

Inspection report

April 2004

Supporting People Programme

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Contents

Summary	3
Introduction to the Supporting People programme	3
Background	3
Scoring the service	5
Context	9
The locality	9
The Council	9
Supporting People – ODPM Framework for Delivery	10
Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Oldham	10
How good is the service?	13
Are the aims clear and challenging?	13
Does the service meet these aims?	14
How does the performance compare?	25
Summary	26
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	27
Ownership of problems & willingness to change	27
A sustained focus on what matters	28
The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement	28
Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management	29
Summary	30
Documents reviewed	31
Reality checks undertaken	31
List of people interviewed	32
Appendices	34
Demographic information	34
Performance information	35
Positive Practice	41

Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People programme

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

Background

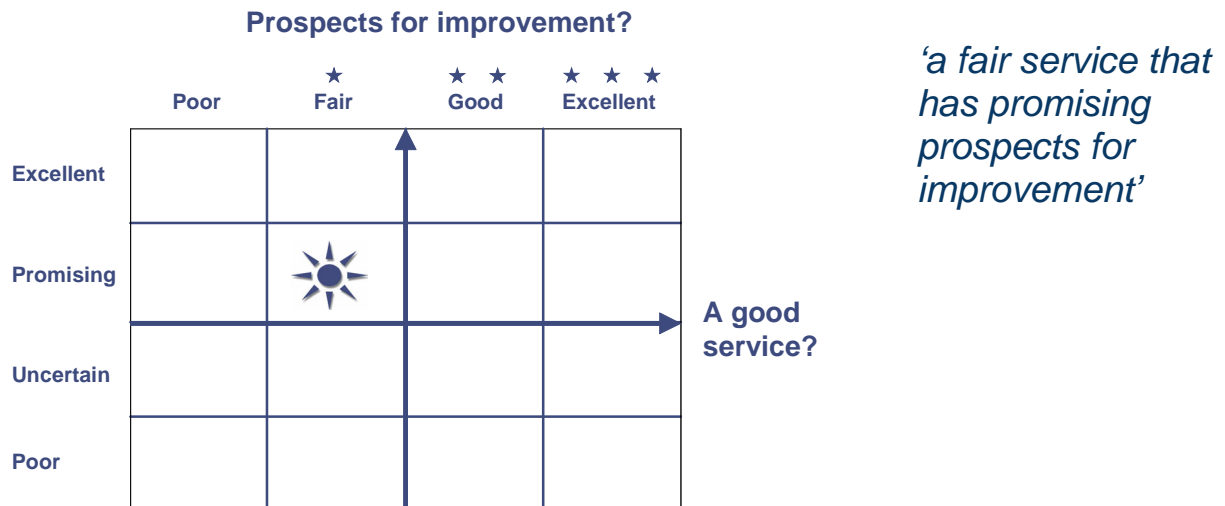
- 5 Oldham is a metropolitan council in the North West of England located in the North East quadrant of Greater Manchester. The borough is an area of contrast from the traditional town centre of Oldham to the rural and sparsely populated areas such as Saddleworth.
- 6 The population of Oldham is 217,273 of which 15.64 per cent are from minority ethnic communities with the largest communities being Pakistani with 13,754 and Bangladeshi with 9,817.
- 7 Unemployment at 2.9 per cent is above the national average of 2.6 per cent, and the borough is 61st out of 354 authorities in the government's index of multiple deprivation with 7 out of 20 wards being within the 10 per cent most deprived in the country. Conversely 2 wards are within the least deprived 10 per cent of wards in the country.
- 8 The council is Labour controlled with 33 of 60 councillors. The council operates under a leader and cabinet style government, supported by scrutiny and area committees.
- 9 The council employs approximately 12,000 staff across all services of and has a net revenue requirement for 2003/04 is £266 million.
- 10 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Oldham primary care trust and Greater Manchester probation service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 11 The total amount of Supporting People grant funding available in 2003/04 is £8,759,775. The council receives £303,580 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 12 The highest cost Supporting People service in Oldham is £463.05 a week for accommodation based support for two people with learning disabilities. The

lowest cost service is £1.35 a week for sheltered housing with 21 elderly residents.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart¹: Oldham Metropolitan Borough 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 people of Oldham that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy of increasing the range of service available and increasing access to people from black and minority ethnic communities;
 - ◆ work on the five year strategy is linking in to the wider strategic agenda including the housing market renewal pathfinder; preparation of a supported housing strategy and the private finance initiative project to provide extra-care sheltered housing;
 - ◆ 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;
 - ◆ cross-authority working is developing well with examples of positive outcomes for vulnerable service users;
 - ◆ accessible information for people with a learning disability has been developed and is being used as part of the review of services for people with a learning disability; and
 - ◆ the area probation service has developed a comprehensive package of information for district managers which includes practice notes, guidelines and reference guides.

Areas for improvement

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

¹ 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.

- ◆ service users and their carers have not been involved in the development of the Supporting People strategy;
- ◆ feedback to service providers has not been consistent and the role of the service provider on the core strategy group in regard to two-way communication has not been defined;
- ◆ the current programme lacks specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART) performance targets. It is therefore not possible for the commissioning body to assess and monitor the success of the programme; and
- ◆ the Supporting People service review programme has fallen behind schedule and to date no reviews have been completed. The potential for service improvement and the scope for cost savings to be realised at the earliest opportunity have been delayed as a result. The first tranche of reviews are due for consideration at the March 2004 meeting of the commissioning body.

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 positive progress on the equality and diversity agenda;
- ◆ the Supporting People grant has been used to facilitate the growth in cross tenure floating support and improve access to people from black and minority ethnic communities who were identified as a priority within the shadow strategy;
- ◆ both internal and external partnerships working to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable people are positive and facilitative;
- ◆ the directorates management structure which is in the process of being strengthened will give the additional management capacity necessary to continue driving the Supporting People programme forward;
- ◆ the Supporting People team are viewed by providers as committed to providing a good service, are approachable, supportive and knowledgeable;
- ◆ there has been a positive response to the areas for improvement we have highlighted throughout the inspection with improvements to Supporting People arrangements already in place; and
- ◆ the council has recognised the weaknesses in its action plan and following our on site inspection, the 2004 programme has been reviewed and includes SMART targets.

Areas for improvement

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

- ◆ the previous lack of senior management within the lead department left the Supporting People team without appropriate line management support and direction for a period of approximately ten months until interim management arrangements were put in place;
- ◆ scrutiny arrangements have been slow to be embedded and there has not been any consideration given to facilitating a structure which involves representatives from health and probation; and
- ◆ service users and their carers have not been involved in the development of the Supporting People strategy and are therefore not able to influence the future direction of the programme.

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:

The council must:

- ◆ re-introduce the newsletter for providers and ensure that it is also accessible to service users;
- ◆ progress work on engaging with service users in a timescale which will enable their views to inform and influence the five year strategy;
- ◆ engage with members of the minority ethnic communities in Oldham in time to ensure that they have the capacity and information needed to contribute to the five year strategy;
- ◆ extend the opportunities for frontline staff to be involved in the formulation of policy in general and specifically in the development and production of the five year strategy;
- ◆ formalise the terms of reference for the providers representative on the core strategy group;
- ◆ extend financial reporting to the commissioning body to include reporting on the administration grant;
- ◆ ensure that a revised timetable for service reviews which includes the resources and skills needs for completing all the remaining reviews before the ODPM deadline of March 2006 is agreed;
- ◆ continue with work to review and revise the performance reporting mechanisms to include SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound) targets and outcomes which are linked to the priorities identified in the shadow strategy and which mirror the revised priorities being agreed in the production of the five year strategy;
- ◆ extend the opportunities for scrutiny of the Supporting People programme to include non-executive members of Oldham primary care trust and the local probation board; and
- ◆ develop an action plan to address other weaknesses as outlined in this report.

- 19 The above recommendations have all been accepted by the council and included in their Supporting People 2004 performance plan.

- 20 We would like to thank the staff of Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council particularly Lynda Megram, Pauline Rutherford and the Supporting People team who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

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

The locality

- 22 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council is in the North West of England, situated in the North East quadrant of Greater Manchester. The borough covers 55 square miles, and is centred on the traditional industrial town of Oldham and extends to take in part of the Peak District National Park within its boundary.
- 23 The population of the area is 217,273, living in 87,824 households². 15.6 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities³. At 13,754 and 9,817 respectively, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are the largest minority ethnic groups in the borough.
- 24 Unemployment stands at 2.9 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. The areas traditional industry of cotton spinning has been replaced by hi-tech industries such as electronic, electrical and instrument engineering.

The Council

- 25 The council has 60 councillors with the Labour group being in overall control. The council adopted the leader and executive model of governance in September 2001 and this is supported by scrutiny and area committees.
- 26 The council's net budget requirement for the year 2003/04 is £266 million with a social services net revenue requirement of £53.6 million.
- 27 A comprehensive performance assessment was carried out in 2002 and the council received an overall score of 'weak'. A progress assessment report published by the Audit Commission in December 2003 made the following comment:

'Overall the direction of travel is positive and the pace of change has picked up over the last six months. Based on its current plans, the council is well placed to improve the way it works and the services it provides to local people'. - Audit Commission December 2003.

- 28 The Social Services Inspectorate awarded Oldham social services department zero stars in November 2003. Prior to November work had commenced, at the council's request, to install a performance action team. The team will be working with the council from February 2004.
- 29 Priority areas within the community strategy which link to Supporting People are:
- ◆ community cohesion;
 - ◆ equalities and inclusion;
 - ◆ community safety;
 - ◆ voluntary sector;
 - ◆ environment and transportation ;

² 2001 Census.

³ 2001 Census.

- ◆ health and social care;
- ◆ housing; and
- ◆ young people.

30 The council established an arms length management organisation (ALMO) called first choice homes Oldham (FCHO) in April 2001, delegating responsibility for providing housing management and maintenance services of its 18,000 homes to first choice homes Oldham (FCHO). Following transfer, the ALMO received a 'two star' "good" inspection from the audit commission and as a result is able to draw down an additional capital allocation of £32.4 million to 31 March 2005 and a further £39.7 million for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2007.

Supporting People – ODPM Framework for Delivery

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

31 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:

- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
- ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
- ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
- ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
- ◆ Elected members: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
- ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

32 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority (ALA), the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier ALAs each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the ALA has a veto where it can demonstrate a financial risk to the ALA.

Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Oldham

Management Arrangements

33 The Supporting People team sits within the partnership and commissioning arm of the social services directorate with the accountable officer being the executive director for social services.

34 The commissioning body comprises the executive director of social service who chairs the body, assistant director from Oldham primary care trust, district probation manager, the borough director for Oldham Pennine care trust and five senior managers from the council.

35 The commissioning body is an established group with terms of reference which set out its role for overseeing the Supporting People programme in the borough and these are regularly reviewed.

36 The Supporting People team comprises:

- ◆ Supporting People manager;

- ◆ 1 x contracts officer;
- ◆ 2 x project officers; and
- ◆ 1 x administrative officer.

37 The team structure is currently being reviewed as a result of the changing emphasis of work from contract issues to the review process.

Supporting People Strategy and Budget

38 The ODPM required all Supporting People administering local authorities to submit a shadow strategy in the autumn of 2002. The shadow strategies were required to demonstrate a clear vision and strategic steer for the programme and to set out the map of existing housing related support provision. The ODPM assessed the council's shadow strategy as "fair".

39 The shadow strategy explains the identified supply of Supporting People services in the city with the services mapped against the ODPM's suggested supply profile of Supporting People services in an area such as Oldham.

40 The primary client group analysis of services and unmet need identified in the shadow strategy showed:

- ◆ No Supporting People funded services identified for mentally disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS, refugees or rough sleepers and travellers.
- ◆ No Supporting People funded services for frail elderly/older people with dementia/mental health problems or for young people leaving care.
- ◆ There is minimal provision identified for drug users and offenders.
- ◆ No 'rapid access' provision for single people.
- ◆ There is only one provider who has specific services for people from BME communities. Extending provision of all services into the BME communities.

41 Priorities for provision include:

- ◆ Frail elderly – there are agreed capital allocations via a private finance initiative for up to nine frail elderly schemes.
- ◆ Floating support scheme for people who have misused drugs.
- ◆ Development of a 'rapid access' provision for single people.
- ◆ Extending provision of all services into the BME communities.
- ◆ Extending support provision into previously excluded tenures.
- ◆ Providing a continuum of support provision for all client groups.

42 The actual supply of accommodation and support services as funded by Supporting People grant based on 31 March 2003 was as follows:

Primary client group	Number of units of support
Single homeless with support needs	161
People with mental health problems	106
People with learning disabilities	234
People with a physical or sensory disability	33
Older people with support needs	4511
Women at risk of domestic violence	28
Homeless families in need of support	46
Refugees	0
People with alcohol problems	36
People with drug problems	4
Pregnant teenagers	21
Offenders	24
Young people Leaving care	38
Young people at risk	13
Generic	33
Total	5288

- 43 Administering local authorities are now required to prepare a five year Supporting People strategy, these are due to be submitted to the ODPM by March 2005.
- 44 Preparation of the five year strategy is being carried out in conjunction with the preparation of a supported accommodation strategy for the borough and a consultant has been jointly commissioned by Supporting People, social services and Oldham PCT to work on the project. In addition, the social services research team are working on the needs analysis which will inform the strategy. A progress report was discussed by the core strategy group in February 2004 when consultation will be carried out with providers. Following on from this a half day event facilitated by the consultant for the commissioning body and core strategy group is planned for March 2004.
- 45 The administration grant awarded to the council by the ODPM to assist in the costs of implementing, delivering and managing the programme is £303,580 for the financial year 2003/04.
- 46 The final Supporting People grant allocation to the council for the financial year 2003/04 is:
- ◆ £8,759,775.
 - ◆ £229,000 has been awarded to cover the revenue costs of schemes under development (pipeline funding).

- ◆ The highest cost Supporting People service in Oldham is £463.05 a week for accommodation based support for two people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £1.35 a week for sheltered housing with 21 elderly residents.

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 47 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.
- 48 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.
- 49 The vision for Oldham's Supporting People programme is expressed as:

'To ensure better housing support and greater choice for everyone in Oldham: better support for better lives'.

- 50 As part of achieving the local vision, the following aims are stated:
- ◆ developing services which meet needs;
 - ◆ increasing choice for service users;
 - ◆ improving the quality of service provision; and
 - ◆ ensuring that services produce positive outcomes.
- 51 Within the context of the vision and aims the shadow strategy sets the objectives for the Supporting People programme in 2003/04 as including:
- ◆ to address the gaps in services for young people and ex-offenders;
 - ◆ to extend the range of services for women experiencing domestic violence and for young parents into different tenures;
 - ◆ to look at levels of staff support for young parents; and
 - ◆ to address the under-representation of black and minority ethnic service users across all areas of provision.
- 52 Work priorities for the Supporting People team are included in the shadow strategy as follows:
- ◆ improve the evidence base of needs data;
 - ◆ ensure that the communication strategy 'rolls out' beyond providers and incorporates service users more fully;
 - ◆ address issues of black and minority ethnic service provision and raise this as a quality strand with all providers;
 - ◆ map related, non Supporting People funded services to aid strategic planning; and
 - ◆ transfer data about supply of provision to 'GIS' (geographical information system) format to enable analysis of supply at the local area level.
- 53 There are clear links between Supporting People and the local strategic partnership (LSP) with the chair of the commissioning body chairing the children and young people's partnership sub-group of the LSP and the chief executive of Oldham primary care trust being the current chair of the LSP.
- 54 It has been acknowledged by the council that the lack of a housing strategy function has limited the integration and development of various housing advice and support strategies. This situation has now been addressed with the

appointment of a housing strategy manager in June 2003 who is also chair of the Supporting People core strategy and development group and sits on the commissioning body in an advisory role.

- 55 Work on a supported accommodation strategy is underway which links housing support into a whole system planning framework. A project group whose membership is drawn from the Supporting People core strategy group is overseeing this piece of work.
- 56 As a result of the lack of a housing strategy function, the council's housing strategy is also out of date, however an updated housing strategy is now in preparation and is due to be completed by March 2004.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 57 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.
- 58 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

- 59 Within the council as a whole and including the social service directorate, senior management capacity has been increased and a new strategic director for social services took up post in July 2003. Commitment to the Supporting People agenda is evidenced by the executive director holding a meeting to request a progress report on the Supporting People programme on her first day in office and subsequently taking the chair of the commissioning body.
- 60 There is a lot of optimism amongst staff that there is a new commitment to service delivery within Oldham:

'The homelessness strategy is being re-worked. With the old style Oldham this would have been left. The structure change has had a massive impact. Now you are talking to people who can deliver'. - Frontline staff.

- 61 Housing related support providers have a positive view of the council's Supporting People team. The following comment embodies the flavour of the comments made by service providers during our inspection:

'The Supporting People team are genuinely committed to a genuinely good service. They are very approachable, supportive and knowledgeable'. - Supporting People funded provider.

- 62 Within the council there is an acknowledged lack of a robust commissioning function. In order to address this, there is an emphasis on improving commissioning within the agreed work of the performance assessment team and a consultancy firm has been commissioned to lead on the work. One anticipated outcome from this is a new appointment of head of commissioning which will be a post jointly funded with Oldham primary care trust (PCT).

- 63 At our focus group of frontline staff from a number of provider organisations, the views expressed were very positive about how their support services had improved as a result of Supporting People. Examples given included:
- ◆ extending support to include weekend cover;
 - ◆ extended help for families with support needs;
 - ◆ more floating support and help for vulnerable people to establish independent living; and
 - ◆ outreach support following a stay in a homeless hostel and an increase in the number of tenancies sustained as a result of the increased housing related support.
- 64 At the time of our inspection all the interim contracts had been signed and service providers saw the Supporting People team's use of the quality assessment framework as facilitative and 'not being used as a stick'.
- 65 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 payments were made from the implementation day of 1 April 2003.
- 66 A fairer charging policy has been adopted with assessments carried out within the fairer charging team. For new service users, provider's monthly returns link changes in occupation and trigger a referral for assessment. For existing service users, in addition to the provider's own arrangements, the council has been proactive in contacting each household where there was a payable charge at 1 April 2004. This has resulted in a further 200 requests for an assessment under fairer charging.
- 67 There is an acknowledged over supply of traditional sheltered housing within Oldham and an under supply of extra care sheltered housing. In order to redress this balance, a private finance initiative (PFI) is being entered into. Bids for the PFI will be evaluated by nine panels each responsible for evaluating a different aspect of the bid. One of these is for support services.
- 68 The commissioning body for Supporting People will have the right to veto any provider that cannot satisfy at least level C of the quality assessment framework and have an action plan to get to level B. The Supporting People team are currently working with the PFI team on a robust scoring system that addresses the evaluation of bids.
- 69 There are also direct links between the Supporting People team and the housing market renewal pathfinder team and the chief executive of Oldham PCT is also closely involved with work on the pathfinder. Existing supported provision has been mapped in the early intervention areas but needs still have to be mapped.
- 70 It is accepted by the council that more work needs to be done to accurately identify housing needs and housing support needs. A great deal of information about housing and support needs is held by agencies within Oldham but historically best use has not been made of this information in developing housing strategies. Work is now underway to improve the evidence base of needs data which will inform the Supporting People five year strategy and work has commenced on the identification of relevant organisations and information across the local strategic partnership (LSP). This work is being facilitated by the forum for Oldham research which is a sub-group of the LSP.
- 71 The following work which is either currently being completed or planned will contribute to the identification of housing related support needs:
- ◆ A homelessness strategy has been drafted and is currently being worked to.
 - ◆ A consultant has been appointed to complete work on the strategy by the end of February 2004.

- ◆ The housing needs survey is currently being updated by consultants with the work due for completion by April 2004 and a full survey will take place in 2005.
 - ◆ Specific research will take place including work with the PCT into the support needs of people with HIV/AIDS.
 - ◆ Extensive work within the prospectus for the housing market renewal Pathfinder.
 - ◆ Focus groups with frontline staff.
- 72 The probation service has no local accommodation strategy, however, there is a Greater Manchester accommodation strategy and a designated officer with lead responsibility for Supporting People. She works closely with all Greater Manchester Supporting People teams, including Oldham, and probation district managers to help ensure that the needs of the local services are reflected in Supporting People strategies.
- 73 The home improvement agency in Oldham has a positive relationship with the Supporting People team and additional funding is being sought in order to extend the service. This is seen as key to addressing areas of need within the owner occupied and private rented sectors where there is an over-representation of minority ethnic communities in poor standard housing. There are also links to the housing market renewal pathfinder work.
- 74 Work is being undertaken to progress the needs analysis for the five year strategy with the research work to be reported to the February 2003 core strategy group meeting. Providers will then be consulted on the analysis.

User involvement and access to services

Consultation

- 75 The Supporting People team have organised nine inclusive forums with good attendance but it has been acknowledged that attendees at the events have primarily been from service providers and there is an awareness of the need to facilitate greater user involvement via alternative means. It is intended that the Supporting People user involvement strategy, which is currently being sent out for consultation, will be the vehicle to deliver greater service user involvement.
- 76 Historically, feedback from inclusive forum meetings was via a news sheet which was well regarded by providers and we were advised that they were also accessible to service users. However, the news sheet is currently not produced with the result that a well regarded channel of communication has been closed. We are advised that the news sheet will be re-launched at the end of March 2004.
- 77 There is a provider's representative on the core strategy group but there is no formal feedback to providers and as a result there is a lack of clarity as to how providers are kept updated on the work of the core strategy group or how they can influence the agenda. As a result of this issue being highlighted during our inspection the role of the provider representative is in the process of being formalised.
- 78 In assessing the shadow strategy the ODPM included the following comment:

'The strategy acknowledges fully that the commissioning body must, as a priority, develop ways of fostering effective participation strategies for users, in particular for users from BME backgrounds'.

However, the council acknowledges that this work still needs to be progressed.

- 79 At individual service level we did see examples of users being involved in consultation about the service they received. For example, within work on the

private finance initiative we saw examples of consultation events and a newsheet being produced with older people.

- 80 Officers from the Supporting People team have attended tenants groups for individual providers to explain Supporting People and offer users the potential to channel issues back to the Supporting People team. Tenants in sheltered accommodation reported that visits from the Supporting People team had been thorough and informative offering them the opportunity to voice their own opinions about the service they were receiving.
- 81 All learning disability services are currently being reviewed by the council. Presentations and information to service users has been produced in accessible formats including using pictorial representation.
- 82 We received very mixed messages from staff within provider organisations regarding communication channels for keeping them informed, opportunities for influencing and for networking. This area has been accepted as needing to be rolled out beyond current arrangements and the issue will be raised at forthcoming provider meeting.
- 83 The jointly commissioned cross authority consultancy arranged a consultation event for all cross authority services in February 2004 that included frontline staff and service users.

Information

- 84 During our inspection, we visited a number of offices and made telephone calls for advice, we found the following:
- ◆ We found all the housing offices easy to contact and we were given clear, comprehensive information and advice from helpful and friendly staff. All offices visited are clearly signed, have ramped access and display office hours, contact telephone number and emergency numbers. All offices visited display language line posters and have minicom/loop systems installed for the hard of hearing and the offices are pleasant and welcoming with ample seating.
 - ◆ Not all office reception staff, however, are trained in recognising housing applicants support needs. This has been acknowledged by the council and will be included in the work on the access and advice work of the supported accommodation strategy.
 - ◆ During a visit to a provider, we observed a customer unable to gain access to the provider's 'shop' front service. The door was locked, the bell was not answered and opening times were not displayed. We have been advised that this has now been rectified and that this type of issue will be picked up during scheme validation visits and improvements progressed through the action plan.
- 85 Information on accessing Supporting People services is currently available within the discreet service areas but is not compiled into a directory for Supporting People. The council acknowledged the need to publish details of services available and how to access them with their partners in health and probation suggesting this would be beneficial. Work on this is now included in the Supporting People team plan and with the agreement of other stakeholders, it is proposed to use the forthcoming 'information fayre' day to launch this.
- 86 Providers have found the information sessions provided by Oldham council to be very useful and spoke highly of the news sheet which had been used to disseminate information on the programme. Unfortunately, due to the necessary prioritisation of work on the gold and platinum cuts this was discontinued and in its place information was posted on the Supporting People web site. This is not seen by providers as an effective communication tool and in the light of providers

comments, the Supporting People team has willingly committed to re-introducing the news sheet.

- 87 The Supporting People team has produced some information in larger print/pictorial form with the accessible version of the quality assessment framework developed for use with people with learning disabilities adopted as part of the ODPM toolkit.
- 88 We found a variance in the quality between the information from the different service providers:
- ◆ Provider's information leaflets are detailed, helpful and easy to understand, but do not provide advice in community languages.
 - ◆ Tenants in one scheme commented that information is generally in small print and they were unaware of options for larger print / Braille / audio tape / signing.
 - ◆ Information is clear and gives information in community languages.
- Provider information is being assessed as part of the quality assessment framework and will form part of improvement planning.

Diversity

- 89 The councils shadow strategy states that:

'In Oldham, addressing the under-representation of black and minority ethnic service users across all areas of provision will be both a major aim and challenge for the Supporting People team and providers of services'.

- 90 Prior to the Supporting People programme there was one service provider with provision which specifically addresses the needs of a minority ethnic community and a very limited number who could provide a culturally sensitive service.
- 91 The joint review of social service which reported in March 2003 commented:

'Supporting People is a potentially useful vehicle for improving community services in Asian communities and the authority should be proactive in ensuring this opportunity is not allowed to slip by'.

- 92 Progress on addressing the support needs of service users from BME communities has included the development of a BME specific scheme for people with learning disabilities, second stage provision for the women's refuge specifically for women from South Asia and a new tenancy support scheme targeted at people from black and minority ethnic groups.

Success of the work to increase the take up of services from BME communities is shown in the fact that 18 per cent of the new users of Supporting People funded services are from BME communities, compared to 15 per cent within the wider Oldham population.

- 93 Work on the supported accommodation strategy and Supporting People five year strategy will build on work already undertaken to identify current and future service needs. Work already undertaken includes:
- ◆ Asian Elders: housing and social care needs in Oldham and Rochdale ⁴.
 - ◆ Meeting Peoples' religious needs in learning disability services ⁵.
- 94 We visited six offices of one provider and all the offices we visited had freephone access for customers with service telephone numbers displayed. However, the

⁴ The University of Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit 2001

⁵ ref

phones are positioned at a height which is too high for wheelchair users. We have been advised that this will be addressed via the council's monitoring service review role with the provider.

- 95 A black and minority ethnic (BME) advocacy group that we spoke to expressed concern that BME community, advice workers and volunteer advocates are unclear about Supporting People and the various housing related support services that are available. The view expressed was that:

'We need proper consultation with the BME community. This should be independent consultation – not just through 'community leaders'.

- 96 The issues expressed by the group have previously been identified by the Supporting People team. The council submitted a bid in July 2003 to become one of the ODPM and Department of Health sponsored Health and Supporting People pilot schemes. The council's bid proposed looking at developing a community based approach from the Glodick centre by funding workers who could encourage take up of services that are traditionally not accessed by BME groups, and to work with communities and service providers to reconfigure services to better meet the needs and preferences of members of the BME communities. Unfortunately this bid was not successful. We are advised that the Supporting People team will work with the group we spoke to in order to progress this work.

Partnerships

- 97 Co-ordinated and effective partnership working is key to the success of the Supporting People programme that delivers real improvements to the housing related support available to vulnerable people.
- 98 The Supporting People team are central to the partnership and members of the team are seen in a very positive light:

'We are now dealing with someone who has understanding of the support service'. - Supporting People funded provider.

- 99 The following mechanisms are in place to support the Supporting People programme in Oldham:

Inclusive Forum

- 100 The 'Oldham Supporting People forum' was first set up in January 2001 when it was advertised as being 'open to anyone interested in housing related support services in Oldham'. The forum is open to service users but has primarily being a meeting for service providers.
- 101 A group of service providers we spoke to consider the forum to be interesting and informative. Initially, following the meeting a newsletter was produced which was seen very positively by service providers. The comment was also made that service users would read the document. Unfortunately due to a lack of capacity within the Supporting People team, the newsletter was abandoned with no effective method of disseminating the information introduced to replace it.
- 102 It was noted by providers that more latterly, forum meetings have not been held as frequently. It has been acknowledged by the council that meetings had 'lapsed' and that there has been discussion at the core strategy group. The core strategy group resolved to relaunch the forum and identified the key aim of having the forum is 'to make it a more powerful vehicle for strategy and involvement'. This aim needs to be translated into a developed and formal role for the forum within the Supporting People programme.
- 103 A representative from the forum sits on the core strategy group. This should ensure that there is a two-way flow of information between the groups but there are no protocols in place to give clarity to the role of the representative and the lack of forum meetings makes a two way dialogue difficult to achieve. As a result

it is very difficult for the representative to be representing the views of other service providers in a meaningful way. Subsequent to our on site inspection, work is underway to formalise the role of the provider representative.

Core Strategy Group

- 104 The group has a membership of 10 with five of the members employed by the council. Of the remaining five representatives, one is from Oldham PCT, one from the probation service, one representative from the inclusive forum and there are two independent members.
- 105 A review of minutes of five meetings of the core strategy group, spanning seven months, shows that the provider's representative has attended all meetings with probation being represented at two meetings with health not represented at any of the meetings. Membership of the group is consistently raised at meetings and membership has been extended and a new health representative recently joined the group.
- 106 The core strategy group helped to steer the council through the smooth and effective implementation of Supporting People which was followed by a short period without a chair of the group. At this time there was a recognition that the group needed to change in order to rise to the new challenges of shaping services for the future and membership of the group was changed and widened to reflect their new role.

Commissioning Body

- 107 The commissioning body has 10 members and is chaired by the executive director of social services and has representation at assistant director level from Oldham PCT and district manager level from the probation service. The borough director from Oldham Pennine care NHS Trust is also on the group with the remaining six places taken by offices of the council.
- 108 The functioning of the commissioning body has been weakened by the lack of active representation from the probation service who have acknowledged that attendance at meetings of both the core strategy group and commissioning body has been inconsistent due to heavy work demands and the absence of identified deputies. The area is in the process of developing strategies to resolve this problem and attended the last meeting of the group where we have been advised by other members of the group that they were valuable contributors to the meeting.
- 109 Positively, the probation service has held a training day for all local probation divisional managers to improve their knowledge of Supporting People and to clarify their roles as part of the commissioning body and core strategy group. Individual district managers have been issued with practice notes, guidelines and reference guides.
- 110 Financial reports on the Supporting People grant are taken to the commissioning body and include a breakdown of spend by client group and service provider together with the estimated over/under spend. Currently the budget has an estimated two per cent underspend.
- 111 The financial information on the grant is very clear and provides the group with the information needed to ensure that they can fulfil their role. Spend on the administration grant of £303,580, however, is not reported which reduces the groups ability to own and direct the budget.
- 112 Not all members of the commissioning body are aware of the terms of reference for the commissioning body. An example of this being a lack of understanding about the council's right, under the ODPM Supporting People grant conditions, to veto a decision if there is a financial risk to the authority. There is a memorandum of understanding and terms of reference for the commissioning body. These include that 'The commissioning body (CB) will review annually its membership

and terms of reference at its January meeting' but this was not completed at the January 2004 meeting which would have provided the opportunity for new members to become familiar with the terms of reference and for the group to review their relevance in light of their role.

Cross Authority Issues

- 113 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. The council has been a member of cross authority working in Greater Manchester which has been a proactive cross authority group.
- 114 A council representative sits on the Greater Manchester Supporting People forum and the contracting and practitioners group. The group meets regularly and has been pro-active in both moving joint projects forward and in providing an effective information and support network. Key outcomes from these groups to date include:
- ◆ Work being undertaken to develop cross authority standards on reviews, accreditation to ensure joint standards are adopted for providers, working across Greater Manchester.
 - ◆ Joint cross authority statement agreed for the shadow strategy.
 - ◆ Funding from all ten Greater Manchester authorities to develop a Greater Manchester research and consultancy project, to influence the development of cross authority protocol and procedures.
 - ◆ Joint training was organised by Greater Manchester authorities for cross authority providers on supply mapping.
 - ◆ Joint lead authority on the steady state contract to be rolled out across the Greater Manchester authorities.

Quality and Monitoring

Contracts and Payments

- 115 The council has successfully negotiated the signing of contracts with service providers and has implemented the payment of Supporting People grant in a timely and efficient manner.

'Of the 4/5 authorities my organisation works with Oldham has been the most efficient with payments'.

- 116 The commissioning body is taking an active role in the monitoring of the Supporting People grant. Reports are provided to each commissioning body meeting and are broken down by service user group and by provider and include information on estimated variance against the grant total.
- 117 The administration grant for 2003/04 is not monitored by the commissioning body with large items of expenditure only agreed but without an overview of the whole budget.
- 118 We have been able to confirm that one scheme we reviewed during our inspection has been over paid Supporting People grant as a result of an administrative error on behalf of the provider. Following discussion with the provider an invoice for £108,000 has been raised for repayment of overpaid grant.
- 119 Regarding late transitional housing benefit claims, there has been no net negative impact on the grant allocation as a result of late claims.

Performance Management

- 120 As highlighted earlier, the social services department has been going through a prolonged period of restructuring which has impacted on the level of support given to the Supporting People team. There has been no head of service for a year and there is currently an acting assistant director for partnerships and performance with a senior head of service overseeing the work of the Supporting People team.
- 121 The Supporting People manager is one of five managers reporting to the vacant head of service post. We have been advised that the post was advertised as a secondment opportunity in August 2003 but interviews are still to be arranged.
- 122 The Supporting People team has a team plan but as a result of the senior management capacity issues highlighted there was a period of approximately 10 months when the Supporting People manager did not have a review of the plan with a line manager. Since November 2003 when the senior head of service took over temporary management of the Supporting People team there have been regular reviews undertaken.
- 123 A progress report is always produced for the both the core strategy group and the commissioning body but the report does not have SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) targets and is not related to the aims outlined in the strategy. Key Supporting People performance indicators one and two plus local indicators on referrals have always been collected and will be used to inform the five year strategy although they are not regularly monitored as part of a performance monitoring system. It is therefore difficult for the groups to confirm that they are achieving target and agreed outcomes from the programme.

Value for Money and Cost Effectiveness

- 124 The highest cost service in Oldham is £463.05 a week. When the transitional housing benefit scheme was introduced by central government the housing benefits manager gave a presentation to providers and provider's forms were checked to make sure the claims were correct. Where there were questions over the level of an individual claim, negotiations were undertaken between the housing benefit manager, the Supporting People manager and the provider in question.
- 125 The Supporting People team are currently undertaking reviews on all learning disability services. As part of the review, a consultant has been engaged whose brief includes looking at the value for money element of the review process which will then be used as a template for reviewing value for money on future reviews. Using an external consultant to undertake this part of the review also enables transparency in a service area which is predominantly high cost, with provision dominated by the council.

Risk and Contingency Planning

- 126 There is currently no comprehensive risk management strategy in place relating to the full extent of the Supporting People programme but work is ongoing on a 'managing business continuity' protocol relevant to Supporting People which will be in place for April.
- 127 Risk management arrangements are in place to consider the management of high risk offenders accommodated in Oldham (MAPPA arrangements) but there are currently no arrangements in place for offenders who have served 12 months or over for violent or sex offences (MAPPA arrangements).
- 128 Supporting People has a bespoke in-house IT system which has performed well in terms of payments and performance modules and is ahead of many market solutions to SPLS phase two. The decision to develop an in-house system was based on council-wide replacement needs which are currently under review with a strategic partnership being considered and the need to respond to this in a

strategic manner. There is recognition of future risk of relying on a small in house team, and the resources required to undertake and support continuous future upgrades.

Service Reviews

- 129 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.
- 130 In choosing to prioritise services for people with learning disabilities for review, a number of factors were taken into account which included the cost of the service, at £3 million representing the highest cost, and as a result having the potential for significant cost savings. Also taken into account was the fact that learning disabilities is also an area where the service users are most vulnerable.
- 131 The review timescale has slipped and at the time of our inspection no reviews had been completed with work on strategic relevance and value for money due for completion during February 2004. The delay in the programme has slowed any possible service provision or re-alignment enabled through the release of funding.
- 132 The commissioning body are aware of the slippage and we have been advised that all the reviews will be completed within the three year timescale required. At the time of our inspection, there was no revised timetable to give certainty that the reviews will still be completed by the end of March 2006 but a revised timetable has now been agreed by the core strategy group and is now due for consideration by the commissioning body.
- 133 The support received from the Supporting People team by provider's perspective has been very helpful and the validation toolkit was a useful tool for ensuring that providers were prepared for the scope of the reviews. The toolkit gives providers a detailed guide as to the approach the council will take in carrying out service reviews. The toolkit states that all stages of the review process will be used for all providers regardless of risk. Desktop reviews alone will not be relied upon.
- 134 Accreditation and appeals procedures for service reviews are currently in draft form but are still to be ratified by the commissioning body.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 135 The Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes a number of people in Oldham as outlined in the brief pen pictures highlighted below. Particularly noticeable is the increased ability to support service users with outreach support in the community following a period in more accommodations based provision.
- 136 Through joint work such as the private finance initiative for extra care sheltered housing, the Supporting People programme is also beginning to affect the quality and appropriateness of services.
- 137 There are still a number of priorities that need to be addressed from the perspective of the probation service to meet the needs of offenders. These include the provision of direct-access services open to users with an offending history.
- 138 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.
- 139 The following case studies 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: Older People
Type of Service: Short term floating support
Key Players: Tenant Support Service, Oldham Council
Social Services
Citizens Advice Bureau

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Mr and Mrs X had recently moved into their rented flat. Mr X had severe short term memory loss with a prognosis that his condition would deteriorate. Mrs X was his sole carer but was finding it increasingly difficult to manage.

Actions taken:

- ◆ Mrs X contacted the Tenant Support Service after hearing about the service provided from another tenant. The following support was given:
 - ◆ Help in making an application for Housing Benefit.
 - ◆ Referral to Citizens Advice Bureau.
 - ◆ Application for Attendance Allowance for both Mr and Mrs X.
 - ◆ Application for MIG.
 - ◆ Referral to Social Work Team for assessment of care and support needs.

Outcome for Service Users :

- ◆ As a result of the support given to them Mr and Mrs X have benefitted through:
 - ◆ Receipt of eligible benefits.
 - ◆ Receipt of benefit to pay for support for Mr X.
 - ◆ Mr X attends day care.
 - ◆ Referral to hospital specialist.
 - ◆ Mrs X now has the appropriate support which enables Mr X to stay in the family home.
 - ◆ Mr and Mrs X have their support needs assessed on a regular basis.
 - ◆ Mrs X is aware of the support agencies who can give them both support and guidance and feels able to share with support agencies when she is in need of additional support.

Supporting People Case Study 2

<u>Service User Group:</u>	Homeless families
<u>Type of service:</u>	Two bedroomed flat accommodation based
<u>Key players:</u>	Tenant Support Service, Oldham Council Social Services

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Ms Y and her two children went to stay at the homeless hostel fleeing violence from an ex-partner and local youths. The family were in a distressed state and needed practical support on a number of issues including:

Outcomes for service user:

- ◆ Ms Y has written about the help she received and the following is an excerpt from her own study:
 - ◆ “When I first arrived, I needed a lot of help with many practical issues. My children needed to be registered at a nearby school, my son needed referring to a counsellor as he has many difficulties. I also needed help with my benefits, a place to store my furniture, and also to close the tenancy of my property. I found the staff to be friendly and helpful, they showed genuine concern and were available 24 hours a day. This made me feel very safe knowing that someone was always on hand to help.

I also needed help finding a new doctors, and most importantly a new home for me and my children to feel safe. Without the help of the staff, I would have had many difficulties in solving problems I needed to. I discussed all my problems with my support worker, who advised me on all my problems, helped me with appointments and the important things, from start to finish. He also helped me and supported me by attending some appointments and collected some of my personal belongings.

I will always be thankful to the staff for their help and support they gave me and my kids, and especially my support worker who sat and listened to my problems. Without that help and support I wouldn't be where I am today”.

How does the performance compare?

- 140 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.
- 141 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.
- 142 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 need is significantly higher than the overall average of 74 per cent. This is being addressed through the private finance initiative which will see a reduction in units for older people and an increase in provision for frail elderly where provision is currently below the national average.

- 143 At £0.77 per head of population, the unit cost per week of Supporting People Services in Oldham is below the North West regional average of £0.86 although when the cost of community alarms and sheltered housing is taken out the position reverses and at £122.76 the unit cost per week is higher than the regional average of £91.57 per week.
- 144 The performance assessment framework indicators for 2002/03 are included in the data appendix to this report. The council performs well in most of the areas of work where there is a read across to Supporting People service user groups with the exception of admissions of supported residents aged 65 and those aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care where the performance is rated as average. The council performed below average (**) in relation to:
- ◆ Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home.
 - ◆ Avoidable harm for older people (falls and hypothermia).
 - ◆ There were no areas pertinent to Supporting People where the councils performance was rated as significantly below average (*).
- 145 The best value performance indicators for 2002/03 compared with other metropolitan councils are also presented in the data appendix. The council perform well in some areas but their performance is in the bottom 25 per cent for:
- ◆ Unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished.
 - ◆ Homelessness decisions within 33 days.

Summary

- 146 Overall, we judge that Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council is delivering a fair, one-star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. We have highlighted the following areas in making our judgement.
- 147 The council has produced a fair shadow strategy for the Supporting People programme and the level of synergy with the wider work of the council is continuing to improve through joint work on strategies and initiatives such as the private finance initiative, housing market renewal pathfinder and supported housing strategy.
- 148 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.
- 149 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme in Oldham is beginning to produce positive outcomes for service users that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy and cross-authority arrangements are well developed with the council playing an active part within this group.
- 150 However, the programme for service reviews is behind schedule and the potential for service improvement has therefore been delayed and negotiations over possible revisions to contract terms have not started with the potential for cost savings to not be realised at the earliest opportunity.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 151 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.
 - ◆ Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management.

Ownership of problems & willingness to change

- 152 Historically, despite efforts made by officers, councillors have not been extensively involved in the Supporting People programme with the result that there is little knowledge of Supporting People and key issues for Oldham as administering authority. The need to engage councillors further in the programme has been acknowledged and we have been advised that the council will seek further opportunities to raise the profile of Supporting People and the involvement of councillors.
- 153 The council readily acknowledges that the overview and scrutiny function has been slow to be embedded and as a result a manager has been appointed to drive the process with a program of work and training are now in place. The Supporting People programme has featured in the first phase of this with an initial briefing session held in August. To date there has been no discussion regarding the potential for joint scrutiny arrangements involving the council, health and probation.
- 154 It has been acknowledged that the structure in social services was not driving improvement and a new structure has now been agreed. As a result, the social services department is seen as in a 'transitory period' and a priority is to 'get a quality management team in place'. An executive director of social services has been in post since July 2003 and second tier appointments were being advertised at the time of our inspection. There is currently an interim assistant director for partnership and performance, with a permanent post holder targeted to be in place by July 2004. Following a permanent appointment to the post, the interim post holder will continue in the short term to offer continuity and overlap to support the new assistant director.
- 155 During this 'transitory period' there are capacity issues within the social services department which, as highlighted earlier, resulted in a lack of management support and direction for the Supporting People programme until November 2003 when temporary management arrangements were introduced.
- 156 There is now a demonstrable corporate commitment to moving forward on the equality and diversity agenda. From one race equality officer a team is now in place and a number of initiatives have now gained momentum including:
- ◆ An equality and diversity policy which was due to be discussed for approval at the cabinet meeting on the 5 February 2004.
 - ◆ A re-writing of the race equality scheme which is due to go out for consultation in April with the authority being used as a pilot for the commission for racial equality.
 - ◆ A commitment to increase the equality standards for local government by one level per year.
- 157 Regarding the historic lack of services and access to services by BME communities, there has been an increase in services both specific and sensitive to the needs of local BME communities together with evidence of people from BME communities accessing the services provided.

- 158 The commissioning function within social services is acknowledged as having weaknesses and the department has reached agreement to work with the performance action team to focus on introducing a more robust commissioning function. One anticipated outcome from this work is a senior manager to drive commissioning which will be a jointly funded post with the Oldham primary care trust (PCT).
- 159 The strength of the partnership between the council and Oldham PCT is further evidenced by the PCT chief executive chairing the local strategic partnership. Her involvement in the housing market renewal pathfinder and the jointly funded director of public health, the attendance at Supporting People forum meetings of a non-executive member from the PCT professional executive committee (PEC) and the weekly meeting of the chief Executive of the PCT and the executive director of social services.
- 160 It is acknowledged that there is still more work to be done to identify and agree local priorities and this is being responded to through the work on the five year strategy and its close development links to the supported accommodation strategy. This work is underway but has to be converted into specific conclusions and actions.

A sustained focus on what matters

- 161 In Oldham 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.
- 162 As part of the work on the private finance initiative (PFI), work is being undertaken to review the nature of support provision for non-PFI sheltered residents to ensure that there is not a reduced standard of service compared to PFI support services.
- 163 In setting the service review timetable, priority has been given in the process to an early review of high cost, high risk services. However, the review process is significantly behind schedule and whereas at the time of our inspection there was confidence within the service that all the review will be undertaken within the three years, there was no recovery strategy to back this up. Subsequent to our inspection a revised timetable has been drawn up, agreed by the core strategy group and is timetabled for the forthcoming commissioning body meeting.
- 164 There are a number of issues which have lead to the slippage including the complexity of the service area, the number of services to review and a capacity issue within the Supporting People team. In order to address the capacity issue, a decision was taken at the core strategy group to approve a reconfiguration of the Supporting People team and to recruit a second review officer.
- 165 The Supporting People team, partners and providers feel positively that the supported accommodation strategy which is currently being developed will provide the focus for future Supporting People development. A consultant is currently working on a tight timetable to develop this.

The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 166 The Supporting People team are viewed by providers as genuinely committed to providing a good service, are very approachable, supportive and knowledgeable
- 167 The current move towards a greater strategic development and linkages between providers is positive for improving services in a co-ordinated manner. The assistant director for policy and performance is a jointly funded post with the PCT

and it is expected that there will be a joint commissioning post created within a joint commissioning framework.

- 168 Currently there is no comprehensive risk assessment framework for Supporting People but work is currently ongoing to produce a 'managing business continuity' protocol which will sit under the emergency plan. This will include a tool for risk analysis and will be in place for April.
- 169 A new performance management framework has been developed for the council to monitor first choice homes Oldham which includes a simple balanced scorecard and it is intended to integrate this system with the quality assessment framework for Supporting People.
- 170 The computer soft wear system for Supporting People is a bespoke system developed in house on a modular basis and covers the full spectrum of current needs. It was developed on time and to budget. A further module for performance management is being developed. The most recent development has been a performance module which includes key performance indicators.
- 171 The council considered the relative merits of a bespoke system against purchasing a system and decided on an in-house system due to council-wide replacement needs. There is recognition of future risk in relying on a small in house team, and of the resources required to undertake and support continuous future upgrades. A strategic partnership which will cover ICT is currently under discussion.
- 172 The view expressed is that communications systems both corporately and within the social services department have significantly improved 'there wasn't any before' through staff newsletters, a management forum, senior management groups where Supporting People have given briefings, and the director's quarterly letter.
- 173 Performance management has not been strength but new arrangements which link between individual targets to departmental plans and corporate targets are to be introduced from April 2004. Staff within the Supporting People team are aware of the new system and how it will affect management of their own and the team's performance.

Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management

- 174 The council has responded constructively to the 'weak' corporate performance assessment rating with the review stating:

'Overall the direction of travel is positive and the pace of change has picked up over the last six months. Based on its current plans, the council is well placed to improve the way it works and the services it provides to local people'.

- 175 Corporately, performance management has not been strong and this has been reflected within Supporting People. The commissioning body receive a report at each meeting which is split into risk areas but it is not reported against an action plan and does not contain SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time bound) targets. Together with other agreed recommendations, reporting to the commissioning body is to be reviewed and will incorporate SMART targets.
- 176 The lack of consistent support from within social services has impacted negatively with a lack of understanding of the Supporting People agenda and a lack of focus on managing performance. For example, there was a period of 10 months during 2003 when the team plan did not undergo a management review.
- 177 The inclusive forum provides a well received opportunity for the Supporting People team to consider the views of service providers. However, it is acknowledged that the views of service users and their representatives have not

been integrated to any degree. This is being addressed through the adoption of a service user involvement strategy which is currently out to consultation.

- 178 Within the equalities and diversity agenda an impact assessment toolkit is currently being piloted on the housing market renewal pathfinder and in children's services. There will be an authority wide rollout of the toolkit in April. The application of this to the Supporting People programme would be beneficial in ensuring the inclusiveness of the services provided.

Summary

- 179 Overall, we judge that Oldham has promising prospects for delivering further improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme.
- 180 The council is making progress in improving its corporate performance and a performance assessment team commencing their work in February will be providing support in assisting performance within social services. Within this work there is a focus on improving the commissioning function and performance management within the department.
- 181 A new corporate performance management system is being introduced and there is a commitment to progressing the corporate equality and diversity agenda with the building blocks for this currently being put into place.
- 182 Work has been undertaken and continues to be developed to ensure that the support needs of service users, and future service users from black and minority ethnic communities are acknowledged and provided for.
- 183 Although there are currently no systems for encouraging the participation of service users and their carers a strategy which will move the agenda forward is currently in draft form.
- 184 All recommendations from this report have been received well and an early response by the council has resulted in them being already included in the Supporting People team's 2004 performance plan.
- 185 Despite efforts by the administering authority, there has not been full involvement from all partners on the commissioning body or core strategy group. The local probation service has recognised the need to address this weakness and have put measures in place to strengthen their participation.

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 discussed;
- ◆ better care higher standards charter summary;
- ◆ minutes of core strategy development group;
- ◆ commissioning body minutes and terms of reference;
- ◆ Supporting People leaflet;
- ◆ Supporting People newsletters;
- ◆ Supporting People five year strategy and business planning – consultation process document; and
- ◆ 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 offices including:
 - ◆ Royton.
 - ◆ Saddleworth and Lees.
 - ◆ East Oldham.
 - ◆ Failsworth and Hollingwood.
 - ◆ Chadderton.
 - ◆ West Oldham.
 - ◆ Housing options centre.
- ◆ Visits to a number of providers which included:
 - ◆ Denton Lane, OMBC scheme for people with a learning disability.
 - ◆ Elm Leigh, Anchor Housing Trust, scheme for older people with support needs.
 - ◆ Greenacres Lodge, OMBC scheme for people with mental health problems.
 - ◆ Women's Refuge, Oldham Family Crisis Scheme, women fleeing domestic violence.
 - ◆ Swift Court, FCHO, Homeless Hostel.
 - ◆ Spring Street, Threshold Housing Project.

List of people interviewed

David Ashcroft	Interim Assistant Director Policy and Performance
Steve Ainscow	Senior Development Officer, Corporate IT
Hugh Broadbent	Chief Executive, First Choice Homes
Alan Caddick	Housing Strategy Manager, OMBC
Rick Eastwood	Head of Finance & Buildings, Social Services
Rob Farnos	Project Leader, Sheltered Housing PFI Scheme
Chris Gibbons	OPAL
Mark Goldup	Independent consultant
Alastair Graham	Project Director, Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder
Dave Hargreaves	Group Manager, Housing Benefits, OMBC
Cllr Harrison	Chair, Health and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Richard Humphrey	District Manager, Probation Service
Veronica Jackson	Executive Director, Social Services
Andrew Kilburn	Chief Executive, OMBC
Sandra Mardell	Manager, Anchor Staying Put
Lynda Megram	Supporting People Manager
Rosemary Molyneux	Provider Manager, Learning Disability Service
Graham Mynott	Manager, Oldham Independent Housing Aid Centre
Martin O'Connell	Community Safety Co-ordinator (Acting)
Lynn Patel	Deputy Director (Operations), First Choice Homes
Cllr Quinn	Portfolio Holder
Gail Richards	Chief Executive, Oldham Primary Care Trust
Marcus Roe	Corporate BME Officer, Diversity and Cohesion Team
Steve Sinnott	Contracts Manager
David Smith	Director of Development and Finance, First Choice Homes

Richard Standing Divisional Budget Support Officer

Cllr Sykes Leader of the Opposition

Focus Group – Supporting People Team

Focus Group – Commissioning Managers

Appendices

Demographic information

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

Measure	Oldham	England
Population (mid-2001)	217,273	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	14.25	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	15.64	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	2.9	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁷	61	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁸	7 of 20	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁹	0 of 20	-
Households accepted as homeless and in priority need (2001/02) ¹⁰	755	-

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England

⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

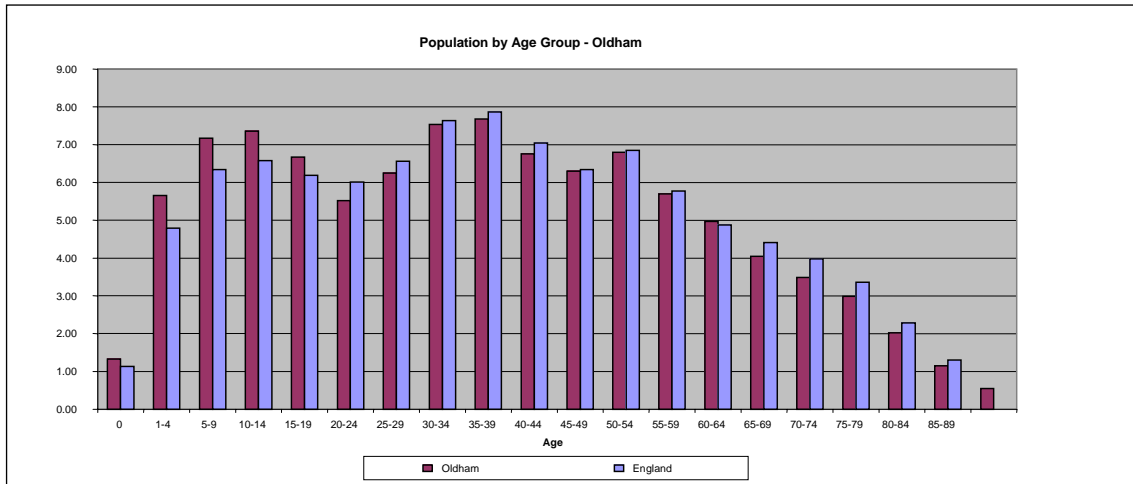
⁷ Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

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).

¹⁰ Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2002.

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



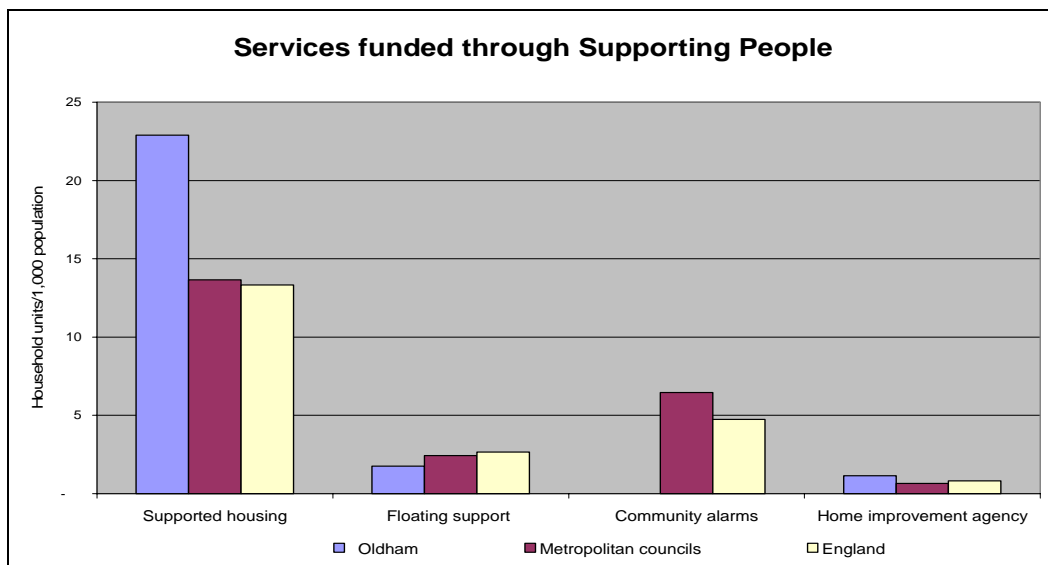
Performance information

This section highlights strong and weak areas of the council’s performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People.

We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:

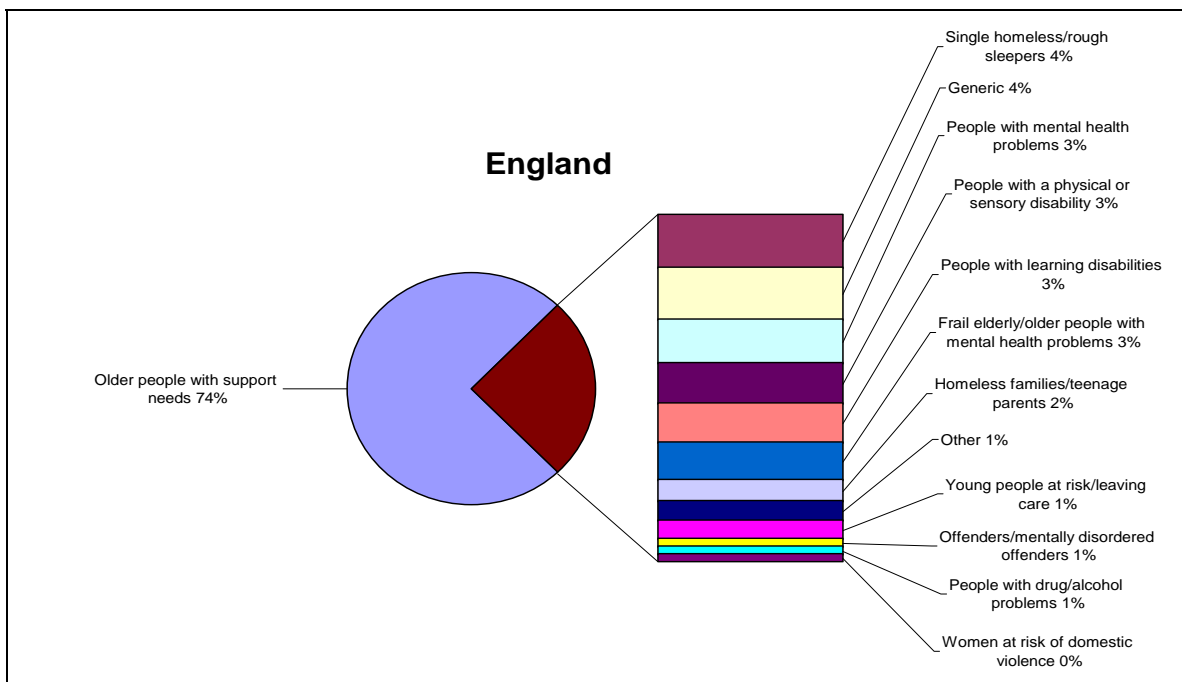
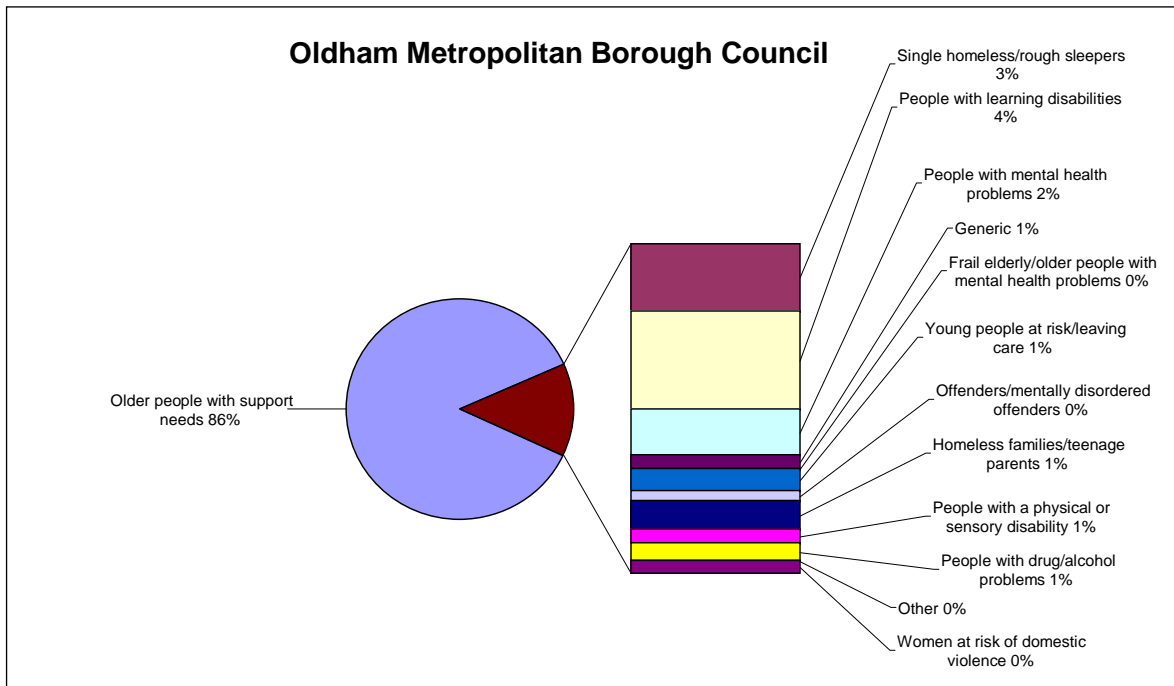
- ◆ data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- ◆ comprehensive performance assessment scores;
- ◆ star ratings for social services;
- ◆ performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services; and
- ◆ relevant best value performance indicators.

Service provision funded through Supporting People¹¹



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

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



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

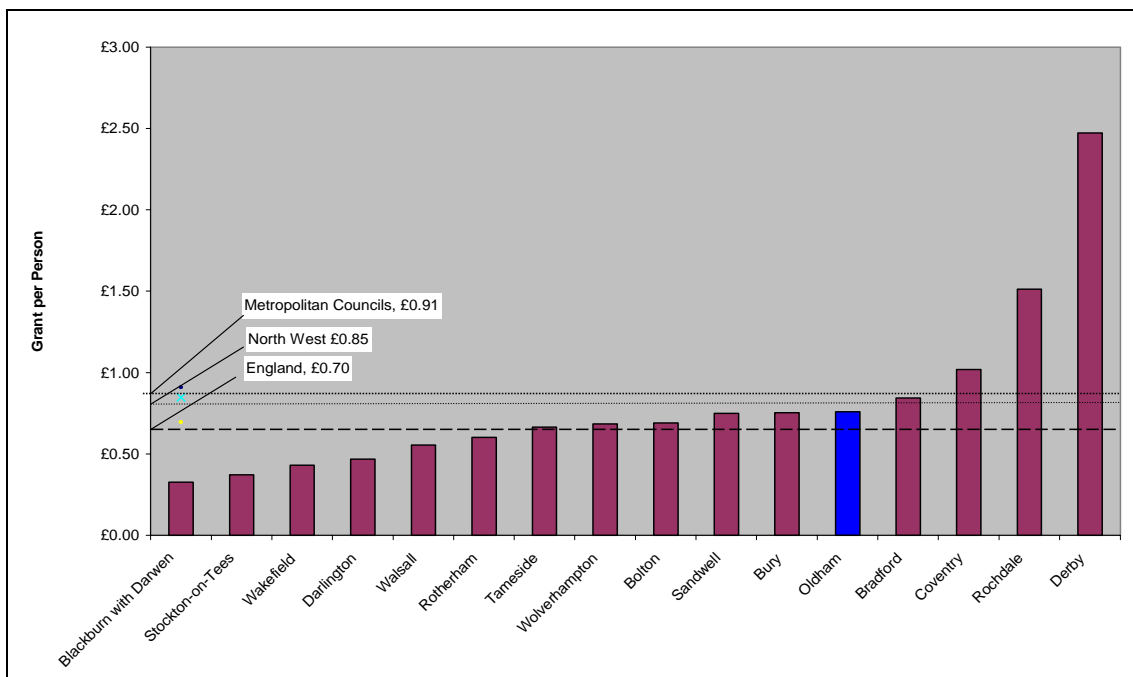
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Estimated Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Oldham	£ 8,759,775	£ 29,014	£ 303,580.12

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

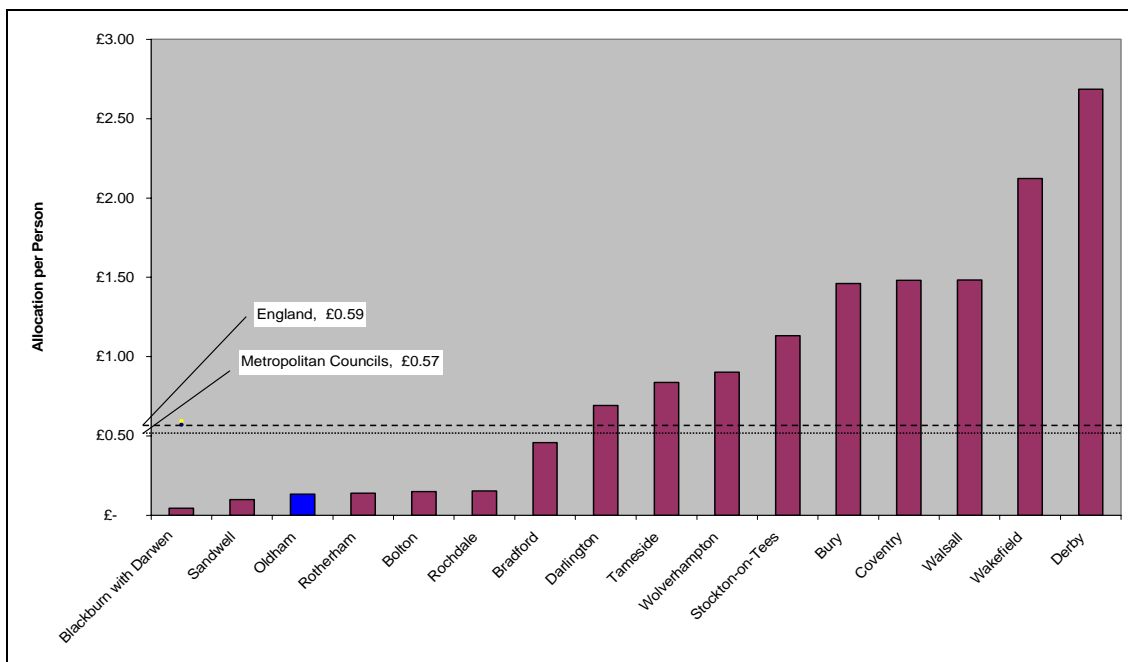
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Oldham	£0.77	£29.55	£29.55	£122.76
North West	£0.86	£33.04	£39.06	£91.57
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

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



¹³ A comparator group of similar councils.

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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Some	Uncertain	(0)
Children's Services	Some	Poor	

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 (★★★★)	Employment, education & training for care leavers Intensive home care as a percentage of intensive home and residential care Intensive home 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
Above average (★★★)	Older people helped to live at home Waiting time for care packages Delayed discharge (all ages)

Average (***)	Admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care
Below average (**)	Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home Avoidable harm for older people (falls and hypothermia)
Significantly below average (*)	

Best value performance indicators

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

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

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

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).

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. This appendix summarises areas of positive practice found during the inspection of the Supporting People programme at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council in January 2004.

Item 1

- ◆ The review of services - In a positive move to facilitate active participation in the review process by service users, information has been produced in a format accessible for people with a learning disability.

Item 2

- ◆ Membership of the Core Strategy Group - The Core Strategy Group currently has 10 members including two independent members, a representative each from health and the probation service and a representative from the inclusive forum. This balance on the group ensures that there is good cross-sector representation with no local authority domination.