

Inspection report

September 2004



# Supporting People Programme

Nottingham City Council

# Contents

Scoring the service	4
Recommendations	6
Context	8
The locality	8
The Council	8
The service	8
How good is the service?	9
Governance of the programme	9
Delivery arrangements	12
Financial monitoring & management	14
Value for money	18
User involvement & partnership arrangements	20
Customer care, access to services & information	22
Diversity	23
Outcomes for service users	25
Summary	27
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	29
What is the evidence of service improvement?	29
How good are the current improvement plans?	30
Will improvements be delivered?	30
Summary	31
Documents reviewed	32
Reality checks undertaken	32
List of people interviewed	32
Demographic information	34
Performance information	36
Positive practice	45

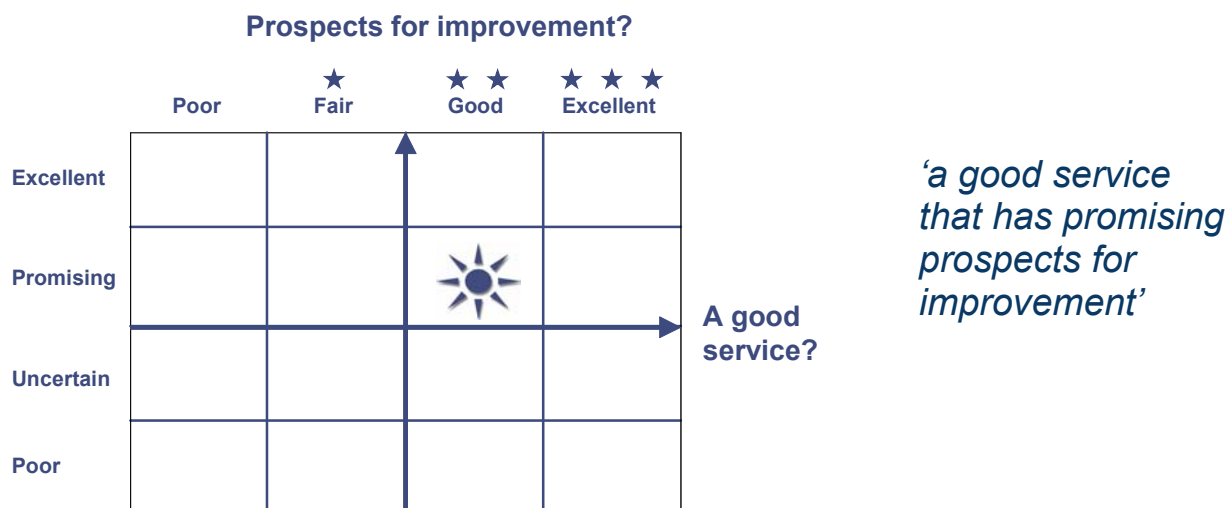
## Summary

- 1 Nottingham City Council is a unitary authority in the East Midlands of England. The population is 270,000 of which 18.5 per cent are from minority ethnic communities.
- 2 The council is Labour led with 37 of the 55 seats.
- 3 The council employs 14,000 staff across all services.
- 4 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 5 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and unco-ordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 6 Nottingham City Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Nottingham City primary care trust and Nottinghamshire Probation Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 7 Nottingham City Council was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme and was among the 19 administering local authorities considered by the ODPM to have the highest service costs. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.
- 8 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2004/05 is £28,423,024. The council receives £282,292 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 9 The highest cost Supporting People service in Nottingham at the final grant size determination, the platinum cut, was £1872.09 per person per week for accommodation based support for people with learning difficulties. The lowest cost service was £0.69 a week for an alarm service for people with a physical or sensory disability, in this case deafness.

## Scoring the service

- 10 We have assessed Nottingham City Council as providing a ‘good’ two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>: Nottingham City Council - Supporting People Programme



- 11 We have assessed the council’s Supporting People service to be good because:
- ◆ it is directed by a strong commissioning body with the highest level representation;
  - ◆ quality outcomes for service users can be demonstrated;
  - ◆ the Supporting People team has an appropriate blend of relevant skills and experience;
  - ◆ all contracts have been signed and payments to providers are made in a prompt and accurate manner;
  - ◆ value for money, strategic relevance and issues of quality are being addressed through a well developed Supporting People service review process;
  - ◆ an appeals mechanism has been put in place, tested and refined in the light of experience;
  - ◆ resources within the team have been targeted at the key areas of strategy development, needs analysis and stakeholder consultation;
  - ◆ the core strategy group has a good range of representation;
  - ◆ needs are seen as the priority driver for future provision;
  - ◆ savings have been achieved in the first year of the programme and carried forward;
  - ◆ service directories exist to provide guidance to users and advocates; and

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- ◆ there is corporate commitment to the diversity agenda.

12 However, we found a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include:

- ◆ no formalised protocol for the commissioning body to deal with conflicts of interest;
- ◆ there has been a delay in making a permanent appointment to the role of Supporting People lead officer. The current service manager is operating in an 'acting' capacity;
- ◆ the inclusive forum in its current form does not reach all service users, their carers and advocates;
- ◆ whilst levels of partnership and ownership are healthy at the strategic (commissioning body) level, there are concerns about relationships with providers operationally; and
- ◆ the better care, higher standards charter is out of date and contains no reference to Supporting People and the general availability of written material for users is limited.

13 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths:

- ◆ the commissioning body has strategic vision and will drive the programme forward;
- ◆ a robust project plan exists, and work has commenced, for development of the five year strategy, with resources directed at the tasks involved;
- ◆ local performance indicators are beginning to develop;
- ◆ there is growing acknowledgement of Supporting People as a delivery vehicle for strategic objectives;
- ◆ performance management is improving across the council and is particularly strong in Supporting People; and
- ◆ the council as a whole has embarked upon a major change programme which is showing positive service improvements.

14 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve. These are:

- ◆ negative relationships with a number of providers will need to be addressed in order to achieve the best possible results in partnership;
- ◆ risk management activities would benefit from a more formalised and documented approach;
- ◆ Supporting People is not embedded at a strategic level across the council; and
- ◆ there are no support plans in place for vulnerable people in some in house Supporting People funded services.

## Recommendations

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

### With immediate effect and ongoing

- ◆ Actively change the manner and tone of future communications with providers to positively redress any negative perceptions of the relationship and to foster the spirit of partnership.
- ◆ Proactively use existing keen and engaged users and carers groups to help organise and shape future consultation events.
- ◆ Ensure that the approach to user engagement includes those users and carers who are not currently engaged with the consultation groups.
- ◆ Adopt an open and transparent approach to service review recommendations, ensuring that affected providers are made aware of efforts being made by the city to negotiate alternative sources of funding where Supporting People is at risk.
- ◆ Maintain sufficient capacity within the Supporting People team to ensure that the service review programme does not slip and that time is built in for potential appeals.

### As soon as possible within your meeting cycle

- ◆ Present this report to the commissioning body and the executive board.

### By 31 August 2004

- ◆ Make a substantive appointment to the post of Supporting People service manager.
- ◆ On a formal basis, develop a protocol and process for use by the commissioning body, to handle conflicts of interest.
- ◆ Develop the existing risk schedule and action plan into a living document and use it as a tool for management.
- ◆ Clarify and communicate the council's stance with regard to ongoing funding of clients where changes of address are concerned.

### By 30 November 2004

- ◆ Drive forward cross authority working at a strategic and operational level.
- ◆ Devise and implement a training programme on Supporting People for city reception staff.
- ◆ Introduce a degree of external moderation to enhance the review process.
- ◆ Improve the availability of posters and information leaflets for users, making use of other Council offices and related agencies to publicise the service. Develop a pictorial style of information for users with learning disabilities.
- ◆ Involve providers and users in the shaping and format of future issues of their respective newsletters and ensure that the distribution method for the user newsletters is effective.
- ◆ Update and republish the better care, higher standards charter.
- ◆ Ensure that support plans are put in place in all cases where the city itself is a support provider.

- ◆ Complete and implement an action plan to address these recommendations and all other weaknesses identified in this report.

16 We would like to thank the staff of Nottingham City Council, particularly Neil Barks, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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**Dates of inspection: 7th June to 11th June 2004**

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# Report

## Context

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

## The locality

- 18 Nottingham City Council is a unitary authority in the East Midlands area of England. The population of the area is 266,988 and increasing. 18.95 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities (other than white British). The population has a high proportion of young people, with 12.2 per cent between the ages of 20 and 24 as compared to an England average of 6 per cent. This is primarily due to the number of students attending the two local universities.
- 19 In terms of deprivation, Nottingham ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 354 areas of England, where 1 is the most deprived. Unemployment is falling, but at 4 per cent is still higher than the national average (2.5 per cent). By far the largest source of employment is the service industry, followed by manufacturing.

## The Council

- 20 The council comprises 55 councillors. The Labour party has overall control with 37 seats. Currently the system of governance involves an executive board of 10 members, supported by an overview and scrutiny committee together with a number of standing panels and area committees.
- 21 The council's overall revenue budget for the year 2004/05 is £331 million. The budget for the delivery of social services is £84 million and the budget for housing (general fund) is £5 million.
- 22 The council's priorities as identified in the strategic plan 2004–2007 are:
- ◆ developing the city;
  - ◆ developing our neighbourhood focus; and
  - ◆ improving our performance.

## The service

- 23 The council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 24 The Supporting People programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people including the homeless, older people with support needs and offenders.
- 25 The budget for the Supporting People programme for 2004/05 is £28,423,024, a fall of 2.5 per cent from the previous year. The council receives an additional administration grant for the programme of £282,292 for 2004/05.
- 26 Nottingham City Council was inspected early in the second year of the programme and was among the 19 administering authorities considered by the ODPM to have the highest service costs. The report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

## How good is the service?

- 27 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ governance of the programme;
  - ◆ delivery arrangements including strategy and needs assessments;
  - ◆ financial monitoring and management of the grant;
  - ◆ service reviews carried out by the administering authority;
  - ◆ value for money;
  - ◆ user involvement, partnerships with providers & others;
  - ◆ customer care, access to services & information;
  - ◆ diversity; and
  - ◆ outcomes for service users.

## Governance of the programme

- 28 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
  - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
  - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
  - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
  - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
  - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 29 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier areas each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the administering local authority.
- 30 The elected member with responsibility for Supporting People is the portfolio holder for housing and social services. He takes a keen interest in Supporting People and is working hard to raise the profile within the authority.
- 31 However, at the present time, there is little corporate ownership of Supporting People in Nottingham City. The existing strategic plan for the years 2004-2007 makes no reference to the programme and therefore the council does not clearly demonstrate how Supporting People can help to deliver any of its corporate objectives.
- 32 The local strategic partnership, known as 'One City Partnership Nottingham' produced a community plan in 2003 but this is commonly felt to be an inferior and short-term document and a new plan is being developed, due for completion in

January 2005. Again the current plan makes no reference to Supporting People as a delivery vehicle.

- 33 The Nottingham City Council commissioning body has been in place since August 2002 and is chaired by the corporate director of housing. Meetings take place quarterly. Other members of the body are the acting corporate director of social services, the chief executive of Nottinghamshire primary care trust and the assistant chief probation officer, Nottinghamshire Probation Service. Each organisation has one vote.
- 34 The administering authority has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the commissioning body which describes how the parties will allocate and co-ordinate Supporting People work. The draft memorandum had been discussed and amended over time and was finally agreed by the commissioning body in February 2004, but due to an oversight was never signed. This matter was rectified at the meeting we attended on the 10 June 2004.
- 35 With representation from the partners at the highest level, the commissioning body enjoys good attendance and operates as a highly effective forum for decision making. At the meeting on 10 June 2004 we were able to observe well informed debate, questioning and challenge of the highest order, together with a commitment to meeting the strategic objectives of all partners. Some difficult decisions were reached without undue procrastination, demonstrating that background papers had been read, understood and duly considered prior to the meeting.
- 36 In deliberating the agenda items, other related matters of concern were recognised and actions taken. An example of this was a review recommendation to reduce funding in respect of a 24 hour service, not all of which was considered to be housing related support. A consequence of removing the overnight service raised an issue of child protection – which in turn brought about recognition that a protocol for information sharing would be required between the Supporting People team and social services. An instant decision was made to draft such a protocol and the action minuted. From our evidence we are confident that this level of engagement and commitment was representative of all such meetings.
- 37 For now, the commissioning body is heavily involved in managing the legacy of services in terms of decommissioning and reconfiguring reviewed services. They see their key role, however, to drive through the changes needed to achieve an environment of service provision that is led by needs. The complete picture of service provision is emerging with greater clarity as more and more services are reviewed and there is recognition of the need to develop the wherewithal to commission brand new services, both within the body and the team itself (already one or two commissioning proposals are emerging). Moreover it is recognised that the profile of services that does emerge may well still be at variance with identified need and the commissioning body anticipates that in future some difficult decisions may need to be taken to reshape and redefine the sector as a whole.
- 38 A methodology has been established for the handling of decisions where these have potential to be politically sensitive. This consists of a pre-briefing for the portfolio holder with the council officers which takes place about three weeks prior to each commissioning body meeting. This ensures that the portfolio holder is able to feed the political perspective into the relevant agenda items prior to the papers being finalised and sent out, so that this input can inform decision making by the body itself. A further advantage of this modus operandi is that other elected members can then be made aware, in advance, of the issues that may impact upon them.

- 39 Whilst it is clear that there is potential for conflict of interest within the Supporting People partnership, we were able to see examples where these have in practice been dealt with and consensus based decisions made. One of these was where Supporting People funding for learning disability services originally championed by social services has been substantially reduced as the services did not meet grant conditions.
- 40 The memorandum of understanding does make short reference to the subject of conflict of interest. Also a reciprocal arrangement has been put in place with the legal services department of a neighbouring city council, to provide independent advice should disagreements arise within the commissioning body. However, there is no formal protocol or escalation process set down for dealing with conflicts of interest, which represents a risk as it places too great a reliance on the current personalities and goodwill involved in the partnership.
- 41 There is absolute clarity of purpose and division of roles between the work of the commissioning body and of the core strategy group.
- 42 The core strategy group has been in place since the autumn of 2000 with a range of membership including partners, providers and the voluntary sector. Meetings normally take place on a monthly basis although they can be more or less frequent as pressure dictates. The chairperson is a representative of the voluntary sector. All members are required to feed back to the groups they represent. For example registered social landlords receive minutes and updates via the Nottinghamshire social housing forum, which has a representative on the core strategy group.
- 43 Prior to the start of the programme the meetings of the core strategy group took the form of a sounding board and discussion forum. The terms of reference of this group have subsequently been updated to reflect the changing role from implementation to production of the five year strategy. In addition new people have been brought onto the group to broaden stakeholder representation and to assist with the work of the various project streams.
- 44 Core strategy group meetings now focus on specific issues. The group members have devised a template showing the structure of the five year strategy document and meetings are organised around this in such a way as to provide the material for the individual chapters.
- 45 Recently a decision has been taken to align the meetings of the core strategy group with those of the commissioning body in terms of relevant agenda items and also timing so that the core strategy group can feed the commissioning body with more up to date information to assist decision making and progress reporting.
- 46 As a result of interaction between the commissioning body and the core strategy group, a self assessment has been produced using the ODPM self assessment tool. This focussed on a number of questions aimed at successful preparation and implementation of the five year strategy and resulted in a document that clearly highlighted good and weaker areas for attention.
- 47 Most recently the core strategy group expressed their desire to build on this and to strengthen links with the commissioning body and the administering authority itself. It voted to invite the accountable officer to establish that connection formally. He has agreed.
- 48 The assistant director of housing, responsible for rents, benefits and information and communication technology, has performed the role of accountable officer since December 2002. He has a clear vision for Supporting People both at a local

and regional level and demonstrates clear commitment to raising the profile of the programme within the authority.

## Delivery arrangements

- 49 The Supporting People team is located in the housing department, reporting to the assistant director who is also the accountable officer. In order to provide a strong team infrastructure, additional funding of approximately £400,000, over and above the ODPM's administration grant of £292,000, has been provided by the city.
- 50 The headcount of posts in the team totals nineteen, however, six positions are currently unfilled. The team comprises:
- ◆ the service manager – currently in an 'acting' capacity;
  - ◆ business and performance co-ordinator plus administration (3);
  - ◆ contracts and grants team (9);
  - ◆ finance and monitoring team (4); and
  - ◆ strategy and development officers (2).
- 51 The current service manager has been acting in this role for some time, initially due to the ill health of the substantive post holder. However, the post has for several months been available to be filled on a permanent basis and we questioned why this has not happened. The background is that the housing department as a whole is undergoing a major restructure in preparation for the desired formation of an Arms Length Management Company, and as a result a significant number of staff are 'acting' at present. In recognition of the importance of the Supporting People programme, the budget for which equates to 10 per cent of the whole council budget, we consider that the risk posed by this uncertainty should now be mitigated by making a substantive appointment at the earliest opportunity.
- 52 The current service manager is seen as an effective leader with a strong sense of purpose. The team members are clear about their role and responsibilities within the service plan that exists for Supporting People and all members have had an appraisal within the last twelve months. SMART work plans are in place within the team, which are updated monthly and used in supervision to track progress and workloads.
- 53 The team as a whole encompasses a wide range of skills and background experiences including social services, housing and support providers. The team has the voluntary sector grants officers based within it, which offers opportunities for joint reviews and also takes advantage of their knowledge and understanding of this unique sector.
- 54 The council has supplemented the capacity of the team by employing an external consultant with a change management background from the autumn of 2003 to date to help with setting up systems, clarifying and documenting processes and capacity building with certain individuals.
- 55 Two former contracts officers have been seconded to the strategy and development roles within the last two months. This is in recognition of the need to focus resource on developing the five year strategy, related needs analysis and user engagement.
- 56 The Supporting People shadow strategy prepared in 2002 was rated as 'good' by the ODPM and particularly commended for clarity, structure and the involvement of partners, stakeholders and users in development of the vision and aims. The

strategy made clear links to other council strategies where these sat at the same level, for example the homelessness and community safety strategies.

- 57 At that time, the supply of services was mapped using a combination of data sources available to the authority and pro-active research. Needs analysis was carried out for some, but not all, client groups.
- 58 Since the shadow strategy, significant further needs assessment and supply mapping work has either been completed or is in progress including:
- ◆ city and South Nottinghamshire BME housing needs survey;
  - ◆ learning disability mapping exercise;
  - ◆ accommodation support needs of offenders survey;
  - ◆ city and county combined unmet needs survey;
  - ◆ MORI BME homelessness/drugs survey; and
  - ◆ city/county research on mental health residential and housing needs assessment.
- 59 A project plan has been prepared for development of the five year strategy, containing the high level milestones, reporting timetable and allocated task responsibilities. Beneath this, the necessary detailed work is now in progress or being planned, some tasks having been accelerated as a result of the two secondments described above. The structure of the strategy document was defined in a template to which the various work streams are addressing themselves.
- 60 ODPM feedback on the shadow strategy has also been analysed to ensure that previous strengths are built upon and weaker areas addressed.
- 61 Consultation work for the five year strategy is ongoing but activities to date include:
- ◆ a very well attended stakeholder consultation meeting took place in November 2003 incorporating client based workshops and opportunities for voting in relation to strategic objectives. All the feedback from the day was collated into a published brochure;
  - ◆ a seminar took place in May 2004 for floating support providers in partnership with SITRA; and
  - ◆ a programme of strategic seminars for each client group commenced with learning disabilities on 9 June 2004. These seminars encourage strategists, other commissioning agencies, carers and users to engage in the debate about Supporting People needs, services and strategic aims for the respective client group. The core strategy group are overseeing these to ensure that they are as efficient and productive as possible.
- 62 Currently, the picture of support service provision in Nottingham demonstrates a legacy of provider led services, the majority of which developed on an ad-hoc basis over many years, together with some others which were more hurriedly put in place during 2002 and early 2003 to take advantage of transitional housing benefit. As such, it is recognised that service provision as a whole does not necessarily match strategic goals at the present time.
- 63 By comparison with the profile prepared by the ODPM, the city has:
- ◆ a higher number of services for older people, offenders, the homeless and those fleeing domestic violence;

- ◆ a lower number of services for people with alcohol and mental health problems; and
  - ◆ no provision for those with HIV/AIDS, rough sleepers or travellers.
- 64 Benchmarking and sharing of costs and supply of services takes place with the newly formed core cities group. This provides an additional strand of information over and above the ODPM provided data.

## Financial monitoring & management

- 65 A total of 113 contracts are in place, covering 436 services. The last of the contracts was finally signed shortly before the inspection took place. The background to this was that the council considered that the model contract provided by the ODPM laid them open to an unacceptable level of financial risk occasioned by the lack of commitment by government to funding in future years. They changed and added clauses to it and, in their negotiations with providers, made it clear they were not prepared to contract to fund future years but instead made verbal commitment to it. This caused significant consternation among providers many of whom initially, and for some time afterwards, refused to sign their contracts. One provider said:

*'We are extremely disappointed by Nottingham City Council's attitude to contracting'.*

- 66 The contract terms were also changed by the council from capacity based to occupancy based, this again was to minimise the financial risk to the authority. Again the providers were unhappy but a commitment by the city to meet full occupancy so long as funds permitted has been fully met to date.
- 67 There is a robust process in place which has always ensured that providers are paid promptly. All providers we contacted were satisfied that the payment system is prompt, accurate and reliable. One provider commented:

*'The payment system is fantastic'.*

- 68 The council implemented a systematic satisfaction survey in the form of a feedback questionnaire for providers, specifically relating to payments. From the feedback thus gained the council redrafted the charging policy for greater clarity and produced a guidance document for providers. In addition to this, help and support has been given to providers on a one to one basis where this was needed. The result has been improved mutual understanding, better quality financial data being returned and a consequent reduction in the number of errors and queries generated on both sides.
- 69 Management and monitoring of the Supporting People grant is being carried out in a satisfactory manner. Phased budgets have been primed to compare actual spend with anticipated, on a cycle by cycle basis (13 x 4 weekly payment cycles). Each time a batch of payments is prepared this is used as a tool to identify anomalies and outliers at the earliest opportunity. Issues arising are raised and discussed between the finance and monitoring officers in the Supporting People team and housing finance on the same cyclical basis. Any major irregularity is drawn to the attention of the accountable officer.
- 70 Financial update reports on grant spending are regularly reviewed by departmental management team and presented to the commissioning body at every meeting. The accountable officer receives a monthly summary. Reporting to the executive board (portfolio holders) takes place as part of the housing general fund standard arrangements. Within the Supporting People team itself, awareness of financial performance has been raised as a result of new reporting and circulation processes implemented since May this year.

- 71 Financial risks to the authority from the Supporting People programme were identified at an early stage and mitigating actions attached. However, this document has not since been reviewed or updated.
- 72 A fairer charging policy has been put in place but in practice only a handful of applications for assessments have been received to date. These assessments are being done manually at present by suitably trained staff in the housing benefits section but plans exist to implement a computerised version in the autumn.
- 73 There is a need to develop more sophisticated financial management systems or tools that will help the administering authority understand their exposure to financial risk in the future. This was recognised by the commissioning body in discussions around fairer charging but there may be other areas of business which have not yet been identified or explored.
- 74 The council achieved savings in the first year of the programme. At year end 2003/04 the Supporting People grant was under spent by £919,000, a sum which was carried forward and used in part to make selective inflation increases to providers of low cost services. These savings were achieved by:
- ◆ changes to services following a review;
  - ◆ services that closed during 2003/04, some due to building problems that were already known about, some were temporary, and a couple of small services that were decommissioned;
  - ◆ recovery of overpayments in Supporting People grant on subsidy contracts during the first six days of the programme when transitional housing benefit (THB) was double funding; and
  - ◆ lower than anticipated take up of subsidies and fairer charging assessments.
- 75 Projections indicate a potential for further savings of the order of £2 million during 2004/05.

## Service reviews

- 76 ODPM guidance requires administering authorities (ALA's) to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years starting from 1 April 2003. ALA's are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to the ODPM through their regular performance reviews.
- 77 During 2002, Nottingham City Council was one of seven local authorities selected as pilots to test parts of the review process, in their case validation visits. This enabled them to feed information back to the ODPM about provider concerns with scoring, wording of service user questionnaire and difficulties with workbooks. The benefit to Nottingham was it allowed them early access to service review tools and initial guidance and was able to actively shape their steady state processes.
- 78 In October 2003 the Supporting People team developed its own strategic relevance toolkit which was published on the spkweb and which generated great interest from other ALA's. The toolkit was based on ODPM guidance but took this further in establishing a methodology to assess not only strategic outcomes but eligibility and demand. As part of this, providers are asked to complete a self assessment to show that their services meet the strategic objectives set out in the city's shadow strategy, together with wider strategic objectives as defined in both the ODPM strategic steer for Supporting People and other relevant national

policy agendas. Providers are also required to demonstrate the current and ongoing demand for their service and how the support being rendered meets the description 'housing related'. A stakeholder questionnaire is sent out by the team to augment information obtained directly from the provider.

- 79 Risk and impact assessments were carried out on the service providers and subsequently entered into a matrix in order to arrive at the priorities for early accreditation. Some providers are able to obtain accreditation by a process of passporting if they hold certain externally validated quality frameworks or if already accredited by other ALA's within the Supporting People Midlands contracting group.
- 80 There is a clear strategy to deal with high and ineligible costs through the service review process. Priorities in setting the programme were driven by high cost and/or high risk. As a result of provider comments, regarding more co-ordinated ways to group their services, the original review programme was amended giving greater efficiency. A single review is now done of the provider organisation and then an example of each type of their provision, for example their homelessness provision, if broadly similar, might be dealt with as one review unit.
- 81 Other reviews timetabled early were those where the providers had refused to sign their contracts, as discussed earlier.
- 82 Of a total programme of 108 service reviews over the three year period allowed, 30 are now complete with a further 43 ongoing. Analysis shows that the service reviews currently in progress represent 65 per cent of the annual Supporting People budget, demonstrating the focus of attention on high cost services.
- 83 Service reviews are on target and the programme is monitored frequently to check progress and identify any slippage against the timetable.
- 84 Good quality external training has been made available to the contracts officers who undertake the reviews. The skills and capacity of these officers is also augmented by the use of other city council staff for example social services. The service review of refuges was completed in conjunction with homelessness team to look at wider issues of increased efficiencies. In the case of the mental health client group, reviews are inclusive of NHS trust staff. Nevertheless we did receive comments from a few providers that parts of the review were being undertaken by officers who did not demonstrate relevant skills for the client group or service.
- 85 No provision currently exists for reviews to be moderated externally. We consider that this would provide a useful additional dimension and source of feedback to the review process.
- 86 Two out of the four contracts officers have recently been seconded to work on the five year strategy but have not been replaced. The council must ensure that this does not undermine plans to review all services in the next three years.
- 87 Information about the review process is made available for service users via the users' newsletter, or at the time of the review by invitation to discussion groups or individual visits.
- 88 As part of each review, service users are asked to comment on their experiences and these are related back to client group objectives set out in the shadow strategy. For example the strategy states that all women's refuges should be in safe places, so at review the location and environment of all refuges were considered in the light of user views. As a result of this one refuge is due to be relocated.
- 89 The eligibility guidance issued to providers includes 'a day in the life', within which a range of daily activities are illustrated with comments as to eligibility. This

gives a very practical reference point. The eligibility criteria set by the city is said by some providers to be stricter than that imposed by other ALA's with whom they work. This is particularly evident in the scrutiny to which services provided on a 24 hour a day basis are subjected.

- 90 Providers included in the reviews which were commenced in the first year reported an initial lack of clarity and understanding of the expectations. However, written documentation was issued in April 2004 and as a response to provider feedback, training is now in place for providers who will be reviewed from June onwards so that they understand the process and what they need to do for each stage.
- 91 Providers' experience of service reviews has been mixed both positive and negative and we found this to be reflective of the relationship that exists generally between the city and its providers. More will be said about this under 'user involvement and partnership arrangements'. Some providers reported that the reviews were being conducted fairly and sympathetically with a genuine desire on the part of reviewing officers to bring about the best outcomes for service users. Others have found the process high handed, protracted and disjointed, to the point that they are fearful of outcomes.
- 92 Work is going on 'behind the scenes' at the city council to look at total funding for packages where proposals are likely to reduce the proportion given by Supporting People, however, providers are not generally being made aware of this. The Council could make these deliberations more transparent in an effort to allay some fears.
- 93 Recommendations for review decisions are taken to quarterly commissioning body meetings but there is a call-in procedure if it is felt that the decision should be made more urgently than the next available meeting date.
- 94 A mechanism has been put in place for provider appeals which has been tested and has resulted in appeals both upheld and not upheld. Appeals can only be based on the following:
- ◆ The ALA has failed to consider all the relevant facts at a service review.
  - ◆ The ALA has failed to adhere to the service review procedures.
  - ◆ The ALA has not taken account of wider strategic considerations for the service.
- 95 The council has learnt from the experience of an upheld appeal decision, which highlighted failings of timing in the appeals process (recognition of the need for a call in) and also reinforced the need to adhere absolutely to the city's own published process.
- 96 The council has concerns about the proportion of review decisions that are currently generating appeals, which is of the order of 10 per cent. This is representing a significant burden on the Supporting People team and at the commissioning body meeting on 10 June the need for an appeals sub group to be set up was agreed, relating to the upheld appeal described above.
- 97 Service reviews have resulted in recommendations being submitted to the commissioning body based on concerns both about quality of service and lack of eligibility for Supporting People funds. The commissioning body has taken some difficult decisions which have resulted in poor services being decommissioned following review.
- 98 Other service reviews have resulted in cost savings, for example savings of £429,995 were made on block subsidy contracts as a result of reviews during 2003/04. In these cases the service reviews have resulted in action plans for the

provider together with renewed interim contracts based upon a reduction of the previous costs.

- 99 At the date of our inspection the highest cost Supporting People service in Nottingham was £976.68 per person per week for accommodation based support for people with learning difficulties. This service was being reviewed at the time but a new price had not yet been negotiated. The lowest cost service was £0.71 a week for a community alarm service.

## Value for money

- 100 In order to make an assessment of whether or not the support services in Nottingham represent value for money it is necessary to first have an understanding of the background and history of the existing picture of provision and its related price.
- 101 Nottingham City Council has been identified by the ODPM as one of 19 local authorities having the highest cost services. Costs rose by approximately £10 million between the 'golden' and 'platinum' cuts, at December 2002 and July 2003 respectively. Especially high costs were associated with particular client groups, with the result that over half the total budget was being spent on just over 10 per cent of the provision. These groups were:
- ◆ learning disability – 14.6 per cent of the budget spent on 1.9 per cent of provision;
  - ◆ mental health – 11.1 per cent of the budget spent on 2.6 per cent of provision; and
  - ◆ single homeless – 29.0 per cent of the budget spent on 7 per cent of provision.
- 102 The reasons for the increase in costs can be attributed to:
- ◆ Some schemes missing from the golden cut due to late identification of relevant services by providers and in some cases the housing benefit section.
  - ◆ New subsidy services that reached capacity before 3<sup>1</sup> March 03, having originally displayed their occupancy (and therefore cost) below capacity.
  - ◆ New provider led services developed in the latter part of 2003/04, some of which aimed to meet need as defined by the shadow strategy and others which, in retrospect following review, are felt to have been opportunistic in nature, designed to take advantage of THB/Supporting People.
  - ◆ Providers took the opportunity to fully cost out their services with some resultant increases in costs for services already in existence.
  - ◆ The council itself greatly expanded its own provision of floating support and also commissioned additional services for those with a learning disability. In both cases the need for these services had been clearly established as part of a strategic framework for some time before the THB funding opportunity presented itself.
    - ◆ In the case of the floating support it was an initiative by the housing department (landlord services) to meet its tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention objectives.
    - ◆ The supported living was developed for people with learning disabilities in conjunction with social services and health colleagues. This was to meet a local strategy called 'Positive Futures' as well as to assist with

the closure of a long stay hospital, which necessitated alternative solutions being found for the residents.

- 103 Housing benefit is a locally determined benefit and the city council as a unitary authority were responsible for assessing claims for transitional housing benefit (THB) - the main vehicle used by the ODPM for sizing the eventual Supporting People pot. The hostels team in the housing benefit section evolved as the team with responsibility for processing THB claims. Just two senior officers made all the decisions in respect of eligibility to ensure consistency of approach. In respect of the actual support needs of clients they were guided by other officers' expertise from both the Supporting People team and from social services. We have concluded that a somewhat more liberal interpretation of eligibility was taken by social services than by Supporting People staff.
- 104 To some extent therefore the ALA must accept responsibility for the escalation of these costs; however, we found no evidence that any cost shunting had taken place. It was the development of new and clearly defensible services that was responsible for a large part of the cost increase, not a shift of funding for services that were already in existence.
- 105 The commissioning body is highly cognisant of value for money factors and this concern is given sharp focus through the review process. All services were initially mapped against value for money tables to show the outliers and all the high cost services were prioritised for the earliest review. Low cost outliers were generally placed in year two.
- 106 In addition to comparisons with ODPM regional and national cost indicators, further benchmarking has been undertaken against figures provided by the major cities group. Benchmarking the hourly rates has shown them to be generally within reasonable limits and that resulting high costs are more a product of the high number of hours per user, particularly for certain client groups such as learning disabilities.
- 107 In some cases, action was very promptly taken after 1 April 2003 to address value for money outside of the review process. One example is that registered care homes in receipt of supported housing management grant (SHMG) were given their six months entitlement to notice as soon as the programme began, as it was clear that there would be no ongoing entitlement to Supporting People funds. Thus no further payments of legacy SHMG were made after October 2003 to these homes.
- 108 In another case contract negotiations to reduce the price have taken place with a major homeless provider. This included a presentation by the accountable officer to the board of the social landlord concerned, to apprise them of the risks to their income stream engendered by the current Supporting People grant environment. These negotiations have resulted in a cost reduction of close to £500,000 per annum from this one provider. Despite these delicate negotiations the relationship with the provider is strong and positive.
- 109 Cross authority work to improve procurement or commissioning arrangements for Supporting People services is not yet well developed. This is referred to in more detail under 'user involvement and partnership arrangements'.
- 110 Nottingham City Council has taken a decision not to issue steady state contracts and will not do so until the grant distribution formula and timescale are known. Where necessary, new interim contracts are being issued.
- 111 There is recognition by the authority that there is scope for further economies and efficiency gains over time, even where service reviews are complete.

- 112 A number of the schemes we visited as part of the inspection were not currently offering value for money. Examples of these were:
- ◆ services where it is not clear what is being offered in addition that justifies higher than average costs;
  - ◆ services where it is clear that Supporting People monies are funding services which are not housing related support; and
  - ◆ services being provided for clients whose needs are lower level or reducing but who are occupying high cost spaces due to a lack of ability to move on.
- 113 However, other schemes we visited had already been reviewed or had reviews in progress. We are confident that the above factors were also being recognised by the reviewing officers, that recommendations being made as a result were sound and that these will result in greater value for money being achieved in Nottingham than is the case at present.
- 114 As experience grows, the team are developing a more sophisticated approach to value for money, including greater awareness of provider budget analysis techniques and improved understanding of allocations to central costs.

## **User involvement & partnership arrangements**

- 115 There is no 'inclusive forum' as such to provide engagement with users and carers. Instead of this, the council relates to a network of existing, multi-purpose groups.
- 116 The approach being taken by the city has the advantage of making best use of those existing groups who are already engaged and active and therefore precludes the need to develop new groups solely for consultation on Supporting People. A plethora of these exist including:
- ◆ Speakout for homeless.
  - ◆ Elderly Voices.
  - ◆ Learning disability service user forum.
  - ◆ Alcohol users forum.
  - ◆ Nottingham and Nottinghamshire refugee forum.
- 117 Users and carers who are not already plugged in to one or other of these groups, however, will not be reached by this method and are therefore currently excluded from consultation. The council will need to find alternative ways to engage those who are 'hard to reach' by virtue of falling through this net.
- 118 The council has lost focus on service user involvement since the production of the shadow strategy but demonstrates awareness of this and has recently seconded an officer to work on user inclusion for the five year strategy. We met a group of users and carers who were very enthusiastic about becoming more involved and were keen to help the city organise an awareness event or conference as a starting point.
- 119 Leading up to production of the shadow strategy, a service user involvement plan was put together and this is now being built into a wider consultation plan for the five year strategy.
- 120 The council's relationship with support providers presents a mixed picture and one of extremes. We found many providers highly praiseworthy of the team and of the accountable officer; and there were examples where the Council has 'gone the extra mile' for the providers, for example payments made over and above

contractual obligations (occupancy versus capacity) and inflation increases for low cost providers at the start of 2004/05.

- 121 However, there were also a significant number whose experience of the relationship was very negative. On several occasions we heard words like 'high handed', 'dictatorial' and 'prescriptive' used to describe the city council. The city's intransigence over the contracts and financial risk was cited by way of example. Other references were made to the tone of correspondence. Some providers even indicated they were frightened of what the council might do to them in terms of funding cuts.
- 122 It is clear that providers do understand and accept the messages coming from the city about future government funding challenges and the requirement for the services environment to become strategically planned and needs led. However, there was a clear indication that, for some, the manner and tone in which these messages are being delivered is not reflective of partnership spirit or joint working.
- 123 Inside the council we saw good evidence of partnership working so far as Supporting People is concerned. Officers and managers from strategic housing and social care come together with the team and with other agencies as part of the core strategy group. Councillors we met demonstrated understanding of the aims and aspirations of the programme. We are satisfied that there is a level playing field maintained between internal and external support providers.
- 124 There are some formal protocols in existence that provide for joint working and information sharing, including the MAPPA<sup>2</sup>, the Housing Corporation and the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) – which became part of the newly created Commission for Social Care Improvement (CSCI) on 1 April 2004.
- 125 In order to meet the needs of those for whom necessary specialist housing related support services are unavailable locally, cross authority working is essential. Moreover there are some for whom a move out of their immediate area is essential, for example women fleeing domestic violence and some ex offenders.
- 126 Various cross authority groups exist – including one between Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council and a wider one which includes other counties such as Lincolnshire and cities including Derby. Whilst dialogue has taken place between these groups and continues to take place, significant further work will need to be done to gain a full understanding of the complex cross boundary issues. Some initiatives currently in place are:
- ◆ work being undertaken on a Supporting People unmet needs survey across the city and county;
  - ◆ a protocol was established for provider accreditation between the city and county such that if one accredits a provider, the others will passport them. This has now been adopted more widely across the region;
  - ◆ the Nottinghamshire social housing forum includes representatives of both the city and county Supporting People teams. This is also true of other strategic and commissioning groups; and
  - ◆ a request to share lettings information provided by registered social landlords via CORE recording, which details the previous location of newly housed

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<sup>2</sup> MAPPA is the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel Agreement which ensures that the needs of high risk offenders are met whilst ensuring that the public are protected from any risks these offenders might present.

tenants. This information will provide the material for a cross authority statement.

- 127 Nottingham City Council has been an active player in the newly established Supporting People core cities group to examine issues common to large urban centres. This has included data sharing, input to the allocation formula debate and benchmarking.
- 128 Cross authority discussions also take place at the East Midlands regional implementation groups and the Housing Corporations three cities group (Nottingham, Derby and Leicester). In the latter case issues relating to capital investment and Supporting People revenue funding have been raised, resulting in a broad statement setting out the three cities priorities for investment in the sector in the future.
- 129 The council recognises that in the housing and housing related support field, cross authority arrangements are not well developed at a strategic level. There are plans for discussion to take place at this level between the city and county, but the accountable officer also expressed the view that to have the greatest impact the debate needs to be regional and to include other relevant agencies such as the Housing Corporation.
- 130 There are some more unusual external links being made by the Supporting People team, for example a local general practitioner with a particular interest and specialism in homelessness and substance abuse.
- 131 Where gaps in partnerships are identified, prompt action is taken to remedy this. One example we highlighted was that the youth offending team had no representation on the core strategy group. Within days of us leaving site this invitation had been extended and accepted.

## **Customer care, access to services & information**

- 132 Whilst mystery shopping at the various council offices around the city we were given a pleasant reception together with good signposting to available services. However, we found very little availability of information about Supporting People in the form of leaflets or posters other than at the Supporting People office itself.
- 133 Although reception staff were helpful and knew where to direct us, we found quite limited knowledge or understanding of Supporting People funded services amongst them.
- 134 Related agencies such as local libraries, citizens advice bureau or health centres, are also currently not utilised as an opportunity to communicate with those who might not commonly access the city's own offices.
- 135 We have a concern that the lack of ready access to information as highlighted above may doubly disadvantage those for whom English is not their first language.
- 136 The city council provides information for its users and stakeholders in a number of ways:
  - ◆ There are some useful Supporting People specific web pages accessible from the city's main website.
  - ◆ A county-wide directory of services has been produced and printed which was jointly funded and commissioned by the city and county council together with other relevant agencies.
  - ◆ A city based directory of floating support services has been developed and is available as a document on the website.

- ◆ A quick guide to Supporting People was produced to inform users.
- ◆ A glossy, summary version of the shadow strategy itself which is easy reading.
- ◆ Documents are available in other formats and languages, although we found nothing in pictorial form for those with learning disabilities.
- ◆ Newsletters for providers have been produced since 2001 and most providers found these to be of value. However, providers are not involved in the production of this newsletter.
- ◆ The first users' newsletter was produced in April 2004, however, users were not involved in shaping the format and reliance was placed on providers to distribute the newsletter. Consequently we found that receipt has been patchy.
- ◆ Service users, their carers & advocates can obtain information on fairer charging from the users newsletter and from the quick guide.

137 Work in progress to improve access to services includes:

- ◆ The council is piloting the idea of having a single access point for the multitude of floating support services in the city. This pilot, which is supported by the ODPM, is intended to improve co-ordination across the sector and will commence in October.
- ◆ Together with their computer systems supplier, Nottingham City Council is implementing a web based solution which will give members of the public a search facility to look for available services by location, type of service, client group and a number of other such factors. The website will also incorporate a password protected area for providers to access information about their own funding and to enter their performance indicator returns on-line. Resources have been allocated and implementation meetings set to achieve a go live date in late summer this year (2004).

138 In June 2000 it became a requirement for unitary authorities and certain other public bodies to produce a local charter entitled 'better care, higher standards', for anyone aged 18 or over in England who has difficulties associated with old age, long term illness or disability and for carers who support people in these circumstances. The charter sets out standards for services in health, housing and social services and indicates what to do if these expectations are not met. As such these are key departmental documents designed to empower users and give authorities a tool against which they can monitor performance based on the views of users and carers. The charter should be updated annually.

139 It was disappointing to note that the Nottingham 'better care, higher standards' charter makes no reference to Supporting People and has not been revised since 2001. This represents a lost opportunity to promote joined up working between services, to encourage user engagement and to make public services more accessible.

## Diversity

140 Nottingham City Council has a corporate commitment to the diversity agenda, which is seen to be driven from the top, by both councillors and officers. A new team has been set up with the remit of 'Action on Diversity' to implement the actions in the councils first race equality scheme by May 2005 and to ensure all other relevant standards are met.

- 141 The council aims to achieve all 5 levels of the equalities standard over the next 4 to 5 years and is currently awaiting external validation that it has reached equalities standard 2.
- 142 The council's staff profile broadly matches that of the community it serves.
- 143 At a corporate level work is under way to review the city's procurement strategy with a focus on the equality and diversity agenda. This project is being led by the director of housing who also chairs the commissioning body. The link between this and the Supporting People service will be made by ensuring that steady state contracts, services and the approach to procurement will align with the city's equality and diversity policy.
- 144 In Supporting People, one of the key strategic aims is that services should be 'accessible and appropriate to BME communities'.
- 145 To assist with the identification of needs, and therefore gaps in supply, the council has sponsored a range of research into equalities related issues, for example Black and Asian young single homeless and the housing needs of ethnic minorities.
- 146 The jointly commissioned housing needs study represents a partnership approach to BME housing and social care assessment by the five local authorities in South Nottinghamshire. The ultimate aim of this is to inform the strategic development of services to meet the needs of individual communities. The study has provided data on a wide range of aspects which will help to shape planning activity and strategic direction, however, the report is only recently published and there is no action plan in place as yet to address the findings.
- 147 Research has also identified health needs among BME groups, especially related to aids and adaptations work for BME elders.
- 148 The second stage of the service review of domestic violence refuges will be to look at exclusion policies to ensure that everyone who needs it can access the service including women with disabilities and women with teenage sons.
- 149 Examples of outcomes that illustrate commitment to diversity in Nottingham include:
  - ◆ There are a number of services in existence, both accommodation based and floating support, that are culturally specific.
  - ◆ A partnership initiative known as Diverted Giving was launched just before Christmas 2002 and is aimed at persuading Nottingham people to donate money to projects working with rough sleepers and those with drug and alcohol problems, rather than giving directly to beggars.
  - ◆ The services for care leavers in Nottingham cater for young people from diverse backgrounds.
  - ◆ A new group has been established by the partners to look at a wider approach to supported living for people with mental health problems
  - ◆ A range of floating support services have been developed in response to research that indicated that minority groups were not using hostels as they were culturally inappropriate, for example the appointment of a tenancy sustainment officer for BME tenants.
  - ◆ Joint working has taken place between the Supporting People teams and the criminal justice intervention programme (CJIP) to increase the number of temporary accommodation beds available to offenders with drug problems. This involved joint commissioning of capital funds available to carry out

improvement works to accommodation units which have since been designated for CJIP clients.

## Outcomes for service users

- 150 The shadow Supporting People strategy set out key outcomes that were sought from all services that transferred into the programme in April 2003. These were:
- ◆ services are accessible and appropriate to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities;
  - ◆ providers meet the standards set out in the quality assessment framework for Supporting People; and
  - ◆ services foster effective partnerships.
- 151 In addition, key outcomes were also set out for each client group, for example:
- ◆ a choice of wet or dry accommodation services for users of alcohol;
  - ◆ an increase in supported housing options to reflect choice and need for those with learning disabilities; and
  - ◆ support services to assist with accessing suitable adapted accommodation for those with physical disabilities.
- 152 Since its introduction in April 2003, the Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes for a number of service users in Nottingham some examples of which are:
- ◆ The availability of extra care housing for older people has increased.
  - ◆ Excellent availability of accommodation and support for care leavers.
  - ◆ A range of floating support schemes have been put in place.
  - ◆ More people with learning disabilities have been enabled to take their own tenancies.
  - ◆ The commissioning body have agreed to set a service specification, following consultation with stakeholders and providers, that requires direct access providers to allocate 25 per cent of total bed spaces to those clients for whom the authority has a statutory duty.
  - ◆ We were shown examples of residents who were now able to exercise far greater choice in their lifestyles than had been the case in their previous registered care home environment.
  - ◆ One provider has been able to improve the range of services available for those with mental health needs although it is recognised by the city that there is limited use of Supporting People for low level support and a need for greater variety of services and choice at this level.
  - ◆ Another provider has been able to fund an independent advocate for those with mental health needs. Users reported that they had been encouraged in their independence with support from scheme staff.
  - ◆ A provider of services for offenders is able to evidence some positive outcomes for young people who are now able to work and contribute to their rent, whilst accessing support. The provider sees this as one of the most significant outcomes of Supporting People.
  - ◆ One national provider of accommodation for offenders has a team of people committed to pre-review of their schemes nationally.

- ◆ Joint commissioning is highly developed between the social services department and health, including some use of Health Act flexibilities
- 153 Poor services have been decommissioned as a result of the review process. However, the city has been careful to ensure that notice periods have taken account of the time needed to secure alternative solutions for vulnerable users before the decision takes effect and the funding is withdrawn.
- 154 As a direct result of experience gained through the review process a service user's charter has been drafted by the Supporting People team for women fleeing domestic violence. This charter sets out the service standards which users should expect of any refuge they access, irrespective of provider. At present this charter is in draft form, being circulated for consultation.
- 155 Whilst support plans for service users are for the most part in place, we did find exceptions – one of which was one of the city's own sheltered schemes. The ODPM extended the deadline for the implementation of support plans to sheltered housing tenants, to 1 April 2004, and it is disappointing to find that this has not been achieved.
- 156 There were some concerns raised by providers about the ability to move service users on. The perception is that the city have taken the view that if a service user changes address, this amounts to a new commissioning decision which is a barrier to moving service users on to greater independence. The city is able to evidence, however, that they have continued to fund certain clients who have moved. We suspect this represents an area of miscommunication which would benefit from greater transparency.
- 157 We also understand that applicants with outstanding rent arrears can have difficulty accessing housing, due to exclusion policies. A particular example drawn to our attention was the case of ex offenders, where a typical scenario might involve a tenant being taken into custody, perhaps held on remand for some months and then serving a prison term, during which arrears accrue and the tenancy is ended. Upon release, the applicant then encounters these difficulties when seeking accommodation.
- 158 The following case study demonstrates a positive outcome for one particular service user and serves as one illustration of the effectiveness of the council's work in this area.

## Supporting People Case Study

Service User Group: Offenders/people at risk of offending and vulnerable young people

Type of Service: Short to medium term core, and longer term cluster accommodation

Key Players: Service Provider, Probation service

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Mr A was a 17 year old asylum seeker from Iraq, who arrived in England on the back of a lorry 2 years ago.
- ◆ He spoke very little English.
- ◆ On arrival in England he spent three months in hospital.
- ◆ A referral was made to the service provider and he was offered accommodation at the core unit which provided 24 hour support.
- ◆ Through the support given by staff in the unit and local agencies Mr A reached the stage where he could live more independently and he moved into the cluster units.
- ◆ The level of support given is now very low.
- ◆ Support given included help overcoming obstacles to access education and lobbying for financial support, liaison with other agencies and acting as advocate.

Outcome for Service User:

- ◆ During the last two years Mr A has learnt to speak English fluently.
- ◆ He went to College.
- ◆ He is a talented artist and with the support of his provider he has exhibited locally.
- ◆ He was accepted at University to study photography as part of which he was required to pass tests to prove his competency in English.
- ◆ He works at two jobs and pays his own rent.
- ◆ He also works as a volunteer interpreter for the refugee council.
- ◆ He has completed his first year at university and achieved a 2:1.
- ◆ The Supporting People funding has provided stability and support to allow him to access both education and employment.

## Summary

- 159 Overall, we judge that Nottingham City Council is delivering a good, two-star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. We have highlighted the following areas in reaching this judgement.
- 160 Governance of the programme is robust, with strong leadership and direction provided by the commissioning body and a skilled and energetic team delivering the service. Grant management, monitoring and reporting is carried out in an assiduous manner with prompt and accurate payments to providers.

- 161 The service review programme is well under way and is already delivering marked improvements in quality and value for money, with savings achieved in the first year. There is evidence of positive outcomes for service users.
- 162 The nature of partnership with providers presents a mixed picture, with some very positive experiences. However, relationships with a significant number of providers have been soured by the tone and manner of communications with the city over the last eighteen months.
- 163 Some users are being missed from consultation by the current virtual inclusive forum, if they are not part of the recognised structures.
- 164 Opportunities are being missed to promote the service through making written material available in more places and by updating the better care, higher standards charter.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 165 Within the Supporting People team the ODPM implementation milestones were met and the shadow strategy rated as 'good'. More recently the IT system has been updated to the latest ODPM requirements, enabling the team to produce the required data extracts and strategy tables in accordance with the ODPM phase 2 timetable.
- 166 In a number of earlier sections in this report we have identified examples where service improvements in Supporting People have been implemented by the city as a result of learning from its own experience and that of others, including the service review methodology, the appeals process and in payments to providers.
- 167 Savings have been made from service reviews, high cost services have been successfully challenged, value for money has been achieved and poor services remodelled or decommissioned. Difficult decisions have been taken by the commissioning body.
- 168 Corporately, the council improved its comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) score from 'weak' in 2002 to fair in 2003, chiefly due to performance improvements made within the housing benefits service. The service improvement plan for housing benefits was developed and managed by the Supporting People accountable officer.
- 169 As a response to CPA criticisms the council has embarked upon a major change programme known as 'Gearing Up', focussed upon making changes in both structure and organisational culture.
- 170 Despite some good services, the CPA highlighted corporate failings in the lack of an overall approach to performance management. Through the 'Gearing Up' programme, the council has been prioritising the development of this approach. A new chief executive joined the city in early 2003 and in September 2003 an interim deputy chief executive was put in post to drive improvement and strengthen corporate capacity. The Audit Commissions latest annual audit letter endorsed the councils approach to improvement planning.
- 171 Prior to 2003 there were no systems to collect and report BVPI's across the whole council. These are now in place and the Strategic management team performance reviews these monthly, with quarterly reports to the executive board across all activities. We were shown, in the report to the executive board in March 2004 that, as at the third quarter of 2003/04, there had been a positive effect on best value performance Indicators within the city. Approximately two thirds showing improved performance against the previous year end and the report also drew clearly to attention the ones that remained a cause for concern.
- 172 The following table shows performance against the thirteen housing BVPI's as reported.

	Top Quartile	Second Quartile	Third Quartile	Bottom Quartile
2002/03	3	2	4	4
2003/04	7	1	4	1

- 173 Whilst the above figures are unaudited at this stage, they do represent actions that will have resulted in clear and discernable benefits for customers of the service.

## How good are the current improvement plans?

- 174 There is a service plan in place for Supporting People which supports the housing departmental plan and in turn this makes links upwards to the councils strategic priorities.
- 175 Portfolio holders now have their own action plans monitored by the leader. These sit alongside the departmental plan, indicating that the new performance culture is pervading the political arena.
- 176 A key improvement plan for the Supporting People programme is the development of the five year strategy which will replace the shadow strategy in guiding how services will be delivered and shaped in the future.
- 177 There is a clear focus on the production of this strategy and with direction and leadership from the commissioning body; detailed work is well under way. The involvement and participation of stakeholders, users and carers is an integrated part of this plan. A robustly monitored project plan shows clearly how the various milestones will be achieved, where the responsibilities lie and the reporting stages.
- 178 To augment capacity within the team, approval was recently given for two contract support officers to be recruited to assist with desktop analysis and pre-review work.
- 179 Whilst we are in no doubt that the management of risk is a subject uppermost in the mind of the accountable officer, we were surprised to find that although financial and other risks to the programme were identified at an early stage, the related schedule and action plan are not living documents and have not been updated since the shadow strategy. We consider that this matter should be rectified at the earliest opportunity to ensure that risk considerations are factored into all relevant discussions.
- 180 The service review programme is an effective and dynamic plan which is clearly delivering positive outcomes for service users and for the council.
- 181 The performance management framework in housing, introduced in April 2003 spent its first year concentrating on core, business critical performance issues. This year the focus is on the themes of the strategic plan and service managers are developing their own local performance indicators against these. An example in Supporting People is that through the review of direct access schemes a local performance indicator has been agreed to reduce the average stay to three months in order to improve throughputs.
- 182 The so called 'mustard' method of performance management is now in use, named after Colman's who developed it. Each service team assesses its performance indicators on a monthly basis as one of the following - taking big strides, making steady progress, standing still or going backwards. All staff understand this simple method and because of this there has been wide acceptance. Departmental management team then collate these into a picture of each department's activity on a monthly basis and this in turn feeds reporting to the executive board.

## Will improvements be delivered?

- 183 The aims for the Supporting People service are clear, with a focus on positive outcomes for the service user whilst maintaining value for money and strategic direction for the ALA.

- 184 The council shows innovation in, for example, the plans to develop a single access point for floating support services, with the aim of improving co-ordination and customer service across this sector.
- 185 The Supporting People team have taken the performance framework and 'mustard' method one step further than the rest of the organisation to include additional weekly reporting of achievements for the week and learning for the week. In this way they radiate an ethos of continuous improvement.
- 186 The commissioning body is a strong and cohesive partnership that will drive the Supporting People programme forward. They have demonstrated their capacity to challenge quality and cost of services. Positive engagement from the PCT and from the Probation Service is a particular strength.
- 187 However, there is a danger that cost cutting and other contentious decisions made in future by the body will have a damaging effect on the relationship with providers which in some cases is already fragile. The future success of the Supporting People programme will largely depend upon the commitment of the council to rebalance this relationship and thus engender the necessary level of mutual co-operation and trust.
- 188 As a council, Nottingham City has recognised its past failings and is now taking rapid steps to address them through its ambitious change programme. The new performance culture actively brings forward perceived weaknesses and seeks to address them; an example of this is the best value reviews and inspections which now result in specific improvement plans.
- 189 The council's strategic plan and the community plan produced by the local strategic partnership do not currently embrace Supporting People. There are plans in progress to develop a new community plan but the 'One City Partnership Nottingham', whilst improving, is not yet thought to be a fully cohesive and productive group.
- 190 We do detect, however, a growing acknowledgement within the council of the role of Supporting People as a delivery vehicle for some their strategic priorities. The profile is clearly being raised by a number of officers and members, most notably the accountable officer and the portfolio holder.

## Summary

- 191 Overall, we judge that Nottingham City Council has promising prospects for delivering further improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme.
- 192 The commissioning body is a formidable partnership which has the focus and drive to reshape the housing related support service environment to one which is strategically led, cost effective and leading to real improvements in the independence of vulnerable people.
- 193 The Supporting People five year strategy is taking shape and we are confident it will be delivered on time. There have been significant service improvements in the last year to eighteen months both at a corporate and service level.
- 194 However, Supporting People is not yet embedded at a strategic level within the city council and although there are distinct signs that this is changing it is too early to see any real results. Whilst risk management activities clearly take place, the approach needs formalising within the Supporting People service.
- 195 Finally, providers are not consistently satisfied with the nature of their relationships with the council. These relationships will need to be improved and

nurtured in order to demonstrate commitment to working in partnership which is key to the ongoing success of the programme.

## Appendices

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

### Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Supporting People Shadow Strategy.
- ◆ A variety of other strategy documents including housing strategy, BVR for older peoples services, BVPP, community plan and strategic plan.
- ◆ Service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters.
- ◆ Service Review Timetable.
- ◆ Risk and contingency planning schedule.
- ◆ Better Care, Higher Standards document.
- ◆ Performance reports.
- ◆ Terms of reference for key governing groups.
- ◆ Minutes of key meetings.

### Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ Interviews and focus groups with key staff.
- ◆ Service visits.
- ◆ Mystery shopping.
- ◆ Focus group with providers.
- ◆ Interviews with service users.
- ◆ Visits to Council Offices, Citizens Advice Bureau, Libraries, health centres and other similar public amenities.

### List of people interviewed

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Amanda Schofield	Service Manager – Housing Strategy
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Andrew Lowe	Acting Corporate Director of Social Services
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Anthony Dixon	Supporting People Contracts Officer
Bev Angell	Service Manager – Housing Finance
Ceri Victory	Supporting People Contracts Officer
Christina Barrett	Supporting People Contracts Officer
Councillor Dave Trimble	Portfolio Holder for Housing and Social Services
Councillor G Culley	Leader of the Conservatives
Councillor Jon Collins	Leader of the Council
Councillor M Cobb	Conservative Councillor
Dr Michael Varnam	GP with Special Interest – Homelessness and Substance Misuse
Gary Harvey	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator
Geoffrey Hibbert	SP Accountable Officer, Assistant Director of Housing
Ian Humphries	Supporting People Contracts Officer
Jed Francique	Head of Performance and Scrutiny
Jenny Danson	Consultant, Kendric Ash
John Cowings	Acting Service Manager – Action on Diversity
Ken Beaumont	Team Manager, Youth Offending Team
Kirsty Everson	Acting Supporting People Service Manager
Lesley Daley	Assistant Chief Probation Officer, Notts Probation Service
Lis Lawrence	Manager, Age Concern
Lynne Pennington	Chair of Commissioning Body, Corporate Director of Housing
Mark Jennison Boyle	Supported Living Co-ordinator – Learning Disabilities
Mike Cutler	Team Manager, Leaving Care Team, Social Services
Mike Jackson	Interim Deputy Chief Executive

Neil Matthews	Housing Benefit Team Manager (Supported Accommodation)
Samantha Millbank	Chief Executive, Nottingham City Primary Care Trust
Steph Palmerone	General Manager (Adult Mental Health), Notts NHS Healthcare Trust
Tara Bath	Finance and Monitoring Team Leader
Tony Cooke	Drugs Strategy Programme Manager

## Demographic information

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

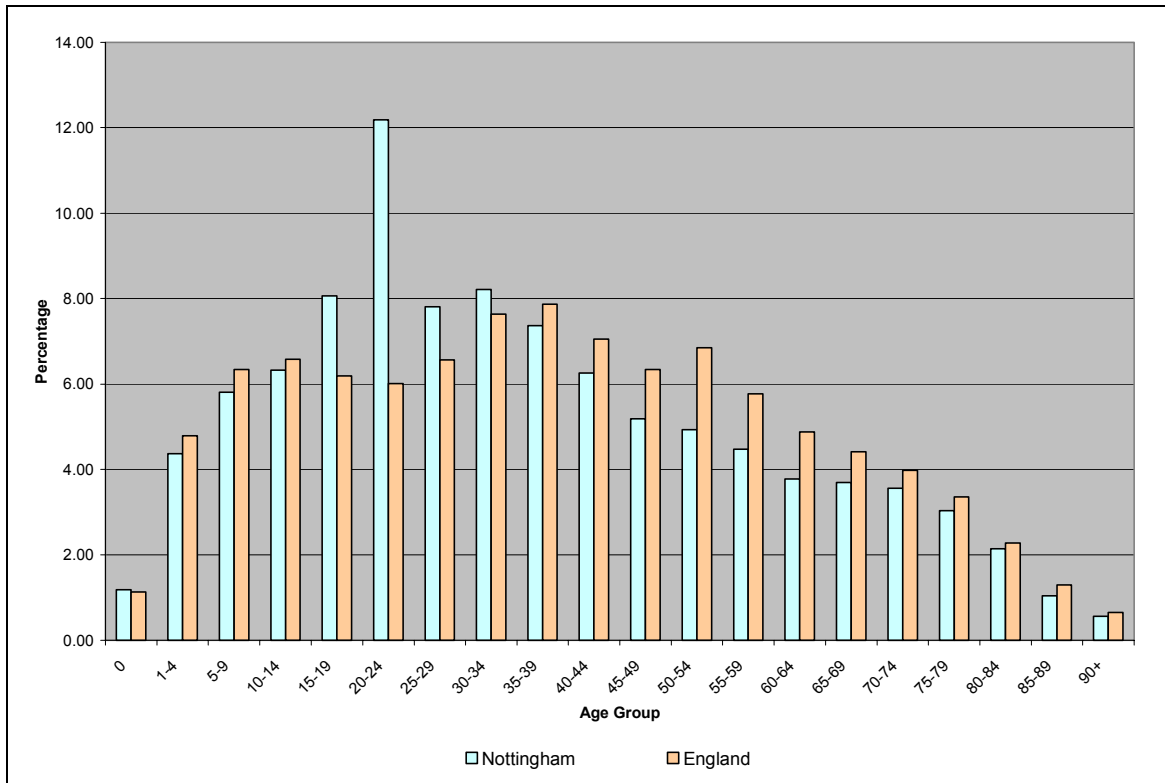
Measure	Nottingham	England
Population (mid-2001)	270,000	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	14.04	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	18.95	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	4.4	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>3</sup>	7	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent <sup>4</sup>	15 of 27	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent <sup>5</sup>	0 of 27	-

<sup>3</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2004, average ward score for the authority.

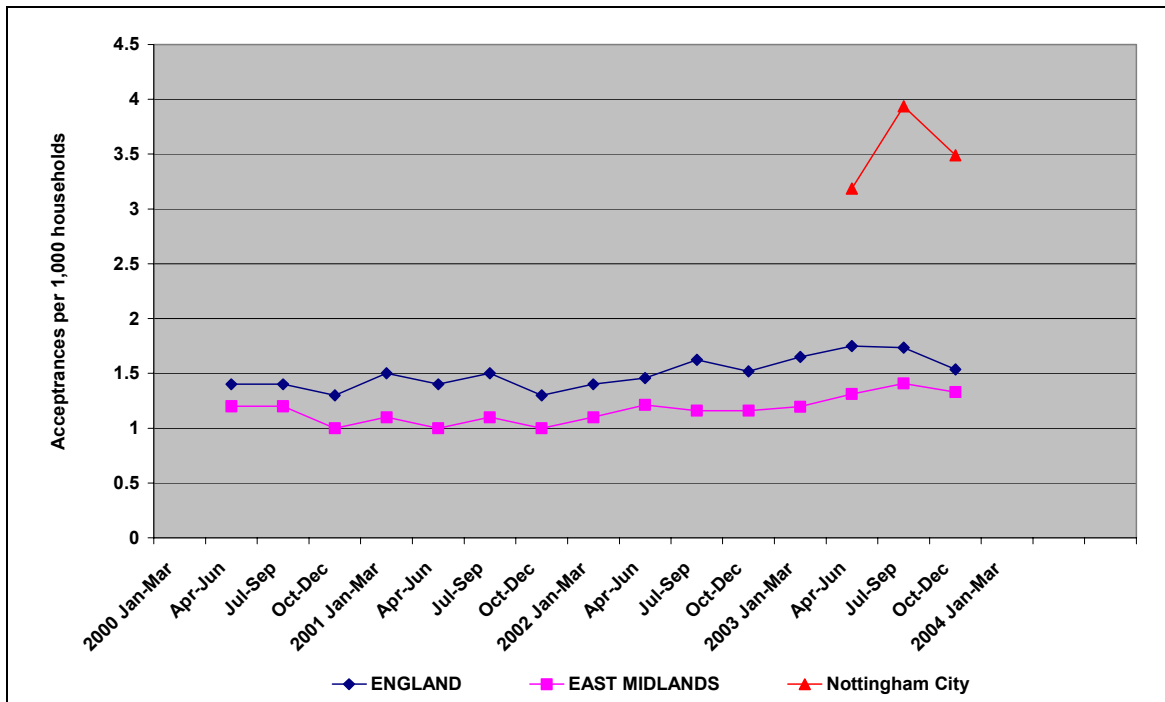
<sup>4</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

<sup>5</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

**Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England**



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



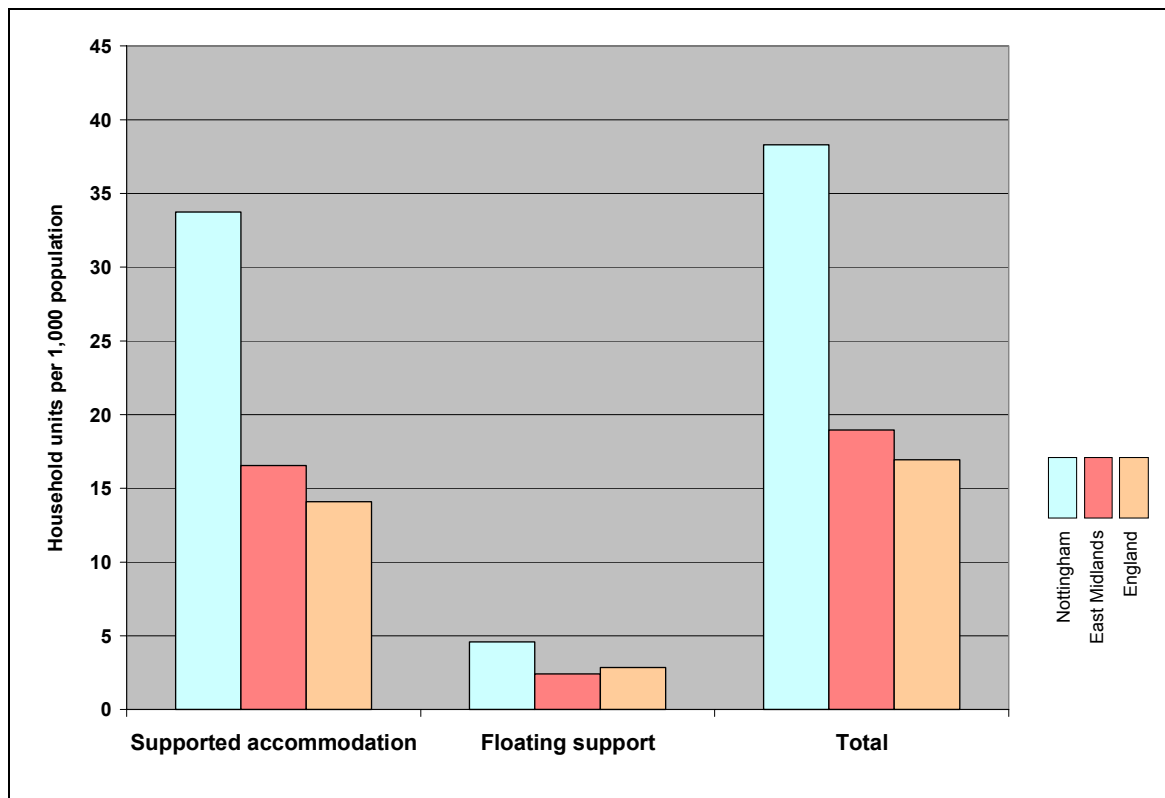
## Performance information

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

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

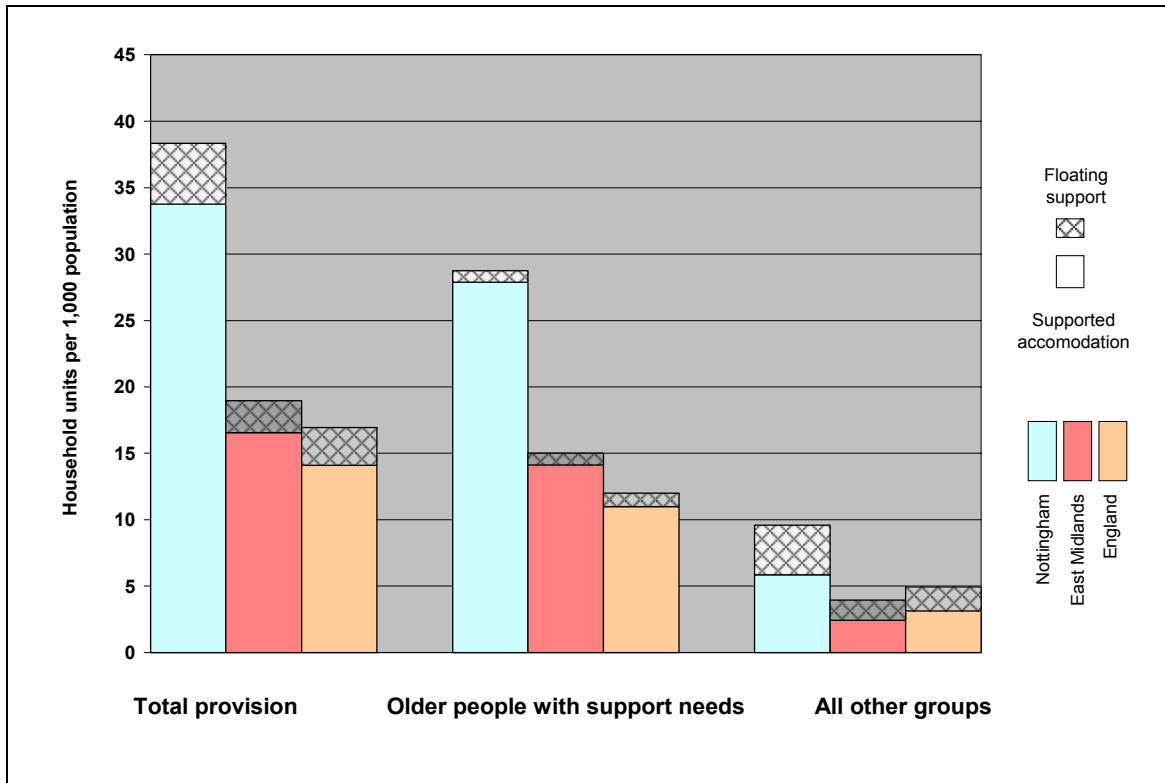
### Supporting People data

#### Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>6</sup>



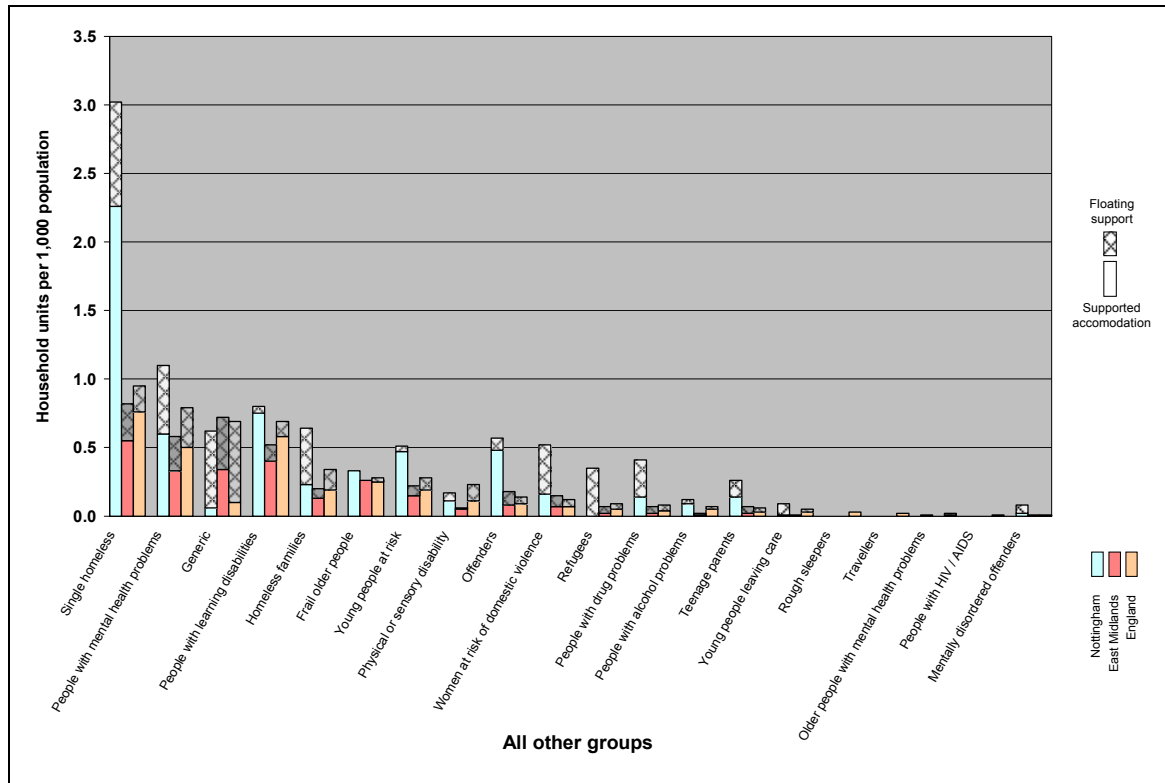
<sup>6</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>7</sup>**



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

**Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>8</sup>**



**Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04**

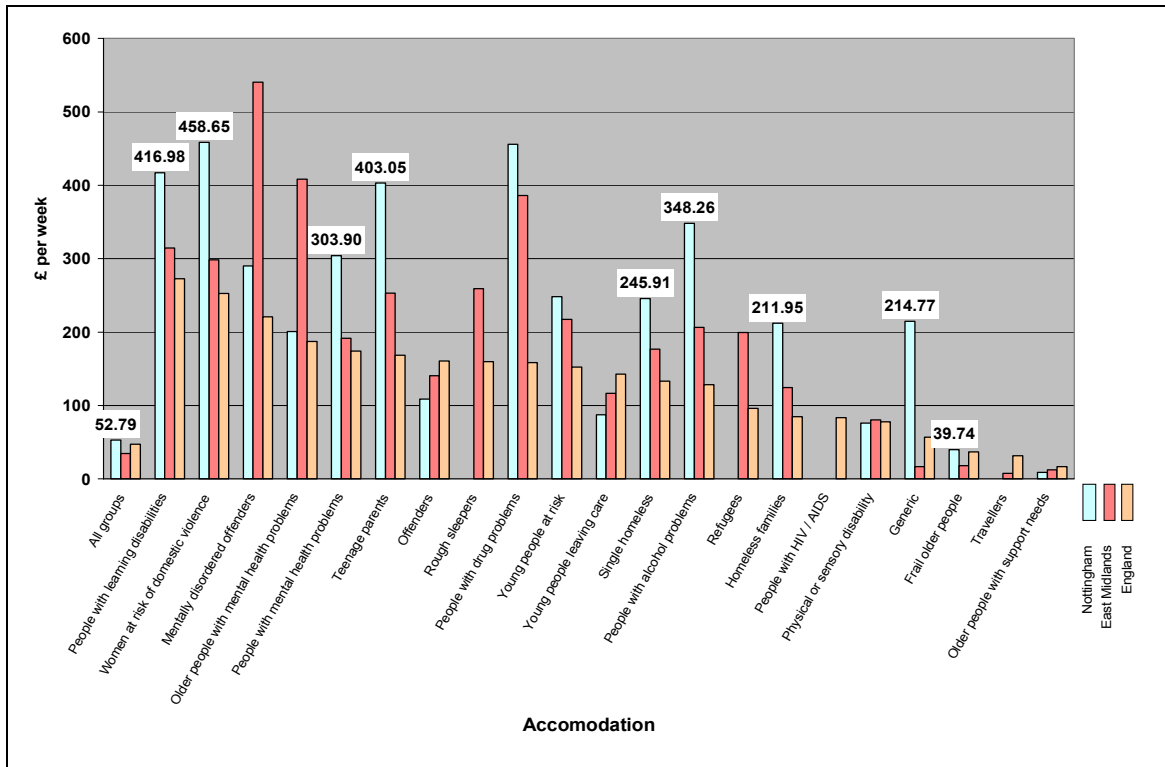
	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Nottingham	£ 29,079,119	£ 52,118	£ 289,475.24

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

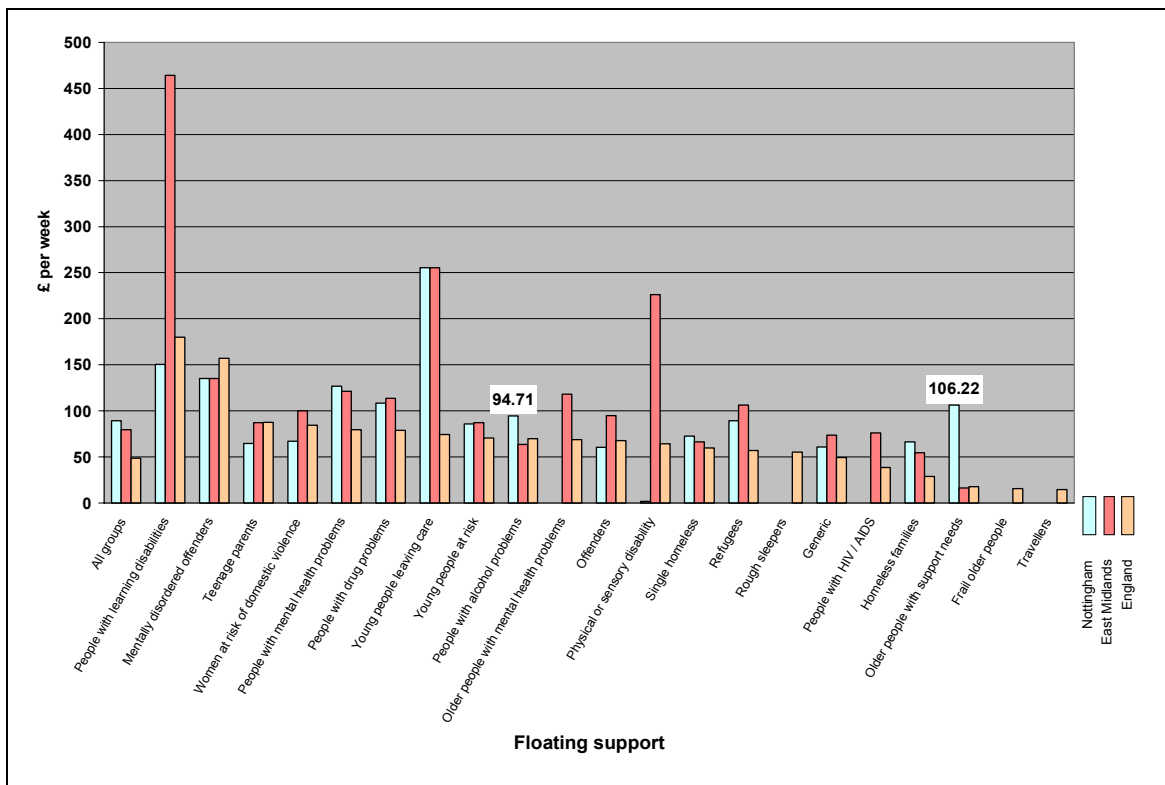
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Nottingham	£ 2.07	£ 48.02	£ 51.08	£ 153.21
East Midlands	£ 0.69	£ 24.96	£ 31.50	£ 88.82
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)<sup>9</sup>**

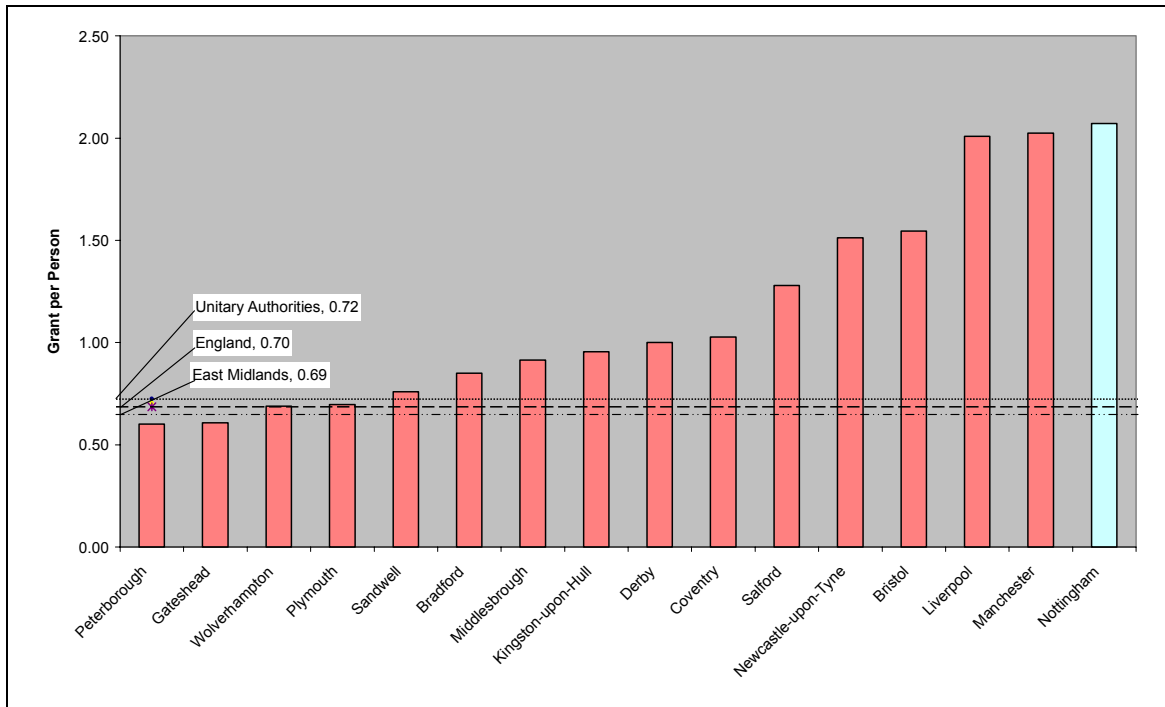


**Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)**

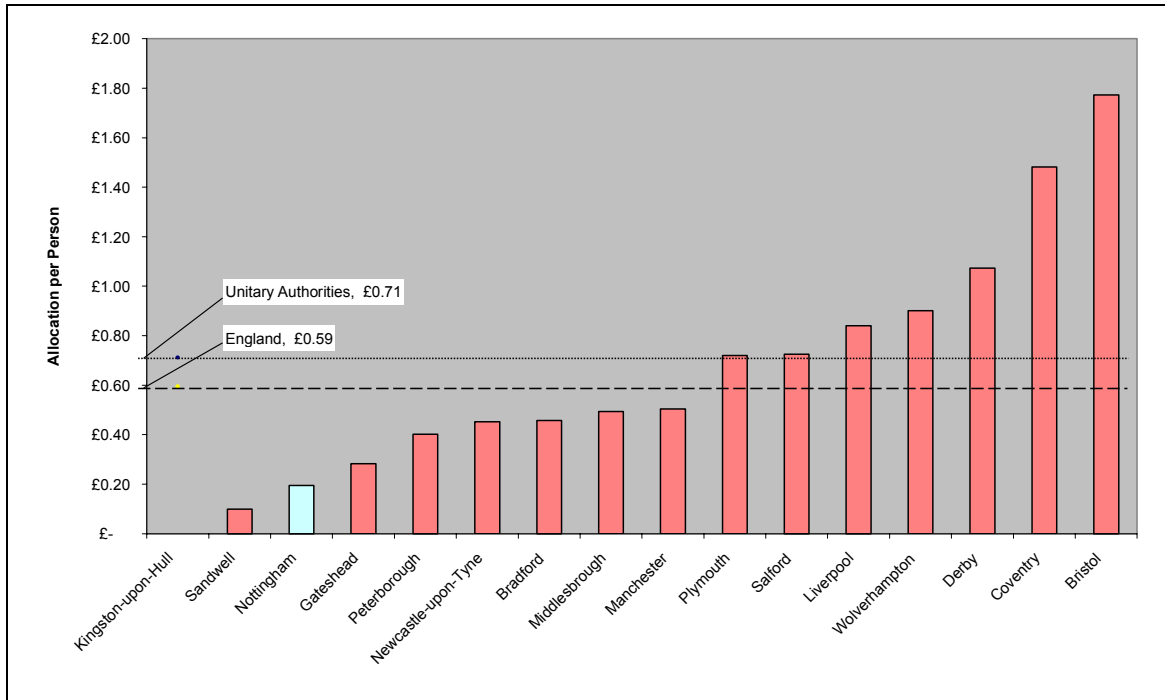


<sup>9</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>10</sup>, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)**

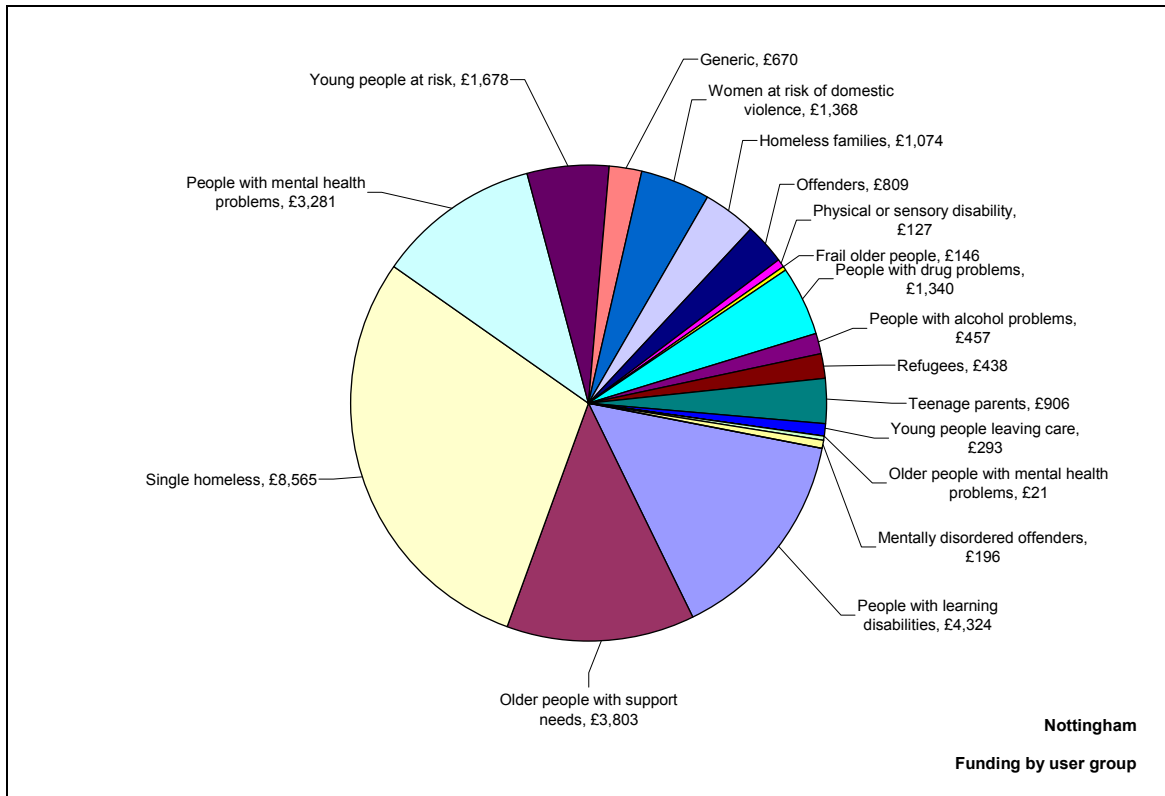


**Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils.**

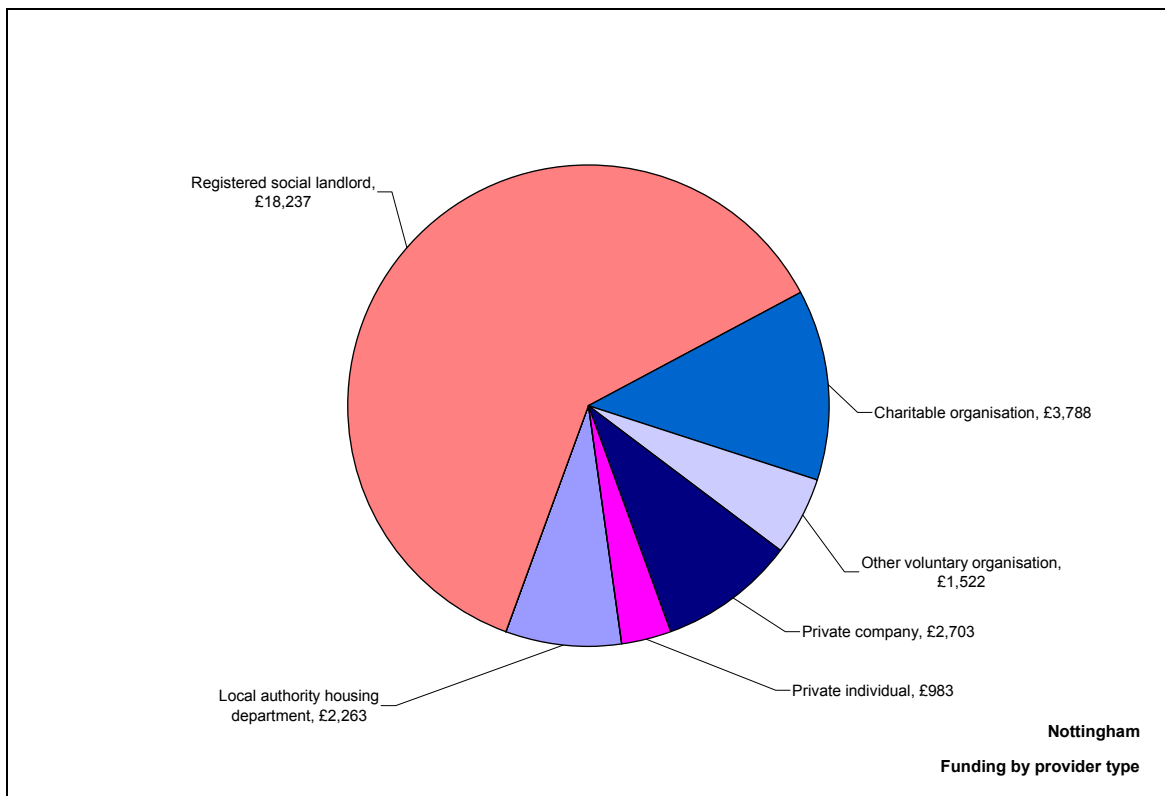


<sup>10</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

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



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



**Social Services star ratings November 2003**

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

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

**Social services performance indicators**

**Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03**

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

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

## Best value performance indicators

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

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

Nottingham	
Within the best 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63) 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 bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a) Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b) Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a)
Within the worst 25 per cent	Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a)

## Supporting People – Housing related support services

'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently.

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase; the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (ALA).

Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

Administering local authorities work in partnership, with districts where this is relevant, to agree Supporting People strategies and delivery mechanisms for support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service. Negotiation and consultation is also required with all housing and support service providers, other statutory service providers, the private sector and voluntary organisations to plan and commission support services to meet identified needs.

The programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a local strategic context. For example:

- ◆ support services for people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities whose needs have previously not been met in an appropriate or timely manner;
- ◆ support services for vulnerable older people who wish to live independently, including those in sheltered housing;
- ◆ temporary hostel accommodation – including probation hostels and those providing support for women fleeing domestic violence;
- ◆ support services for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties;
- ◆ floating support to a range of vulnerable people including young people leaving care; and
- ◆ home improvement agency services whose work includes providing practical support to older owner occupiers to enable them to live independently.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local Authorities would need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)

## Positive practice

*'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources'.*

*(Seeing is Believing).*

### Item 1

A reciprocal arrangement has been put in place with a neighbouring unitary authority, each to provide the other with legal services in the event of a conflict of interests arising within their respective commissioning bodies.

### Item 2

Health service staff are actively involved in reviews of services for people with mental health problems.

### Item 3

The Supporting People team in Nottingham has developed their own toolkit for assessing the strategic relevance of services, which has been published on the spkweb. Other authorities have approached the team to access and adopt this model.