determination of housing and support needs and the need to further review services for older people and those with learning disabilities. There are no opportunities for service users to become involved in the development and delivery of the programme and not enough attention has been given to diversity issues to ensure that services are available to the whole community.
- 282** Positively the review process and a robust contract monitoring system delivered by a committed and enthusiastic Supporting People team has delivered improvements in services that will have impacted on users.
- 283** Also, positively, there are good working relationships with probation, the drugs action team and MAPPA arrangements are in place and working well.
- 284** The prospects for improvement to the service have been judged as uncertain.
- 285** There are several barriers in meeting the aims and addressing the priorities of the programme. The record of delivering improvements is mixed. Whilst there have been noticeable improvements in individual services low levels of service re-commissioning has not altered the provision of support across the county. This means there has been in limited progress in addressing service provision gaps and priorities. Performance management arrangements are weak and do not drive improvement. Whilst there is evidence of attendance at a range of partnership meetings these have yet to deliver consistent and tangible benefits to Supporting People service users. There has been no involvement of service users in shaping and tailoring the strategic aims and arrangements for the programme to meet their needs.
- 286** Despite the slow start there is now a recent impetus and stated commitment at all levels to rapidly progress the programme. This is in part driven by the increased profile of Supporting People within the County Council and other partner agencies. There is improving awareness among stakeholders and partnership working is strengthening. This has resulted in three recent activities being instigated to take the programme forward including a review of governance, robust needs information gathering and the development of a service user involvement strategy.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

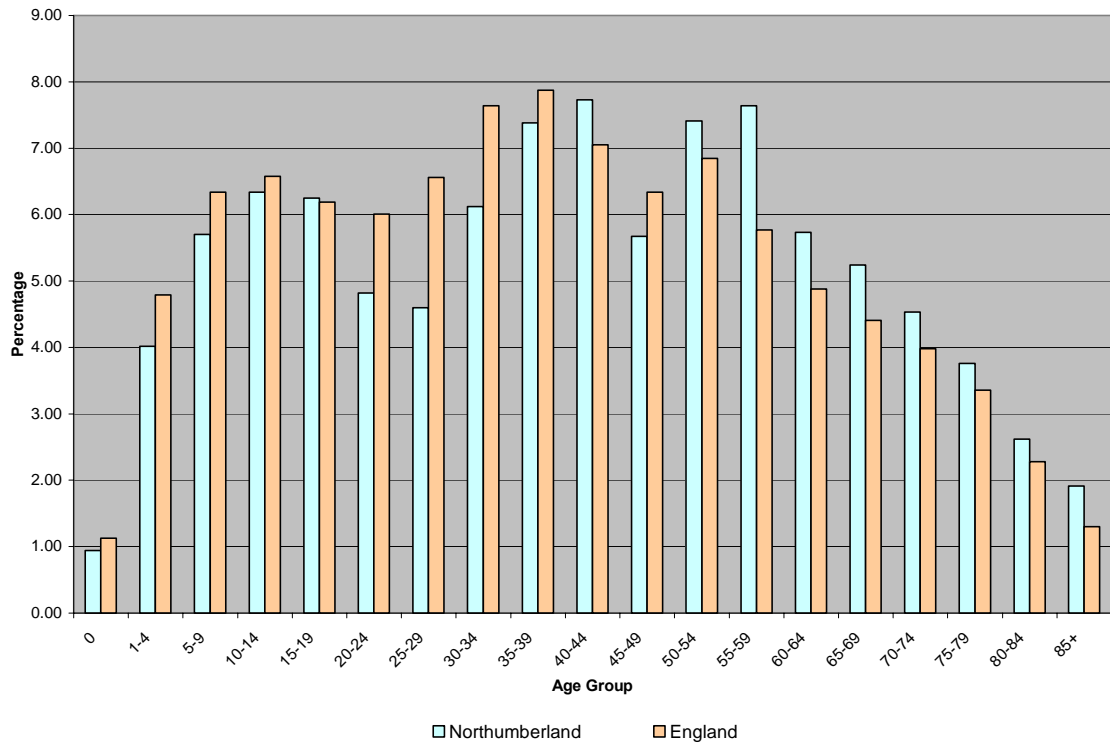
Measure	Northumberland	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁵	311,300	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	20.9	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	1.0	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁶	2.5	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁷	221	-

⁵ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

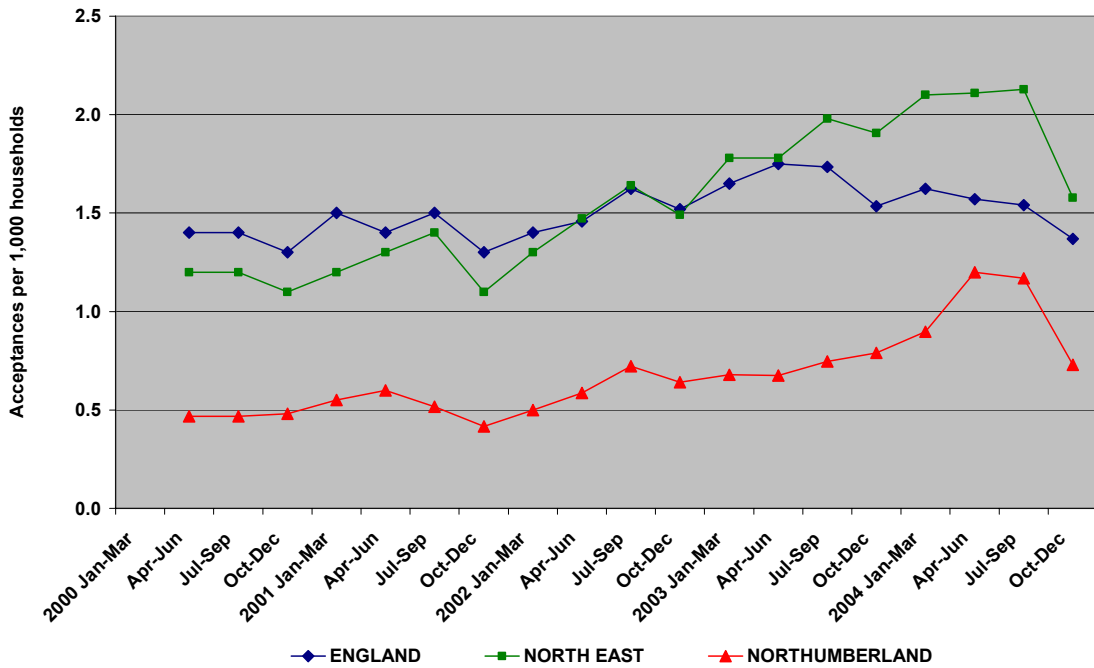
⁶ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (October 2006)

⁷ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Percentage of the population⁸ in each age group compared with England



Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



⁸ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

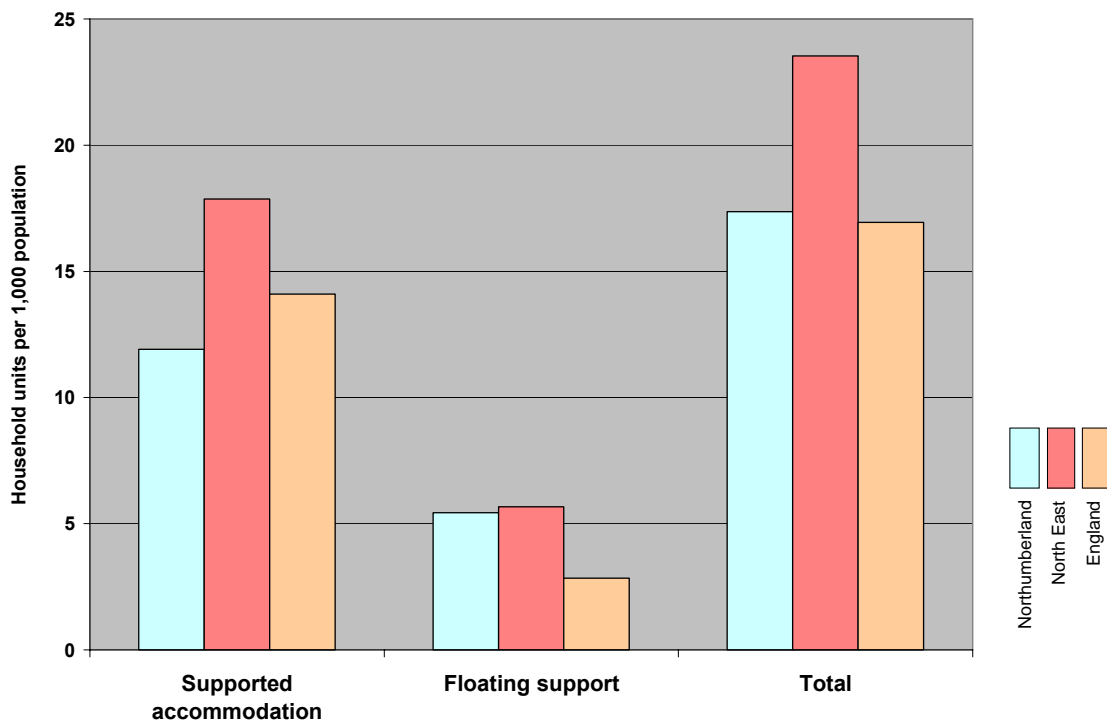
Performance information

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

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

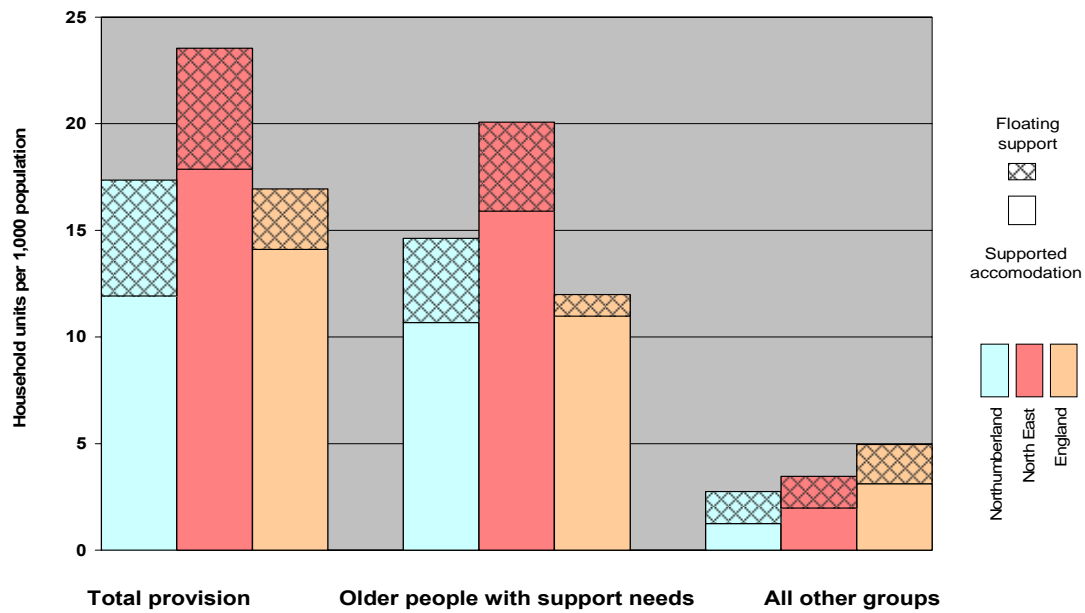
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁹

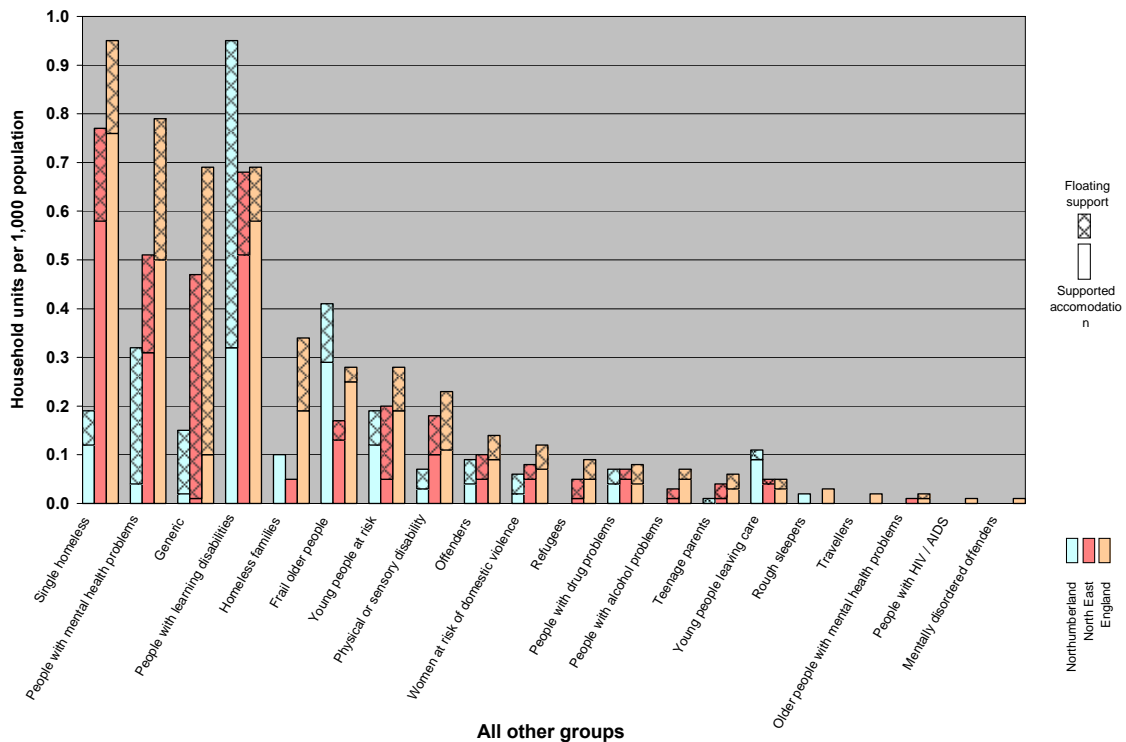


⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹⁰



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹¹



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

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Funding for Supporting People¹²

Northumberland	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 7,463,100	£ 7,394,401	£ 7,085,603
Pipeline allocation	£ 57,042	£ 150,246	£ -
Administration grant	£ 369,916	£ 358,361	£ 286,689

Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹³

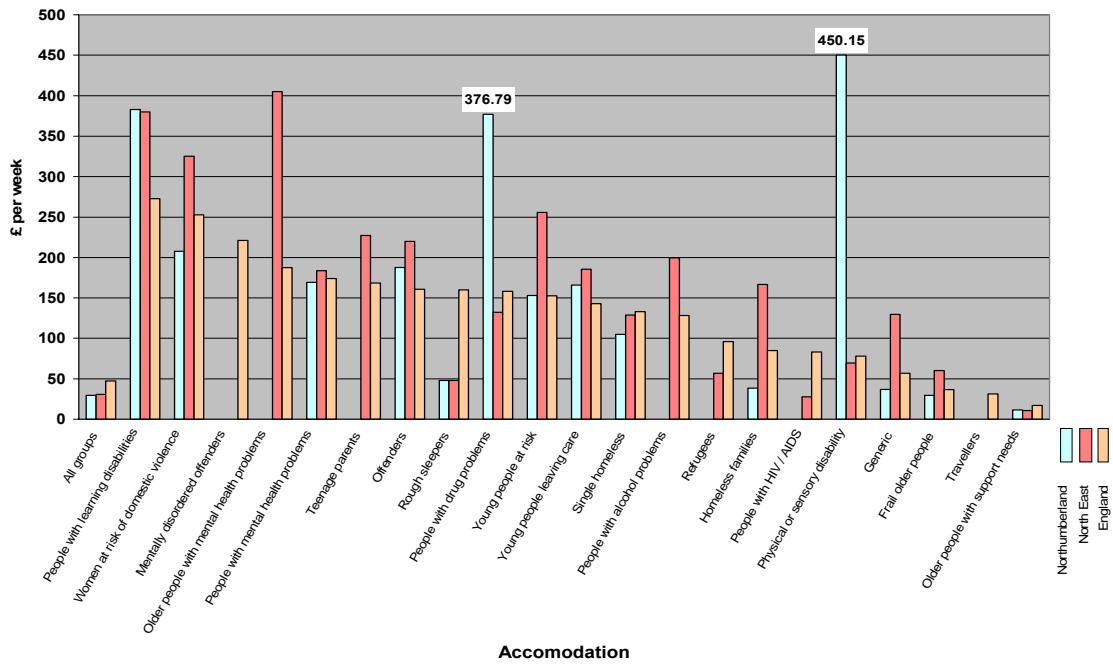
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Northumberland	£ 0.47	£ 14.28	£ 26.38	£ 129.06
North East	£ 0.72	£ 17.86	£ 24.71	£ 62.45
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

'The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. ODPM will be able to provide updated data when it becomes available and this will then be used.'

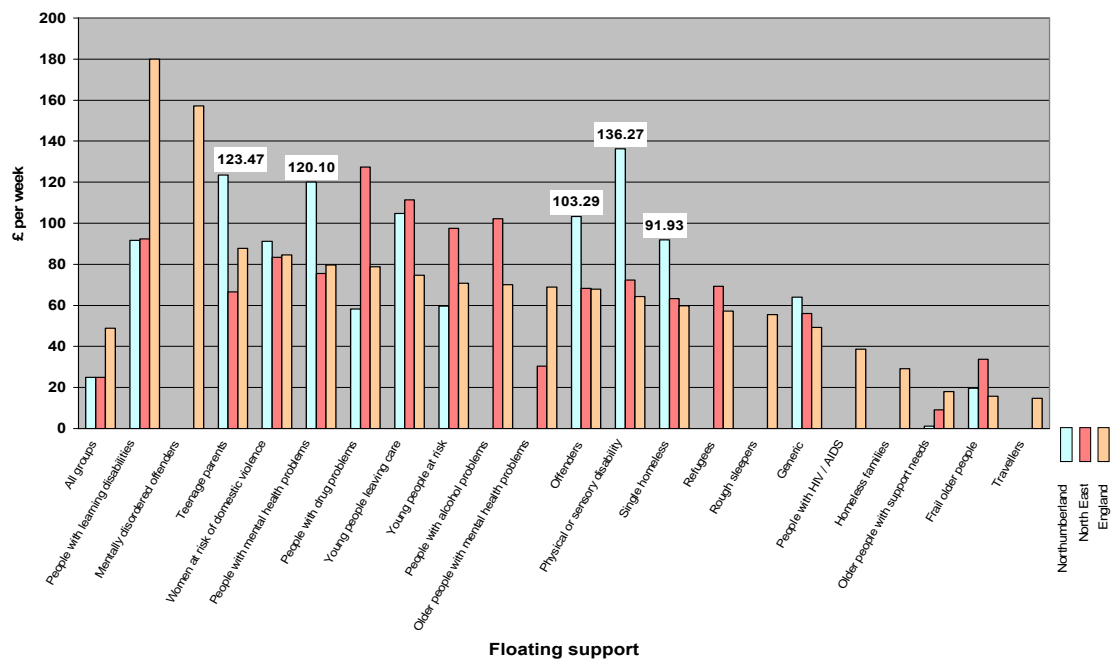
¹² Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁴



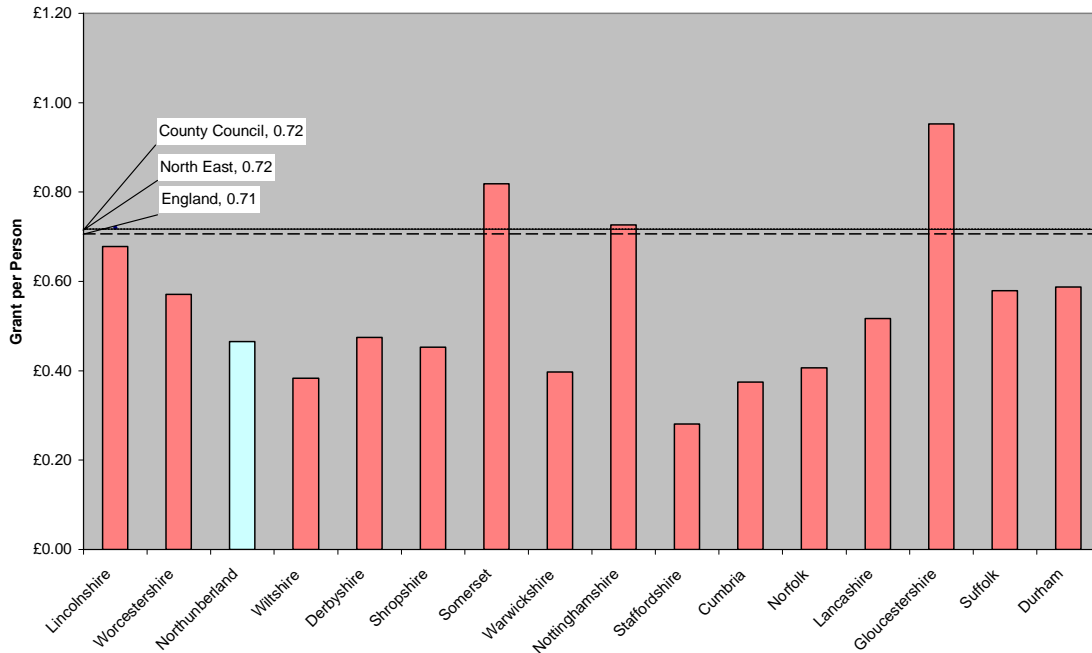
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁵



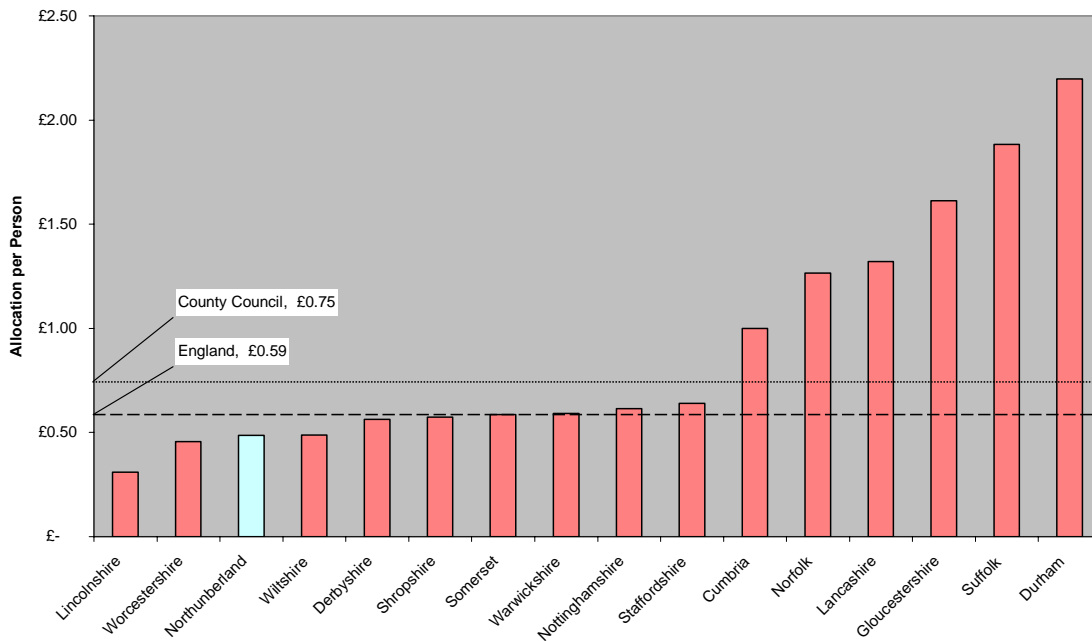
¹⁴ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁶, all county councils and all English councils (2004/05)



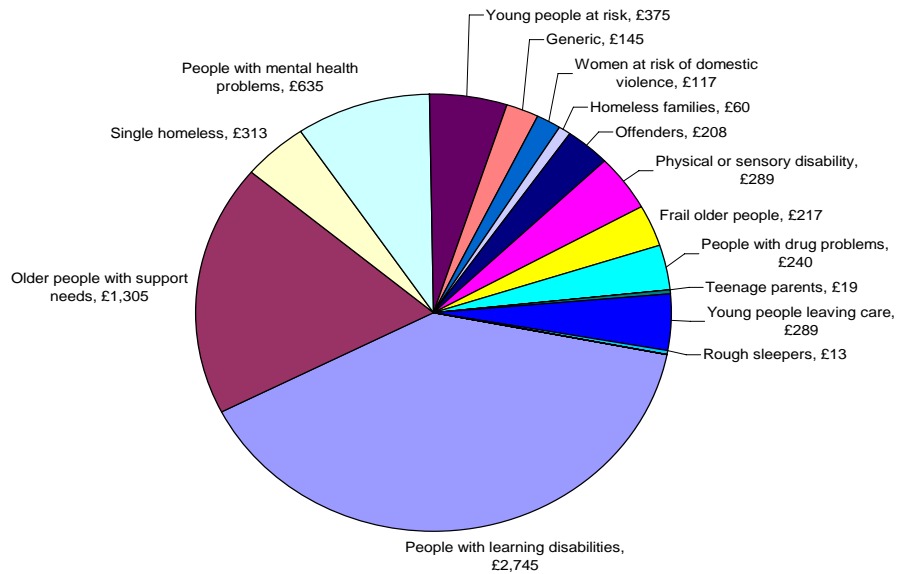
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁷, all county councils and all English councils.



¹⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

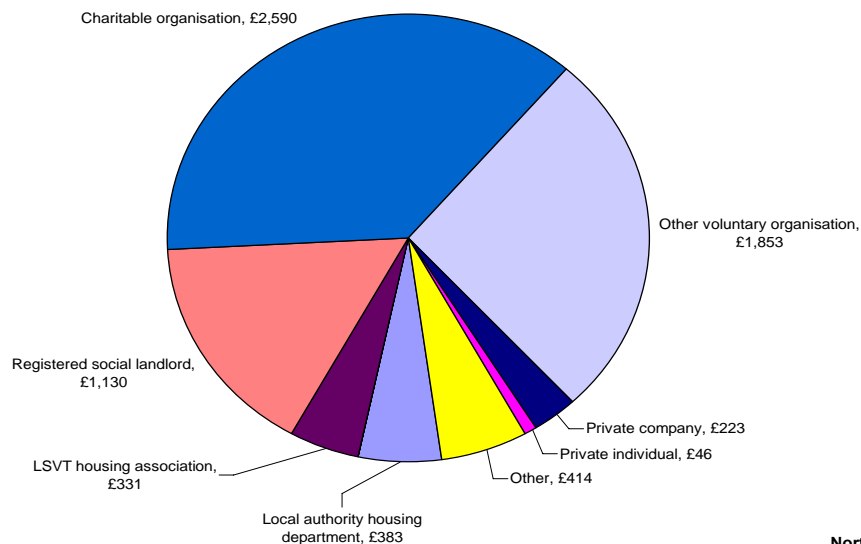
¹⁷ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁸



Northumberland
Funding by user group

Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁹



Northumberland
Funding by provider type

¹⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social Services star ratings November 2004

The table below shows the Social Services Inspectorate ratings of the Council’s performance.

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults’ Services	Most	Promising	☆☆ (2)
Children’s Services	Most	Promising	

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Northumberland	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Above average (●●●)	Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27)
Average (●●)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)

Northumberland	
Below average (**)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)
Significantly below average (•)	Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with county councils

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

Northumberland	
Within the best 25 per cent	
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2)
Within the worst 25 per cent	Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)

District council performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04

The tables below shows how district councils in Northumberland performed on best value performance indicators relevant to Supporting People, compared with all district councils.

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

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

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

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 survey which was sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
 - focus groups for service providers and frontline staff;
 - visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - observing a meeting of the core strategy;
 - telephone calls to test how easy it is to access services; and
 - interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders, including the Chief Executive of the Council, the Accountable Officer, the Supporting People Lead Officer, members of the Supporting People team, councillors, social services commissioning managers, representatives of the probation service and the primary care trusts, advocacy groups and the youth offending team.