

Inspection report

July 2004

Supporting People Programme

Nottinghamshire County Council

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing related support services that help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the housing corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.
- 4 Nottinghamshire County Council was inspected in the first 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 starts 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 of this for vulnerable people.

Background

- 5 Nottinghamshire is a county council in the East Midlands. Within the county area there are seven district and borough councils varying from deprived ex-mining communities to affluent rural areas with urbanised areas characterised by the areas surrounding Nottingham City.
- 6 The population of Nottinghamshire is 748,510 of which 2.60 per cent are from minority ethnic communities with the largest community being people who describe themselves as of Indian origin with a population of 4790¹. In addition there is a large settled Romany population based in the Newark area.
- 7 Unemployment at 1.7 per cent is below the national average of 2.4 per cent with variances between 1.0 per cent for Rushcliffe to 2.3 per cent for Mansfield. Mansfield ranked at 29 and Ashfield at 31 (both out of 334 districts) are the most deprived districts within the county².
- 8 The council is Labour controlled and operates under a leader and cabinet style government, supported by scrutiny committees.
- 9 The council employs approximately 23,000 staff across all services and for 2003/04 has a net revenue budget of £675,147 million.
- 10 Nottinghamshire County Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with seven district and borough councils, seven primary care trusts (PCT's) and the probation service in planning and commissioning Supporting People services.

¹ 2001 census

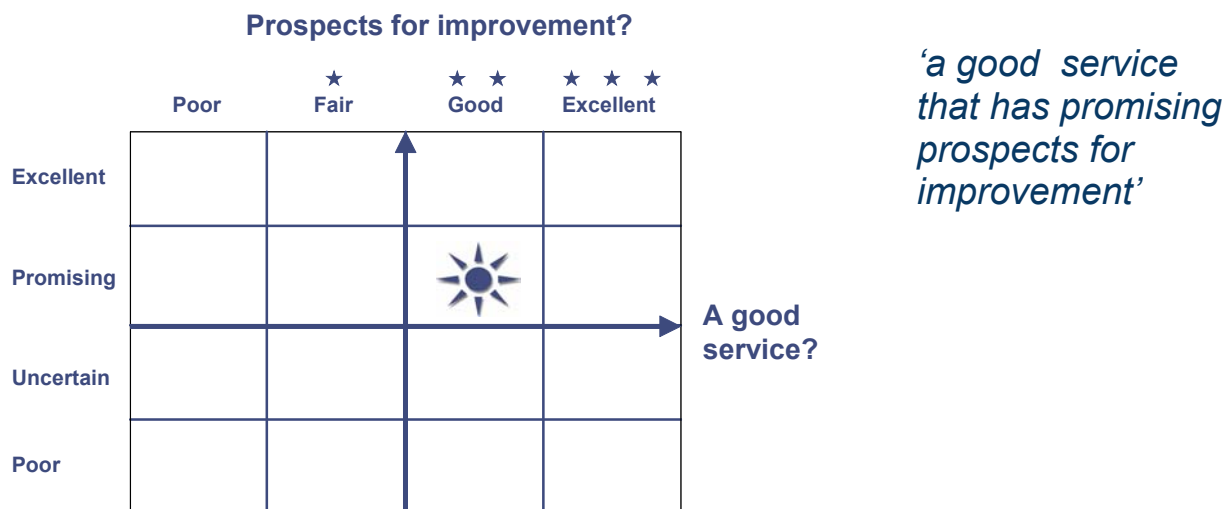
² Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authorities.

- 11 The total amount of Supporting People grant funding available in 2003/04 was £28,456,904 which reduced to £27,846,559 for 2004/05. The council also received £758,591 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority which was reduced to £645,810 for 2004/05.
- 12 The highest cost Supporting People service in Nottinghamshire is £1012.71 a week for accommodation based support for people with a physical or sensory disability. The lowest cost service is £0.87 a week for older people with support needs.

Scoring the service

- 13 We have assessed the 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 chart³: Nottinghamshire County Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 14 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date. These include:
- ◆ Evidence that the Supporting People programme is already beginning to produce positive outcomes for the vulnerable people of Nottinghamshire that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy and those of commissioning partners.
 - ◆ Providers are positive about the council's Supporting People team, their depth of knowledge and the facilitative style they have adopted in implementing the Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ The partnership, in deciding to include representation from both officers and councillors on the commissioning body, has a format which works well in a two tier county environment.
 - ◆ The review timetable has focused early work on high cost services which also include identified non-housing related support and the review methodology contains very clear procedures on addressing value for money. This approach has given the partnership the structure to address inappropriate grant expenditure.
 - ◆ Work on identifying non-housing related support that does not qualify for Supporting People funding is progressing with savings of £900,000 rising to £1.5 million identified.

Areas for improvement

- 15 However, we found the following weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed. These include:

³ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- ◆ The inclusive forum in its current form does not reach all service users, their carers and advocates.
- ◆ Service providers are represented on the core strategy group, however their role as representatives on behalf of all providers needs to be established.
- ◆ The needs of some of the most excluded members of society including travellers were not initially identified and work has only just started to address this.
- ◆ The perceived lack of opportunity of some groups including care leavers and offenders to be granted a tenancy and access support services which are linked to a tenancy needs to be addressed in some parts of the county.
- ◆ Contingency plans are still not in place and the lack of these presents a potential risk to service users in the event of a withdrawal or failure of a service provider.
- ◆ We found that potential opportunities to act on evidence of high costs outside of the review process are not consistently acted upon.

16 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements. We found the following strengths:

What works well

- ◆ The council is moving forward on improving its corporate performance which includes a higher profile within the council for the equality and diversity agenda. This includes a pilot scheme for introducing the impact assessment model across the authority and a clear timetable for improving the achieved level of conformity within the commission for racial equality standard.
- ◆ There is good understanding and ownership of the programme by all commissioning partners.
- ◆ Councillors are engaged in the process at both county and district and borough levels and the programme is linked into the scrutiny programme.
- ◆ The Supporting People team are viewed by providers as committed to providing a good service, are approachable, supportive and knowledgeable.
- ◆ Savings are being realised within the review process through the early priority given to reviewing areas with non qualifying services, non-housing related support activities funded through Supporting People, and high unit cost. There is a robust process in place for assessing value for money on services currently under review.

Areas for improvement

17 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve:

- ◆ There are no systems in place for communicating with and encouraging the active participation of service users and carers that enables them to influence and be informed about the future direction of the programme.
- ◆ There is a lack of consistency in the way that the commissioning body plans and manages its governance role so that agendas reflect the issues that need to be considered on a regular basis now that service reviews are in progress and the grant is being spent.
- ◆ The commissioning body does not receive management information in a structured and consistent way to enable them to take ownership of the performance of the Supporting People programme and be accountable for the outcomes.

Following our inspection, action has either been taken or plans are now in place to address the areas for improvement highlighted in this report.

Recommendations

- 18 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, we are making the following recommendations:

User Involvement and access to services

- ◆ Ensure that the user involvement currently being developed is agreed and implemented within a timescale which allows service users to inform and influence the five year strategy.
- ◆ The council needs to ensure that reception staff at their offices are trained in customer care and in order that a consistently high level of service is provided to customers wanting to access Supporting People services.
- ◆ Working alongside other service commissioners, the council needs to introduce monitoring arrangements to ensure that there is transparency and equity in the access to housing related support services across the county.
- ◆ The council must ensure that the lack of requests for fairer charging assessments to date is not as a result of a lack of awareness by service users by undertaking sampling work to make certain that the systems in place to trigger fairer charging assessments are robust.

Quality and monitoring

- ◆ The lack of contingency plans to safeguard against instances of service failure as highlighted in the ODPM's assessment of the shadow strategy needs to be addressed with agreed contingency plans adopted.
 - ◆ Ensure that there is a mechanism in place to enable any major value for money issues which are identified outside the review process to be addressed.
 - ◆ The council needs to formally identify and record potential conflicts of interest that may arise through its governance arrangements in relation to membership of the core strategy group and the commissioning body particularly where the group members are also service providers.
 - ◆ There needs to be a greater clarity in the respective roles of the commissioning body and core strategy group.
 - ◆ The use of support plans across all providers needs to be established.
- 19 We would like to thank the staff and partners of Nottinghamshire County Council particularly Ruth Rigby and Mandy Fowler who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

- 20 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

- 21 Nottinghamshire County Council is in the East Midlands and has a population of 748,510⁴ covering 805 square miles making it the 11th largest authority in the country.
- 22 2.6 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities⁵. The largest group are people who identify themselves as of Indian origin. There is also a large settled Romany community in the county.
- 23 Unemployment stands at 1.7 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent although within areas of the county where the traditional industry of coal mining has virtually disappeared within one generation the level of unemployment rises to 2.3 per cent.

The Council

- 24 The council has 63 councillors with the Labour group being in overall control. The council has adopted the leader and executive model of governance and this is supported by scrutiny committees.
- 25 The council has a workforce of 23,000 of which nearly 5,000 are employed by social services. The revenue budget for the year 2003/04 is £675,147 million with a spending on social care of £147,928 million.
- 26 A comprehensive performance assessment was carried out in 2002 and the council received an overall score of 'good'. A progress assessment report published by the Audit Commission in December 2003 includes that 'the council has also made considerable efforts to improve its overall ability to improve services and use its resources more effectively'.
- 27 Nottinghamshire is aiming to be one of the top 20 councils in the country and the County Council's strategic plan 'Building a Future' includes four cornerstones:
- ◆ Sustainability – to safeguard the long-term future of communities, environment and the economy.
 - ◆ Social cohesion – to encourage and provide opportunities for local people to take part in the running of their communities.
 - ◆ Citizenship – to encourage and provide opportunities for local people to take part in the running of their communities.
 - ◆ Partnerships – to place a high value on working within effective partnerships.

Supporting People – ODPM Framework for Delivery

- 28 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.

⁴ 2001 Census.

⁵ 2001 Census.

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

Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Nottinghamshire

Management Arrangements

- 30 The Supporting People team sits within the adult commissioning arm of the social services directorate with the accountable officer role carried out by the assistant director for adult commissioning within social services.
- 31 The commissioning body comprises Nottinghamshire County Council, all seven of the borough and district authorities, Gedling PCT and Newark and Sherwood PCT representing the seven PCT's within the county and Nottinghamshire probation service. The county council, borough and district authorities have both officer and councillor representation on the commissioning body with councillors being the voting members of the group.
- 32 The commissioning body is an established group with terms of reference which set out its role of overseeing the Supporting People programme in the county.
- 33 The Supporting People team comprises:
- ◆ Supporting People manager;
 - ◆ five partnership officers together with four partnership assistants;
 - ◆ IT and business analyst;
 - ◆ Supporting People accountant together with two finance assistants;
 - ◆ information officer; and
 - ◆ administrator together with two administrative assistants.
- 34 The team structure is currently being reviewed as a result of the changing emphasis of work from contract issues to the review process.
- 35 The administration grant awarded to the council by the ODPM to assist in the costs of implementing, delivering and managing the programme is £758,591 for the financial year 2003/04 which reduces to £645,810 for 2004/05.

Supporting People Strategy and Budget

- 36 The ODPM required all Supporting People administering local authorities to submit a shadow strategy in the autumn of 2002. The shadow strategies were required to demonstrate a clear vision and strategic steer for the programme and to set out the map of existing housing related support provision.

- 37 The ODPM assessed the council's shadow strategy as 'fair' and identified that action was required on cross authority working, setting a robust service review programme methodology and contingency planning. Work on progressing the areas identified has been mixed. The service review programme methodology has been addressed in full and cross authority work is progressing. However, work to introduce an agreed contingency planning process was still ongoing at the time of our inspection although subsequent to our on site inspection, a contingency planning process has now been agreed.
- 38 The shadow strategy explains the identified supply of Supporting People services in the county with the services mapped against the ODPM's suggested supply profile of Supporting People services in an area such as Nottinghamshire.
- 39 The shadow strategy will be superseded by a five year strategy which is due to be submitted to the ODPM by March 2005. Plans for the preparation of the five year strategy are outlined in paragraph 51 of this report.
- 40 The core strategy development group has recently been re-configured to enable the structure to more readily sit with the need to be proactive in the development of the five year strategy.

Services

- 41 The final Supporting People grant allocation to the council for the financial year 2003/04 is:
- ◆ £28,456,904 which reduces to £27,846,559 for 2004/05.
 - ◆ £446,002 has been awarded to cover the revenue costs of schemes under development (pipeline funding).
 - ◆ The highest cost Supporting People service in Nottinghamshire is £1012.71 a week for accommodation based support for people with a physical or sensory disability. The lowest cost service is £0.87 a week for older people with support needs.
- 42 The supply mapping in the shadow strategy highlighted the following:
- ◆ an over supply of traditional sheltered housing schemes;
 - ◆ a disproportionate number of schemes for people with mental health problems in the Mansfield area;
 - ◆ services for people with a learning disability concentrated in clusters around Newark, Mansfield, Ashfield and Gedling;
 - ◆ a lack of support for vulnerable people moving into tenancies;
 - ◆ services for people with a physical or sensory disability concentrated within a small number of schemes in the north of the county;
 - ◆ a potential need to develop services for people who misuse alcohol;
 - ◆ services for young people at risk and young people leaving care are concentrated in the north of the county;
 - ◆ a lack of floating/outreach support for women at risk of domestic violence; and
 - ◆ a gap in knowledge regarding people with HIV/AIDS, refugees, rough sleepers and travellers.
- 43 Geographically, support needs are provided across the county as follows:

Bassetlaw	10 per cent
Mansfield	19 per cent

Ashfield	17 per cent
Newark and Sherwood	17 per cent
Broxtowe	10 per cent
Rushcliffe	9 per cent
Gedling	8 per cent

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 44 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 45 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 46 The vision for Nottinghamshire's Supporting People programme is expressed as:

'To enable vulnerable people to live more independently through the provision of effective local housing-related support services'.

- 47 As part of achieving the local vision, the following principals have been adopted:
- ◆ a commitment to improving quality of life for vulnerable individuals;
 - ◆ the promotion of social inclusion;
 - ◆ a belief that people should be able to live independently with dignity and choice;
 - ◆ a commitment to partnership working to develop services that prevent or alleviate crisis and sustain people within the community;
 - ◆ the development of effective consultation to ensure needs led service provision;
 - ◆ a commitment to providing high quality, value for money services that meet need; and
 - ◆ processes of change should be managed to achieve a smooth transition.
- 48 Within the context of the vision and aims the shadow strategy sets the aims for the Supporting People programme in 2003/04 as including:
- ◆ ensuring smooth transition/implementation;
 - ◆ developing a needs led approach; and
 - ◆ effective partnership working.
- 49 There are clear links identified between the Supporting People programme and other strategies including a section on the focus for each of the seven districts within the county and for the health community and probation.
- 50 Supporting People is being successfully mainstreamed within the county at both strategic and operational levels with links being made both internally and across a range of external organisations.
- 51 Work to develop the five year strategy is being progressed through the core strategy development group with each monthly meeting of the group themed to

cover the work of a specific user group. Initial draft plans have been completed for most groups and a further unmet needs survey which is being co-ordinated with Nottingham city is to be undertaken in June 2004.

“Supporting People has made me realise how poor the links between some services have been in the past, especially between the DCs, health and social care”. - Local authority commissioning body member.

Does the service meet these aims?

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

Commissioning services to meet local needs

- 54 Providers have a positive view of the Supporting People team. The following comment embodies the flavour of the comments made by service providers during our inspection:

‘The team are open & inclusive with providers’. - Supporting People funded provider.

- 55 Operational service managers are fully engaged with Supporting People and supported living implementation groups (SLIGS) with representation from health, housing and social services have been established as planning mechanisms for both learning disability and mental health services. The SLIG for learning disabilities has now developed into supported living strategy group (SLSG), as the group moves from its implementation phase to one of strategic development.
- 56 It is acknowledged by the council that further work is needed in order to address the needs of young people including care leavers. This is now being progressed with the children’s services business action plan for 2004/05 including improving the availability and use of accommodation options as a key area for further development.
- 57 At the time of our inspection all but one of the interim contracts had been signed. The contract, which is with one of the districts, remains unsigned due to contractual queries still outstanding. Confirmation that the services in question will be subject to review if the contract remains unsigned has been given to the provider. Subsequent to our on site inspection the outstanding contract has now been signed.
- 58 The key milestones for the implementation of the Supporting People programme were met by the council. There was a smooth transition from the implementation phase of the programme to delivery and accurate and timely payments were made to service providers from the start of the programme on 1 April 2003.
- 59 The introduction of the Supporting People programme has resulted in work being undertaken to identify the levels of need in specific districts and this information is now influencing investment decisions. For example, under utilised sheltered

housing in Broxtowe has been used to accommodate people with low level learning difficulties who require supported housing. Work has also highlighted homelessness issues. Broxtowe District Council now employs two homeless prevention officers to provide support and mediation to prevent homelessness.

- 60 The council set up a fairer charging project board during 2002 which included the Supporting People lead officer. The resulting fairer charging policy links to the Supporting People charging and relief policy and provides a good balance between the need to generate income whilst protecting the needs of vulnerable service users. The council's welfare rights team compiled an information sheet for the Supporting People fairer charging claim pack which provides information on a range of relevant benefits for those who may not otherwise receive benefits advice from fairer charging assessment staff.
- 61 A Supporting People partnership contracts sub-group is currently looking at the joint procurement of services for people with learning disabilities and extra care provision and social services are appointing a joint project manager (learning disabilities) to look at value for money in preparation for joint commissioning.
- 62 The following work which is either currently being completed or planned will contribute to the housing related support needs identification:
- ◆ Best value review on the promotion of independence for young disabled adults between the ages of 16-25.
 - ◆ County homelessness survey over a two week period beginning on the 20 September 2004.
 - ◆ Probation service unmet needs survey.
 - ◆ Housing and care support needs of BME residents in south Nottinghamshire.
- 63 The home improvement agency we spoke to in Nottinghamshire has a positive relationship with the Supporting People team and a successful bid co-ordinated by the Supporting People team for funding for a HIA covering the three boroughs in the South of the county was worked up by representatives from these three boroughs, the county council and health community, with funding commitments from all of these parties. Expansion of this service is seen as key to addressing areas of need of vulnerable people within the owner occupied and private rented sectors in the south of the county.
- 64 In order to bring further expertise to the Supporting People team, two of the partnership officers are currently studying for a Supporting People specific certificate of competence in commissioning and purchasing for health and social care being run by Oxford Brookes University.

User involvement and access to services

- 65 In developing the Supporting People shadow strategy, service users were not directly involved with the model adopted which sought instead to engage with as many groups representing the interests of users and carers as possible and looking at areas where recent consultation had taken place. Examples of this are a survey of older people carried out in Broxtowe during June 2001 which identified a need for extra care sheltered housing for frail older people and a recent resident's survey in Mansfield district which identified a need for disabled residents indicating that they would require support to stay in their homes.
- 66 Through consultation in this manner, the council believes that consultation fatigue was avoided and working relationships with established groups were formed at an early stage and as a result of this approach the Supporting People team remain directly involved in a range of partnership groups ensuring that Supporting People maintains a high profile within a wide range of service areas. We are not clear, however, how individual service users could have made their views and concerns known.

- 67 Conversely relying solely on this method of consultation does mean that those groups who do not already have established forums or where existing groups were not identified by the Supporting People team were excluded. One example of this is with services for travellers where currently there is no provision or need identified even though one of the largest Romany communities in Britain lives within the county. This position has been recognised and work is ongoing to fully identify needs with a pilot floating support scheme within the Newark and Sherwood area prioritised within the Supporting People annual plan for 2004.
- 68 Service users are fully involved in reviews of the service they are receiving with their feedback clearly included in the verification visit reports but at the current time there is no mechanism to ensure that their views are captured and used more widely than within their own service. This omission will result in valuable information being lost which could be used to influence the future direction of the programme.
- 69 The Supporting People partnership in Nottinghamshire has its own website which includes a provider directory with links to individual provider's sites and we have been advised by providers that this is very useful in signposting prospective service users.
- 70 Training events have been undertaken for frontline staff and evaluation forms from these events show them to have been well organised and informative. However, information provided directly for service users is not always easily understood or user friendly and does not carry information regarding availability in different formats or community languages. The Supporting People application forms and better care higher standards leaflet now carry a statement regarding availability in different formats and community languages although, in line with council policy, this information is not given in community languages.
- 71 There is good liaison between the welfare rights unit and the Supporting People team which includes the officers being made aware of any concerns that the welfare rights team might be regarding providers. An example of this being concerns shared regarding a provider missing deadlines on benefit entitlement appeals.
- 72 Nottinghamshire County Council is currently piloting joint working arrangements between the pension service, social services finance and district council housing benefit/council tax benefit teams. The pilot involves a single worker advising service users on social welfare entitlements, completing application forms, verifying income and capital and completing financial assessments for all partner agencies. Through this process the pilot aims to improve the outcomes for service users through reducing processing times and ensuring that they are given the chance to claim their full range of benefits and services. In addition, joint working arrangements will free time for a more pro-active service aimed at increasing benefit take-up.
- 73 Targets set by the probation services accommodation and benefits advice unit link in to the Supporting People agenda on increasing access to services in a number of ways including establishing protocols with local authorities and other providers in relation to applications and allocations and specifically regarding late tenancy arrears. A further target aimed at increasing access is to improve the teams knowledge on accommodation provision, Supporting People and benefits advice provision.
- 74 However, during our inspection we visited social services offices in six districts within the county and carried out reality checks on access to services and received wide ranging responses to our enquiry from frontline staff which varied from very clear help and advice where details on services available in the area were explained and backed up with leaflets to an unhelpful response where we were told that the service being enquired about was delivered from another office but they probably wouldn't be able to see us on that day. As a result of our

findings, the Supporting People team is arranging training for social services reception staff.

- 75 At the time of our inspection, a user involvement strategy was being devised to address the acknowledged gaps in the approach to service user involvement within the programme. Subsequent to our inspection, a timetable for implementation has been agreed and includes user involvement in formulating the strategy.
- 76 Access to tenancies in some areas of the county is seen as problematic with exclusions from services still perceived as an issue in some of the districts within Nottinghamshire for some groups including offenders and care leavers. In response to these concerns a number of initiatives are now in place with additional measures planned including:
- ◆ Local Supporting People provider monitoring in relation to referrals to services as well as acceptances (monitored through client record forms) which will be used during Supporting People service reviews.
 - ◆ Work through the probation service to develop a protocol around access to local authority accommodation across the county is underway.
 - ◆ Workshops to be held at a forthcoming Supporting People event on exploring barriers to accessing short term Supporting People services.
 - ◆ The commissioning body to discuss access to housing at its next meeting with a report to be received from a representative from the Nottinghamshire housing and homelessness network.

Diversity

- 77 On work to engage with and identify the needs of BME communities the term used was that the Supporting People team were 'running to catch up'. This position is acknowledged by the council and work has recently started to progress this area of work.
- 78 A snapshot survey of service users in January showed that 1.9 per cent of service users are from BME communities and the Supporting People team are now aware that they need to identify the barriers preventing people from BME communities accessing Supporting People services.
- 79 A barrier to services which we have identified is that access to some of the traditionally 'unpopular groups' in society is not seen as equal across all areas of the county. For example, there are currently no Supporting People funded services for travellers or the Romany community in the county and it is acknowledged that the lack of awareness to the needs of these communities is an omission. Priority is being given to work which is now underway identifying the needs of this group.
- 80 Work on the Supporting People five year strategy will build on work completed to identify current and future service needs. This includes research into the housing and support needs of BME households in south Nottinghamshire, including Ashfield, Broxtowe, Gedling Rushcliffe and Nottingham city. The work, which was part funded by the Nottinghamshire Supporting People programme, has taken two years to complete with a community launch planned for the 26 April 2004.

Partnerships

- 81 Co-ordinated and effective partnership working is key to the success of a Supporting People programme that delivers real improvements to the housing related support available to vulnerable people.
- 82 The Supporting People team are central to the partnership and members of the team are seen in a very positive light with a very powerful sense of all stakeholders working together for a common goal.

'I have never seen the commitment between district, county and health to work together so open as in Supporting People' - Health representative.

- 83 The following mechanisms are in place to support the Supporting People programme in Nottinghamshire.

Inclusive Forum

- 84 Nottinghamshire has a population of 748,510 living in an area covering 805 square miles within seven district and borough councils. Early in the programmes' implementation it was decided that a single inclusive forum with fixed representation would not meet the needs of the programme in relation to stakeholder consultation due to the size of the county and concerns that the forum might fix its focus on certain elements of the programme which reflected the particular interests of the forums members.
- 85 In response to the above concerns the approach in Nottinghamshire has been to adopt the model of a 'virtual inclusive forum' using existing and established groups as the consultation vehicle in an attempt to provide a greater breadth of involvement and therefore be more inclusive. This approach has avoided any dependency on a single large forum for the whole of the county.
- 86 As a result, the inclusive forum has developed more as a series of networks with members of the Supporting People team sitting on various groups. The threads and networks link together and feed into the Supporting People programme.
- 87 Whilst this approach has been successful in reaching established groups effectively the approach has only being partially successful in that not all vulnerable groups are currently being reached and not all areas have groups with direct service user or carer involvement.

Core Strategy Development Group

- 88 A Nottinghamshire Supporting People steering group was established in 2000 and evolved into the core strategy development group in November 2001 with a dual role of overseeing implementation of the programme and developing the local Supporting People shadow strategy.
- 89 The need to refocus the work of the core strategy development group was acknowledged at the groups' meeting in September 2003 with the group reforming in April 2004 to become a pro-active one with its' key driver aimed at service improvement.
- 90 Service providers, external and internal, are members of the group but there is no formal protocol for ensuring that the representatives are formally giving and receiving information which is representative of the providers they are representing.

Commissioning Body

- 91 The development of the Supporting People commissioning body was discussed at a chief officer and member event in December 2001 when it was decided that the preferred solution was that councillors should be represented on the commissioning body. The reasons for including councillors on the group included:
- ◆ There would be councillor input in the full debate on strategic and controversial decisions.
 - ◆ It would help to facilitate agreement in decisions or strategies by individual commissioning partners as there had been full councillor involvement in the decision making at partnership level and clear member link between partners.
 - ◆ Reduction in the need for additional meetings, enabling efficient decision making and reduced potential for decisions to be repeatedly referred between meetings.

- ◆ Difficult or sensitive decisions would be taken by councillors taking a view across Nottinghamshire, but also representing each commissioning partner.
- 92 The commissioning body has members representing the county council and all seven district and borough councils who have both officer and councillor representation, two of the PCT's who represent all seven of the PCT's in Nottinghamshire together with the probation service. The group is chaired by the portfolio holder for social services at Nottinghamshire County Council.
- 93 The inclusion of councillors on the group has worked on a number of levels and both councillors and officers have reported that it has led to a greater understanding of the issues, with the lead councillors in the boroughs and districts who have then been in a position to raise the profile within their own authorities. At the time of our inspection councillors had not received any training, or visits to services, in order to facilitate this work but subsequent to our inspection this has been addressed with a training programme agreed.
- 94 The meeting we observed provided evidence that the group is focused on achieving improved outcomes for service users and in addressing value for money within the services delivered.
- 95 A sub-group of the commissioning body has recently been formed which has the authority to take recommendations to, or make decisions on behalf of, the commissioning body.
- 96 However, there is a need for greater clarity on the relationship between the commissioning body and the core strategy group and a greater degree of feedback from the core strategy group to the commissioning body.
- 97 Of the seven PCT's within the county two, Gedling on behalf of the South Nottinghamshire PCT's and Newark and Sherwood on behalf of the North Nottinghamshire PCT's, represent the sector at the commissioning body and the core strategy group. Systems are in place to ensure that there is two way communications between Supporting People and the PCT's.

Cross Authority Issues

- 98 Cross authority working is required in order to effectively meet the needs of vulnerable people for whom specialist housing related support services may not be available in their own administering local authority areas and where people needs may need to meet outside their immediate area. For example, women fleeing domestic violence and ex-offenders who cannot be housed in the area.
- 99 The proposed cross authority group for Nottinghamshire includes Nottingham City, Derbyshire, Derby and Lincolnshire.
- 100 Nottinghamshire has been pro-active in contacting other neighbouring authorities where there are cross authority issues in order to canvass support for a level of joint working. Unfortunately to date there has been little progress on this initiative and cross authority work is primarily carried out between the county and Nottingham City. This includes:
- ◆ work being undertaken on a Supporting People unmet needs survey across both authorities;
 - ◆ provider fora for learning disability and mental health are both county/city groups;
 - ◆ the Nottinghamshire social housing forum has a Supporting People sub-group which includes both city and county representation; and
 - ◆ a protocol has been established so that providers who work for across both authorities will be accredited by one and passported by the other.

Quality and Monitoring

Contracts and Payments

- 101 The council has acknowledged that as a result of the large amount of growth in housing related support services immediately before April 2003 contracts complete with schedules detailing service users were late in being issued.
- 102 At the time of our inspection one interim contract had not been signed and we have confirmed that the late signing of this is the result in delays within the providers' legal department with no intended resistance against signing as a result of concerns about the contract.
- 103 Work on a steady state contract, to replace the current interim contract in place prior to a service review, has been progressed and will be submitted to providers for consultation after being agreed by the Supporting People contracts sub-group.
- 104 There are currently 90 providers in receipt of payments with alternative arrangements in place for small service providers with limited or no IT based systems. The Supporting People team is adopting a flexible approach in support of small providers.
- 105 From April 2003 payments have been made in a timely and accurate manner and service providers have signalled a high level of satisfaction with the process with all respondents to our provider's questionnaire signalling that they are either very satisfied or satisfied with the service.

'We are clear what we receive and when. Any queries are handled quickly and efficiently. The transfer of funds is prompt and easy'. - Supporting People funded service provider.

- 106 At the time of our inspection 131 applications for a fairer charging assessment had been made with the claims made by recipients of approximately half of the county's long term service providers. Providers at a meeting in January 2004 were requested to ensure that information for service users was widely circulated. However, at the time of our inspection there has been no further work to assess whether or not the current level of applications is meeting the needs of service users who might benefit from an assessment. A range of actions are now being planned including:
- ◆ the number of claims for relief received will be monitored and that low levels of claims from users of specific services will be investigated as part of service reviews;
 - ◆ two large providers of long term services will be asked to explain the low level of claims received from their service users; and
 - ◆ the Supporting People payments team will now regularly forward reports on the number of claims to partnership officers and assistants responsible for provider performance monitoring.
- 107 There is an agreed appeals panel for Supporting People charging and relief decisions which comprises of a chair from the council as the Supporting People administering authority together with between two and four members taken from the commissioning body.
- 108 The commissioning body meetings do not include a standing agenda item regarding financial monitoring of the Supporting People grant or the administration grant although at the meeting we observed a report including the projected year end figures for 2003/04 and initial projections for 2004/05 was included. Following our advice, financial monitoring will now be a standing agenda item.

Performance Management

- 109 The Supporting People programme is underpinned by a detailed business implementation plan which is reviewed on a six weekly basis although not all targets are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound). Reporting on progress to the commissioning body on structures and systems is now undertaken on a quarterly basis and work on performance reporting covering outcomes for service users is currently being developed.
- 110 Access to performance information by individual providers will be enhanced when the existing website is further developed to include a password protected area for each provider which will give access to performance information on line. Work on this is due for completion by August 2004.
- 111 The management of the Supporting People programme includes specialist internal and external training for officers such as internal briefings and workshops specific to current service reviews and the opportunity to complete a Supporting People specific certificate of competence in commissioning and purchasing for health and social care being run by Oxford Brookes University.

Value for Money and Cost Effectiveness

- 112 As 83 per cent of the current Supporting People grant in Nottinghamshire consists of services previously funded through transitional housing benefit we initially considered whether the mechanisms were in place prior to April 2003 to successfully validate transitional housing benefit claims.
- 113 Housing benefit is a locally determined benefit with the seven district and borough authorities in Nottinghamshire having the legal responsibility for assessing claims.
- 114 There are joint working arrangements through a housing benefit forum which predated Supporting People and meets quarterly but did meet more frequently during the run up to going live on the 1 April 2003. The group is now facilitated by the Supporting People team to ensure consistency of approach and that districts and boroughs are providing the correct information and in the right way.
- 115 The approach to examining and considering transitional housing benefit applications differed across the county with only some districts ensuring that all larger schemes were visited and that they met with the providers and asked for assistance when needed.
- 116 Although a protocol for exchanging information between Supporting People and the housing benefit sections was drafted this was not signed and as a result there is currently no formal basis for the information exchange. Following our inspection, the protocol has been formally issued to all housing benefit authorities for their signature.
- 117 There are still 15 outstanding housing benefit appeals, representing an annual figure of £200,000, and we are advised that for any successful claims there will be a further assessment carried out within the Supporting People team to confirm ongoing eligibility for funding.
- 118 During our inspection we have looked at a number of cases where the transitional housing benefit has been a factor in the average unit cost being above the national average. Examples include:
- ◆ One transitional housing benefit application which included costs for staff who were not in post on the 31 March 2003. The partnership officer has subsequently undertaken a lot of early work with the provider which has included a reduced unit cost and the service is now due for review.
 - ◆ One provider, whose grant represents in the region of 20 per cent of the total grant allocation, was assessed as requiring an early review and subsequently advised Supporting People officers that their service costs were inflated with

early review work suggesting that their costs can be reduced by nearly £1 million per year.

- ◆ One provider of a scheme providing low level support to approximately 70 young people at risk and single homeless with support needs has unit costs of £190.96 per week for an average of 4.8 hours of support. Included in the costs are high non-staffing costs including £310,000 for central overheads. This service is due to be reviewed during 2004/05 but there are no plans to begin to address the costs ahead of the full review process.
- ◆ Assessments for people with a learning disability were completed based on individual assessments of need which led to housing related support in group living environments being inflated. There are also areas where the support being given is now being identified as care and not housing related support.

- 119 The partnership, through the commissioning body and the core strategy group, has acknowledged that some costs are high and that in addition the Supporting People grant is paying for non housing related support. Early discussions have taken place at the commissioning body to highlight these issues. Detailed work has been carried out within the learning disability service to reassess the provision of care and support within services and this is now drawing to a conclusion and realigning funding streams. From this work it is calculated that during the current year £900,000 will be removed from the grant rising to £1.5 million for 2005/06.
- 120 At the time of our inspection contracts representing 43 per cent of the total grant allocation were under review and due for completion by the end of April 2004. All services are subject to a value for money assessment which initially involves completion of an assessment form which, where concerns are identified, may then trigger a more in depth assessment. Triggers include unit cost; performance; quality; non staff costs (overheads); hourly rate; staff/client ration; cost at the time the grant levels were estimated and then determined, known as the gold and platinum cuts; other funding streams and information gained during scheme/service visits.
- 121 Service reviews should be the main driver for ensuring that value for money is being achieved and this is the case at Nottinghamshire. However, where high costs are identified outside the review process, the opportunities for improvement are not always followed. An example of this is the service highlighted above which provides 4.8 hours contracted hours of floating support per service user for 73 young people at risk and single homeless with support needs. The weekly unit cost of providing this service is £194.10 which includes £310,000 central overheads.

Risk and Contingency Planning

- 122 Risk management arrangements are in place to consider the management of high risk offenders accommodated in Nottinghamshire (MAPPA arrangements) and for offenders who have served 12 months or more for violent or sex offences (MAAAP arrangements).
- 123 The IT system procured has been properly implemented and is fit for purpose. The council committed resources and time to assisting their IT supplier to produce a robust product and in this way they influenced how the software was developed and ensured that it met their needs. Ongoing business process reviews and work with the suppliers 'user group' will ensure it continues to support the delivery of the programme for the foreseeable future.
- 124 The ODPM's assessment of the shadow strategy stated that 'there is little evidence that thorough consideration has been given to contingency planning in your strategy'. A risk register was agreed at the March 2004 commissioning body meeting but at the time of our inspection work on contingency planning was still ongoing. The contingency planning arrangements were subsequently agreed at a meeting of the commissioning body in June 2004.

Service Reviews

- 125 ODPM guidance requires administering local authorities (ALAs) to review all services funded through Supporting People within the three years from 1 April 2003. ALAs are required to produce a service review timetable and to produce a rationale to explain the ordering of reviews. Progress with the service review timetable is provided to ODPM through their regular performance monitoring returns.
- 126 The review programme in Nottinghamshire was originally structured around risk but has subsequently changed to a primarily client group focus. Learning disability services together with services for people at risk of domestic violence, home improvement agencies and generic services were first to be reviewed and together the expenditure on these services makes up 43 per cent of the total grant. Two further services that fall outside the identified priority client groups have been reviewed in the first tranche of reviews because of concerns about the quality of support provided.
- 127 In addition reviews of the 17 care homes that had legacy social housing management grant have also been undertaken. Funding for the care homes has now been withdrawn making a saving of £370,000.
- 128 The review programme has slipped but the first tranche will be completed by 30 April 2004. The commissioning body are aware of the slippage and there is a revised timetable for completion of the reviews within the three year timeframe.
- 129 Supporting People partnership officers and assistants are undertaking the reviews and come from a variety of complimentary backgrounds with skills and expertise in relevant areas. External expertise has been sought as appropriate, for example, a representative from a women's refuge ran a workshop on domestic violence awareness and how to approach users and external consultants are undertaking the home improvement agency reviews.
- 130 Reviews on learning disability services have been carried out with the supported living teams who are jointly funded by social services and health and the Supporting People team has drawn up a definition of housing related support which is now being used as part of the review process.
- 131 It is anticipated that in addition to the identification of non qualifying, non housing related support, service reviews will also find that economies of scale can be made in terms of staffing. Some services have been set up with each resident in a house calculated as receiving individual support in all areas where in reality some housing related support is provided to the group rather than the individual.
- 132 The next phase of service reviews includes short term services and the team has skills and experience of services for young people. The drug and alcohol action team will provide training on working with people who misuse drugs and the probation service will provide training on working with offenders. Additional funding, available as a result of Nottinghamshire being a criminal justice intervention programme area, will be used in part to appoint an additional post to work on the relevant service reviews.
- 133 A scrutiny process, to enable service providers and users to challenge the process and outcomes from service reviews, has been adopted with a panel established which includes two representatives from the council and between one and three other representatives from the commissioning body.
- 134 The current intention, supported by the commissioning body, is to use the service review process as a learning tool and to publicise the results of reviews on the Nottinghamshire Supporting People website.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 135 The Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes for a number of people in Nottinghamshire since its introduction on 1 April 2003. Examples of some of the services provided through the programme are outlined below.
- ◆ A floating support scheme for women at risk of domestic violence in North Broxtowe enables women to choose to stay in their own homes with support.
 - ◆ A floating support scheme for teenage parents which works across three districts.
 - ◆ A 'Supported Lodgings' scheme has enabled young people to stay with foster carers after their sixteenth birthday.
 - ◆ A scheme for hearing impaired people in Mansfield has been developed where all the staff are skilled in sign language.
- 136 The successful bid for additional funding to create a home improvement agency for the south of the county will further increase the ability of Supporting People funding to provide services that can respond to the housing related support needs of vulnerable owner occupiers and tenants in the private rented sector.
- 137 The fairer charging process has been successful in terms of giving advice to people who request an assessment with an additional £3 million in benefits realised for people in the first year. There have been 131 referrals for a fairer charging assessment of which five qualified for housing benefit.
- 138 A joint working pilot between the pension service, social services finance and district council housing benefit/council tax benefit teams will result in a more streamlined, pro-active service with improved outcomes for service users including a greater level of certainty to service users that they are given the chance to claim their full range of benefits and services.
- 139 The following quote gives a flavour of how Supporting People has helped to bring dignity with independence to one person's life:
- ◆ 'It's made a difference to people's lives. For example, when one former residential home resident wanted to go out and socialise but there were numerous difficulties, she had no money and no clothes to fit her and there were only two staff on duty. Now the same person is a tenant in her own right, living with people she chooses to live with. She is able to go out and socialise whenever she wants, with friends and/or support worker'.
- 140 However, our visits to individual services did show that there are still some providers who have yet to develop individual support plans for their service users and service providers should be encouraged in their development of individual plans. The provision of support plans is a requirement for Supporting People funded services.
- 141 The following case studies further illustrate positive outcomes for service users and demonstrate the effectiveness of the council's work in this area.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: Offenders/people at risk of offending
Type of Service : Short term floating support
Key Players : Local authority housing department
Social services
Probation service

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ The service user had a history which included arson, drug use and debt problems. They had been convicted and sentenced to 30 months imprisonment and as a result became separated from their children for the term of their imprisonment.
- ◆ A referral was made to the service provider by the probation service but unfortunately a tenancy was not allocated until five months after release. The house was in a poor state of repair and in another part of the town so that the children had to transfer to different schools.
- ◆ The support given provided financial advice; work on anger management; liaison with other agencies and acting as an advocate. Since getting the house, the service user has decorated it from top to bottom and has dealt positively with many issues. As a result social services are reducing their involvement and the housing related support package has now reduced to weekly visits. The period on licence has come to an end and probation's supervision has terminated.

Outcome for Service Users:

- ◆ The service user said that the housing support worker was more help than anyone else as she provided practical help as well as talking problems through, and also she came to the house. They said that working with the Supporting People service provider 'has meant that I've stayed on track. They made the difference. It was the same person all the time'.

Supporting People Case Study 2

Service User Group: Older people with support needs
Type of service: Accommodation based respite service

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Mrs A is 89 years old and suffers from confusion, arthritis, and high blood pressure.
- ◆ Before moving to the respite centre Mrs A had been living with her sister who did all the cleaning, cooking and other domestic duties which had led to Mrs A becoming de-skilled in independent living.
- ◆ After suffering a head injury which necessitated a hospital stay, she went to stay in a respite flat where she was coaxed by her support worker and friends into doing basic tasks on a daily basis and attending functions at a community centre in order to avoid being socially isolated.

Outcomes for service user:

- ◆ After her time in repite Mrs A was allocated a permanent home on the same site as the respite flat and although she is still finding it hard to come to terms with day-to-day living skills is, with the continued encouragement from her Supporting People worker and friends making progress.

How does the performance compare?

- 142 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 143 The details of the data used to inform comparisons are included in the data appendix to this report. Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with average indicator for all England and all metropolitan councils.
- 144 The current funding profile, outlined in the data appendix at the end of this report, shows that at 86 per cent, provision for older people with support needs is significantly higher than the overall average of 74 percent. There is an awareness that there is over provision of traditional sheltered housing schemes within the county and that there is a need to increase provision for frail elderly residents in the community.
- 145 At £0.73 per head of population, the unit cost per week of Supporting People services in Nottinghamshire is above both the East Midlands average cost of £0.69 and the county councils average of £0.50 and the cost differentials become more stark at £169.91 for Nottinghamshire compared with £88.82 for the East Midlands and £76.37 for England when the unit costs of community alarms and sheltered housing are excluded.
- 146 The performance assessment framework indicators for 2002/03 are included in the data appendix to this report. For adult services overall the council has been assessed as serving some people well with promising prospects for improvement and performs well in a number of areas of work where there is a read across to Supporting People service user groups including the number of emergency psychiatric re-admissions where the performance is significantly above average

(****). However, performance is significantly below average in employment, education and training for care leavers (*).

- 147 The best value performance indicators for 2002/03 compared with other county councils are also presented in the data appendix. The councils' performance with the level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms being within the best 25 per cent.
- 148 Work is now underway on shared performance indicators with the intention of considering how Supporting People might link in and support agreed outcomes of partners. Initially there will be a pilot in the Broxtowe area before widening out countywide.

Summary

- 149 Overall, we judge that the Nottinghamshire is delivering a good, two-star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. We have highlighted the following areas in making our judgement.
- 150 Providers are positive about the council's Supporting People team; their level of knowledge; and the facilitative style they have adopted in implementing the Supporting People programme and all the key milestones for Supporting People implementation were met by the council. Health, probation and all the borough and districts councils are represented and contribute to the development of the service.
- 151 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme in Nottinghamshire is beginning to produce positive outcomes for service users that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy. Work already undertaken has highlighted savings of £1.5 million on identified elements of services that are not housing related support and do not therefore qualify for Supporting People funding. A robust process has been introduced into the review process in order to assess value for money.
- 152 However, there are examples of services where elements of the costs to the Supporting People budget do not currently represent value for money and it is not clear how these instances will be challenged and resolved. The council has not developed mechanisms to allow service users to be directly involved in the development of Supporting People in Nottinghamshire.
- 153 Although there is a high level of operational work undertaken with Nottingham City Council, cross authority arrangements are not well developed at a strategic level.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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

Ownership of problems & willingness to change

- 155 The council is ambitious with the aim of becoming one of the top 20 performing local authorities. The Audit Commission's progress report on Nottinghamshire's comprehensive performance assessment, published in December 2003, stated that:
- ◆ 'Based on Nottinghamshire County Council's current plans, the council has the potential to significantly improve the way it works and the services it provides to local people'.
- 156 The commissioning body has been successful in involving all partners in the Supporting People programme including the engagement of councillors from across the county, district and borough councils.
- 157 The approach to all stakeholders adopted by the Supporting People team has had a positive outcome in helping to mainstream Supporting People within the county:

'The last 18 months have seen Supporting People enter the psyche of social services and health'. - Commissioning body member.

- 158 The council has acknowledged that, subsequent to local government organisation in 1998, the issue of diversity 'dropped down the agenda' but is now a high priority within the council with the chief executive in the role of champion for diversity issues. To facilitate strategic thinking workshops, facilitated by Nottingham Trent University, have been established for chief officers and cabinet members.
- 159 There is a high level of understanding of the importance of Supporting People as part of an emerging preventative agenda which is working to introduce services that support vulnerable people from key councillors and the elected member scrutiny function has looked at Supporting People with further scrutiny of the programme due to commence in June 2004.
- 160 A new management structure within social services is currently under discussion with proposals including a new post of strategic housing and Supporting People service head which will give a much more clearly defined role for the work of housing within the county.
- 161 There is now a demonstrable commitment to understand and respond to the needs of the BME communities. A study on the BME housing and social care assessment in South Nottinghamshire and including Nottingham City has recently been completed which aims to inform the strategic development of services which meet the needs of the individual communities and a member of the Supporting People team is focusing her work on networking and with local communities.
- 162 The commissioning body has taken ownership of the value for money agenda and as a result of early work on eligibility, savings in excess of £1.5 million have now been identified within learning disabilities with the councils senior management in negotiations regarding the allocation of funding responsibilities.

- 163 After a service review, providers are now being asked to complete an assessment form on how they experienced the review and to give the team feedback. This will then be used to inform improvements to the review process.
- 164 It is acknowledged that there is still more work to be done to identify and agree local priorities and this has been responded to through a re-structure of the core strategy group in order to focus their work programme on the strategy.
- 165 However, whereas the majority of district councils are responsive to need there is cross agency concern of behaviour by some district councils which results in vulnerable people being excluded from services. This is particularly the case in relation to the housing of offenders or people at risk of offending. This has been acknowledged and work is ongoing through both the probation service and directly through the commissioning body to address the barriers which currently exist.

A sustained focus on what matters

- 166 At the time of our inspection the Supporting People programme had made projected savings of £1,200,000 for the financial year 2003/04 to carry forward to the financial year 2004/05. In addition to any savings still to be identified through the review process there is also a projected saving of £1,270,000 for 2004/05 with commitments and potential additional commitments currently total £416,000. Within the grant, therefore, funding is being made available to respond to identified need.
- 167 In Nottinghamshire the Supporting People grant has been used to facilitate the growth in cross tenure services such as floating support to victims of domestic violence. Further changes are also planned such as clear plans to review and develop the nature of an accommodation based homelessness housing support service to more floating support with direct access provision.
- 168 In setting the service review timetable, priority has been given in the process to an early review of high cost, high risk services. Although the review process is behind schedule reviews representing 43 per cent of the grant will have been completed by the end of April 2004 and reported to the commissioning body in June 2004. The commissioning body has agreed a revised review programme.
- 169 However, during our inspection we identified an instance of very high overhead costs for a floating tenancy support service funded through Supporting People. Following discussions as part of the inspection process, the cost of elements of this service are going to be addressed outside of the review process.
- 170 The Supporting People team is continuing to show an inclusive partnership approach with providers and other stakeholders and the level of support and advice given has been broadly welcomed and has contributed to the real sense of partnership that exists.
- 171 In order to respond to the changing emphasis of the Supporting People programme, the staffing structure for the Supporting People team has been regularly reviewed with changes made to support the changing requirements of the programme.

The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 172 The Supporting People team are viewed by providers as genuinely committed to providing a good service, are very approachable, supportive and knowledgeable and linking partnership officers with providers helped to build relationships at any early stage.
- 173 The relevant scrutiny body made up of councillors has had a meeting to look at the Supporting People programme to ensure that members understand the programme and are aware of the work that is going on regarding the

development of the five year strategy. Supporting People is currently in the programme for further scrutiny this summer, 2004.

- 174 The supported living implementation group (mental health) has begun a process to identify Supporting People service users to develop the necessary services and support mechanisms to enable direct payments to become more accessible to eligible individuals and increase the uptake of services.
- 175 The council has committed resources and time to assisting their IT supplier to produce a robust product. In this way they influenced how the software was developed and ensured that it meets their needs.
- 176 Further development of the Supporting People website is currently being undertaken to allow separate password protected access for providers where they will be able to view their own organisations performance information.
- 177 A common file format has been agreed between the council and Newark and Sherwood District Council's housing benefit department which is being tested with a view to future electronic data exchange. This will be rolled out to the other districts once fully tested and operational and will save staff time keying in data and make the process more efficient and real time.
- 178 However, at the time of our inspection there were no contingency planning arrangements in place to address the potential failure of a service provider or the withdrawal from the market of a particular service provider. Subsequent to our inspection, at their June meeting, the commissioning body agreed contingency planning arrangements.

Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management

- 179 The council has recently gained beacon status for its work with older people with Supporting People being a key partner in this work. In awarding beacon status the ODPM assessed that the council 'conveys enthusiasm, passion and confidence in supporting older people, with partners working together across the county'.
- 180 The lead councillors are consulted and knowledgeable about the Supporting People programme which is also linked into the scrutiny process.
- 181 Within the equalities and diversity agenda an impact assessment toolkit is currently being piloted with a full authority rollout due to be completed by the end of 2004. This will help to provide a further focus in ensuring that the diverse needs of Supporting People service users, and potential service users, are met.
- 182 The Supporting People team has a business plan which links into corporate plans. All staff have regular supervision and employee development reviews. Appraisals have just been introduced and there is a programme in place for cascading them down to all staff.
- 183 As is the case in other administering local authorities we have inspected, explicit links with health and probation targets and performance indicators are not in place yet although work has commenced in this area.
- 184 There is a lack of formal reporting of performance to the commissioning body and the council has yet to develop a robust range of performance reports that can be reported regularly and monitored through the governance arrangements for the Supporting People programme. This area of work has now been addressed with full reporting mechanisms agreed.
- 185 The virtual inclusive forum is currently not capturing the views of all service users and carers. This has been acknowledged as a priority area of work.

'We want to make the inclusive forum less 'virtual'. Up to now we have been concentrating on providers but need to refocus on direct involvement with users'. - **Supporting People officer.**

Summary

- 186 Overall, we judge that Nottinghamshire has promising prospects for delivering further improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme.
- 187 There is full ownership of the programme across all partners and a high level of awareness within wider services. In addition councillors from across the county are linked in through membership of the commissioning body and the work undertaken through scrutiny. The new management structure for social services currently being proposed will bring a greater emphasis to the role of housing within the council.
- 188 The commissioning body together with the wider council is giving priority to work looking at value for money with non housing related support identified and an agreed approach for identifying high cost services through the review process. We have some concerns about VFM issues that have come to light outside the review process and the lack of clarity around dealing with these.
- 189 The Supporting People team has a clear business plan, however there is a need for all targets to be SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, time bound) and for performance management to be more clearly linked through to the commissioning body. There are no contingency planning arrangements in place for Supporting People to ensure that service users are safeguarded in the event of provider failure.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Minutes of Cabinet meetings where Supporting People was discussed.
- ◆ Better Care Higher Standards Charter Summary.
- ◆ Minutes of Core Strategy Development Group.
- ◆ Commissioning body minutes and terms of reference.
- ◆ Supporting People Leaflet.
- ◆ Service Review timetable document.

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:

- ◆ Visits to a number of social services area offices.
- ◆ Visits to a number of providers which included:
 - ◆ The Herons
 - ◆ Tideswell Court
 - ◆ Action Housing
 - ◆ Midland Womens Aid
 - ◆ Ashfield Hostel
 - ◆ Midway Housing
 - ◆ Nottingham Community Housing Association

List of people interviewed

Nick Allars	IT Business Manager, Nottinghamshire CC
Louise Anderson	Housing Benefit Manager, Bassetlaw District
Cllr Dick Anthony	Chair Commissioning Body and Portfolio Holder for Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Steve Ashmore	Provider Relationship Manager, Commission for Social Care Inspection
Pete Astbury	Revenues Manager, Ashfield District Council

Steve Bambrough	Acting Head of Strategic Housing, Rushcliffe DC
Cllr Chris Baron	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny for Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Cllr Sue Bennett	Leader, Liberal Democrats, Nottinghamshire CC
Stewart Berry	Corporate Performance Management Officer
Chris Blainey	Director of Finance, Gedling PCT
Phil Bradley	Service Manager (learning disability), Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Chris Brown	Housing Benefit Technical Officer, Rushcliffe BC
Sarah Brown	Research and Development Officer, Mansfield DC
Linda Button	BME Development Worker, NAVO
Joy Cooper	Asst Director, Mental Health and Learning Disability, Nottinghamshire CC
Lucy Cooper	Head of Support (Midlands), Step Forward
Lynn Clayton	Head of Housing, Gedling BC
Bernard Coleman	Head of Housing, Bassetlaw DC
Cllr Kay Cutts	Leader, Conservative Group, Nottinghamshire CC
Ted Czeniak	Director of Housing, Health & Leisure, Broxtowe BC
Lesley Daly	Assistant Chief Probation Officer, National Probation Service in Nottinghamshire
Kate Davies	Drug Action Team Co-ordinator, Nottinghamshire Drug & Alcohol Action Team
Malcolm Dillon	Asst Director, Adult Commissioning, Nottinghamshire CC
David Gell	Private Sector Housing Manager, Care and Repair
John Hannam	Fairer Charging Project Manager, Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Hilary Hare-Duke	Offender Accommodation and Benefits Advice Manager, National Probation Service in Nottinghamshire
Richard Holland	Assistant Director (Housing Services), Ashfield Homes
Martyn Hudson	Service Manager (Supported Housing), Ashfield

Homes

Jill Jefferies	Supporting People Partnership Officer, Supporting People Team
Mark Jennison-Boyle	Acting Team manager, Supported Living Team, Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Judi Juno	Supporting People Partnership Officer, Supporting People Team
Al Kestenbaum	Head of Service (Partnerships), Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
John Larwood	Manager, Mansfield & Ashfield Care and Repair
Roger Latham	Chief Executive, Nottinghamshire CC
Eric Laverick	Foundations Regional Coordinator (Midlands)
Cllr J Lonergan	Conservative Spokesperson, Nottinghamshire CC
Sue Marx	National Housing Federation
Anne Morgan	Supporting People IT Business Analyst, Supporting People Team
Tracey Montgomery	Partnership Officer, Supporting People Team
Joe Pidgeon	Service Standards and Business Development Manager, Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Anthony Piddock	Technical Officer, Mansfield & Ashfield Care & Repair
Delores Price	Head of Women's Services, Tuntum Housing Association
Kevin Pudney	Service Head(ICT), Social Services, Nottinghamshire CC
Ruth Rigby	Supporting People Manager, Nottinghamshire CC
Alison Timmins	Community Housing Manager, Newark and Sherwood DC
Cllr Carolyn Troop	Housing Portfolio Holder, Bassetlaw District Council
Gill Westcott	Principal Welfare Rights Officer, Culture and Community, Nottinghamshire CC
David Wright	Senior Benefits Officer Newark & Sherwood District Council
	Focus Group - Supporting People Team

Focus Group – Frontline Staff

Focus Group – Social Services Commissioners

Focus Group – Home Improvement Agency, Steering Group

Focus Group – Inclusive Forum

Focus Group – Providers

Appendices

Demographic information

This section includes demographic information relevant to Supporting People, comparing the council with its nearest neighbours⁶ and with England.

Measure	Nottinghamshire	England
Population (mid-2001)	753,100	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	16.53	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	4.35	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	2	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁷	29 (Mansfield)	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁸	15 of 164	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁹	10 of 164	-

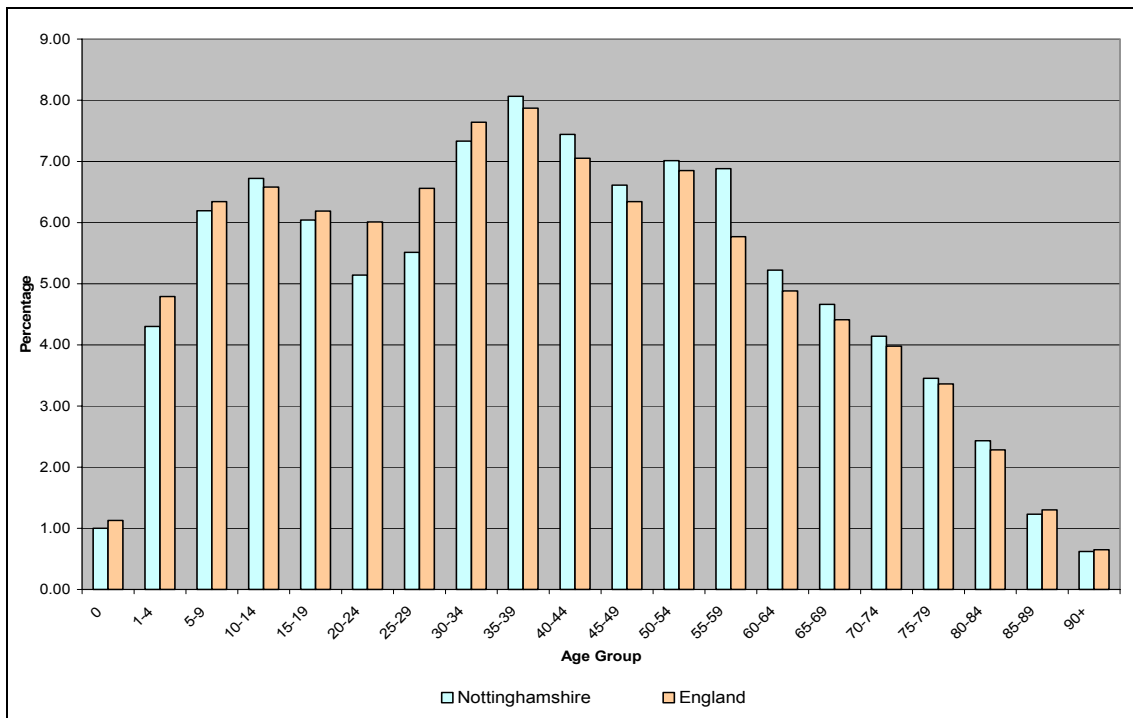
⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

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

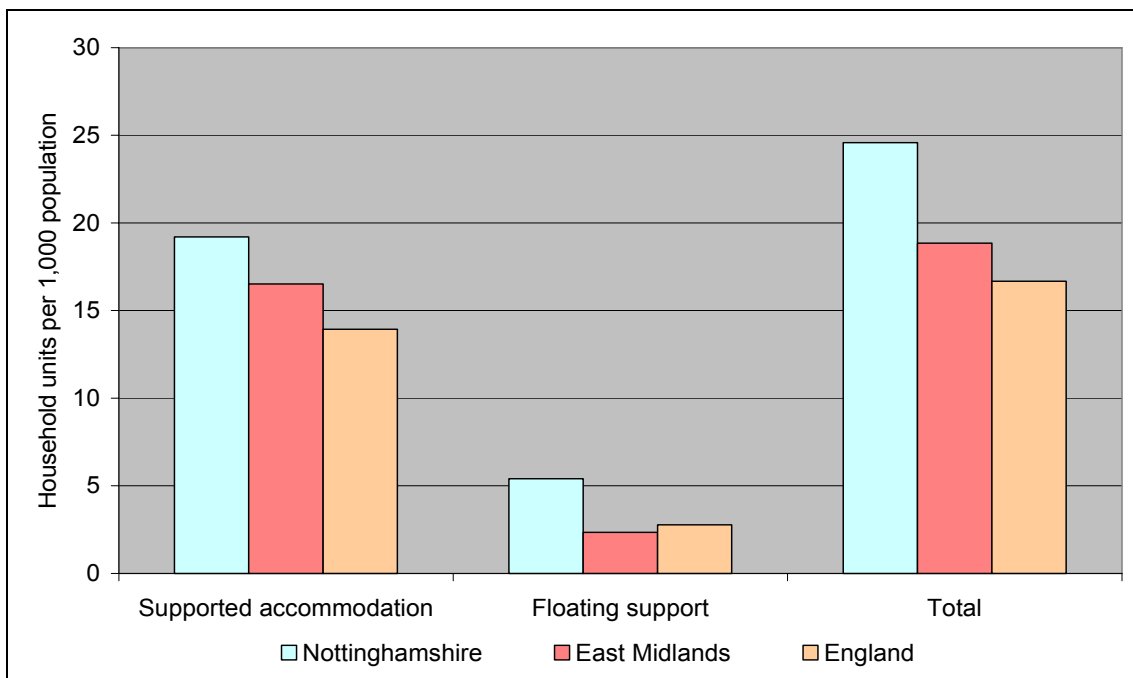
⁸ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

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

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England

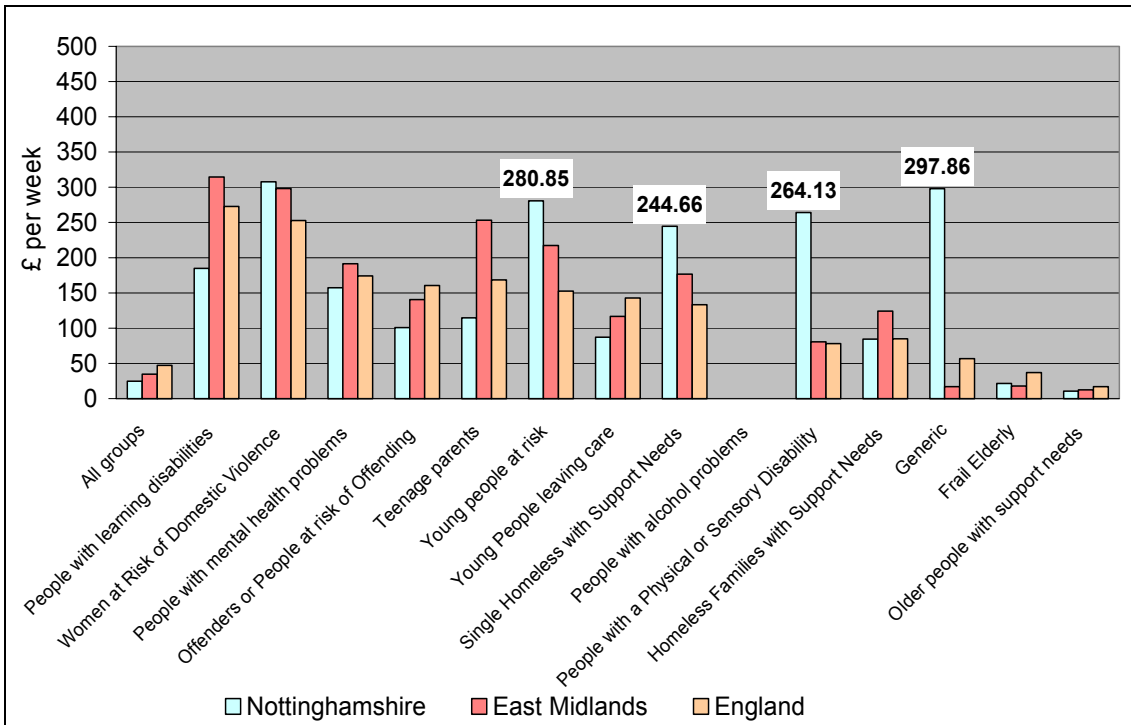


Service provision funded through Supporting People¹⁰

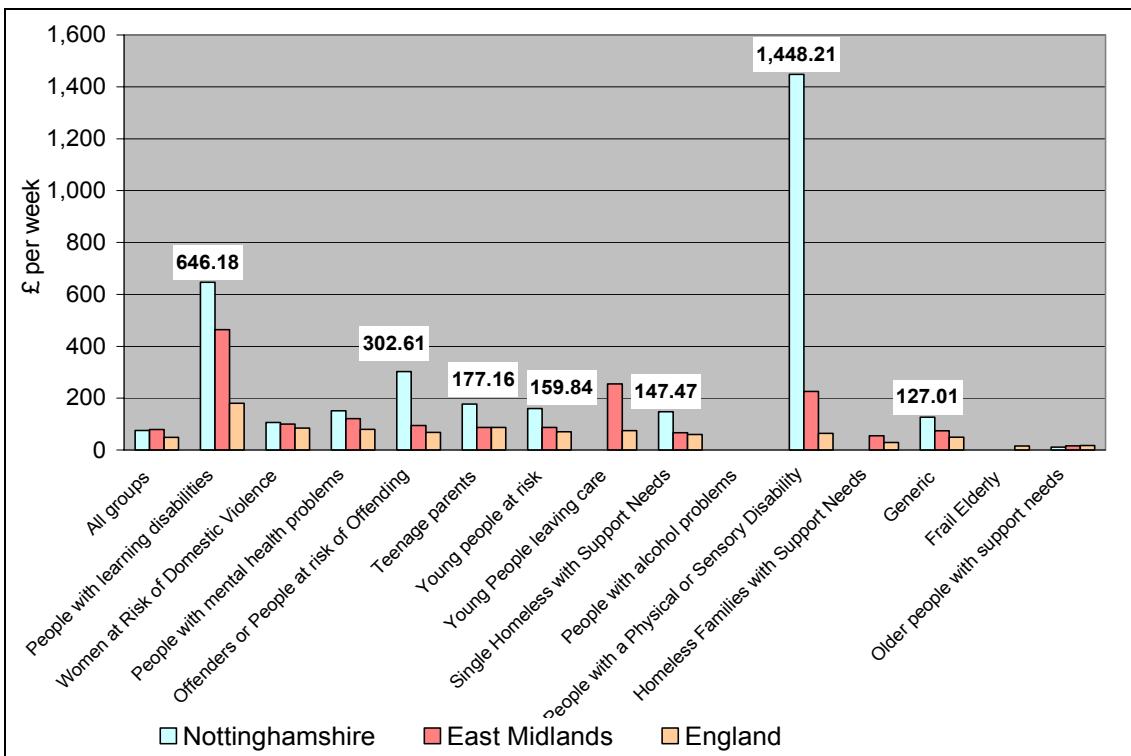


¹⁰ Source: ODPM December 2002 supply reporting data, tables 1a, 3, and 4. Floating support includes resettlement and move-on support services.

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹¹



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



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

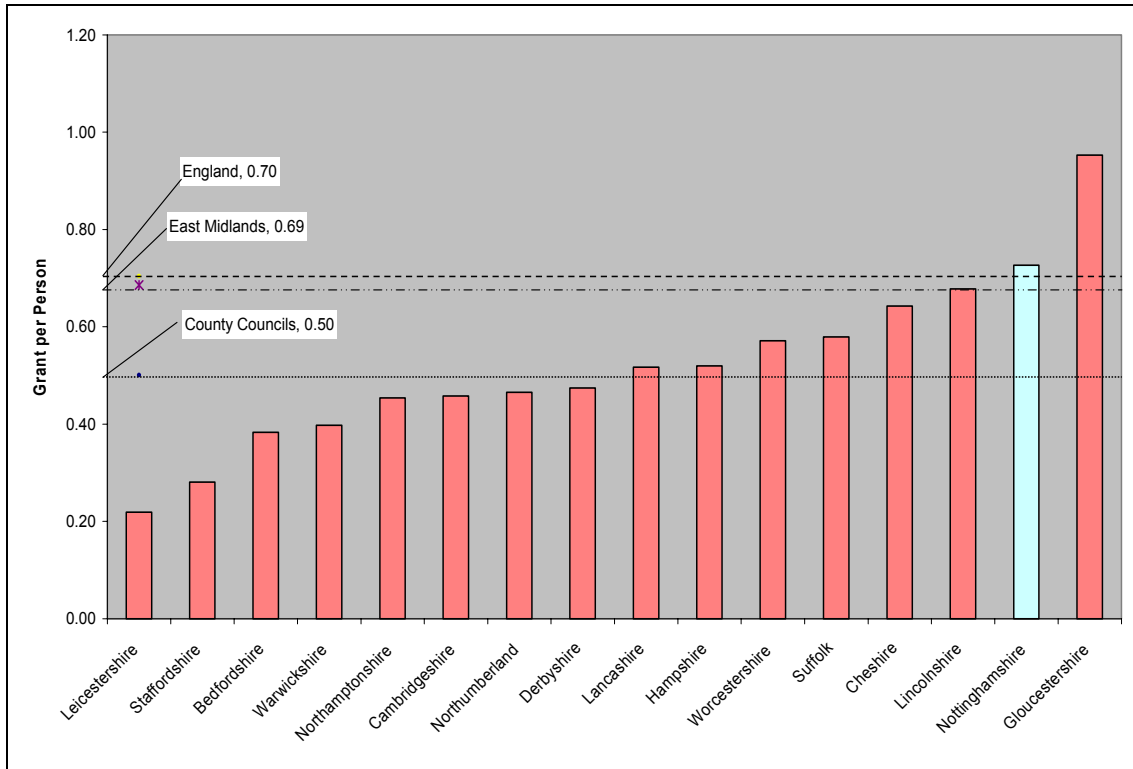
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Estimated Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Nottinghamshire	£ 28,456,904	£446,002	£ 758,591

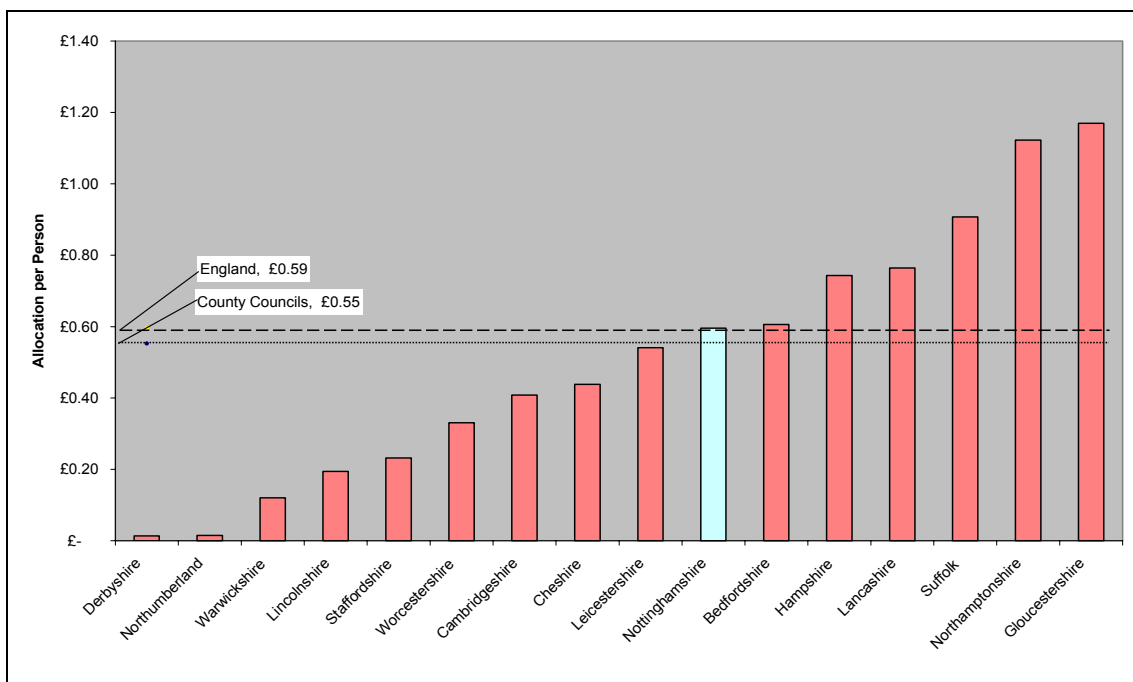
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Nottinghamshire	£0.73	£27.52	£28.24	£169.91
East Midlands	£0.69	£24.96	£31.50	£88.82
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

Estimated Supporting People grant per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹², all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)



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



¹² A comparator group of similar councils.

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

Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

Significantly above average (•••••)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions
Above average (••••)	Admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations costing less than £1000 delivered within 3 weeks Delayed discharge for older people
Average (•••)	Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks
Below average (••)	Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home Older people helped to live at home Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall
Significantly below average (•)	Employment, education and training for care leavers

Best value performance indicators**Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with unitary councils**

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

Within the best 25 per cent	The level of the Commission for Racial Equality's standard to which the authority conforms Racial incidents that resulted in further action
Average	Racial incidents recorded by the authority Domestic violence refuge places
Within the worst 25 per cent	none

Supporting People – Housing related support services

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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)

Local Supporting People website

The Nottinghamshire Supporting People website includes a user friendly provider directory with in turn links to individual providers sites. This gives potential service users the opportunity to view the full range of providers within their area and also enables advice services and providers to effectively signpost prospective service users.

Joining up welfare benefits advice

There is good liaison and working between the welfare rights unit, fairer charging and the Supporting People team in Nottinghamshire with the work being further improved for the service user with pilot work on joint working arrangements between the pension service, social services finance and district council housing benefit/council tax benefit teams. The pilot involves a single worker advising service users on social welfare entitlements, completing application forms, verifying income and capital and completing financial assessments for all partner agencies.