

Inspection report

April 2005



# Supporting People Inspection

London Borough of Harrow

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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 support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1st 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 The London Borough of Harrow was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

## Background

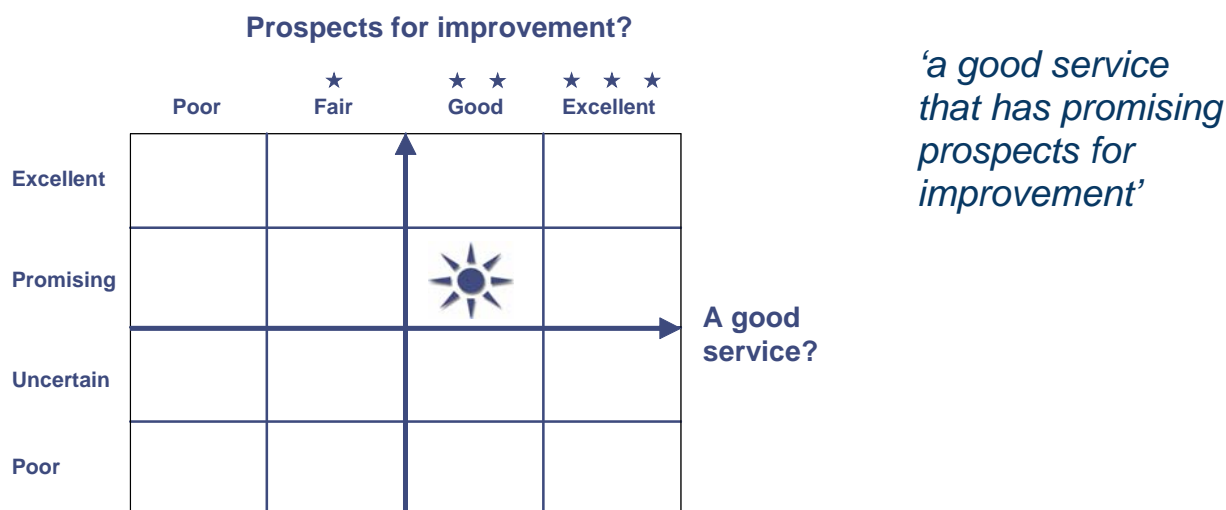
- 5 London Borough of Harrow is an outer northwest London borough council. The borough has eight main population areas including Harrow, Wealdstone, Stanmore and Pinner. The area has a high level of owner occupied accommodation at 80 per cent compared to the England average of 70 per cent.
- 6 The population is 211,700 of which 50.1 per cent describe themselves as 'other than white British'. There are significant minority groups from the Asian communities. The number of people over 65 is 14.5 per cent compared to the England average of 16.4 per cent.
- 7 Overall deprivation is low with the borough ranked at 232<sup>nd</sup> out of the 354 English authorities, where 1 is the most deprived. Unemployment in the area at 2.4 per cent is near the England average of 2.6 per cent.
- 8 The council comprises 63 councillors with the Labour party forming the administration with 30 seats. There are 28 Conservative councillors; 3 Liberal Democrat; and 2 Independents. The council employs 2,784 staff (excluding schools) and the budget for the council in 2004/05 is £264 million.
- 9 The council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in the area. In commissioning Supporting People services, the council works in partnership with the Harrow Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the London Probation Service.
- 10 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the council in 2004/05 is £3,624,566. In addition, the council receives £193,120 administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.

- 11 The highest cost Supporting People service is £395 per person per week for accommodation services for young people with a learning disability. The lowest cost scheme provides support for older people in sheltered housing at £2.24 per person per week. There are 31 different providers with 97 services providing 1,724 units of service.

## Scoring the service

- 12 We have assessed the London Borough of Harrow as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>: London Borough of Harrow - Supporting People Inspection**



- 13 We have assessed the council’s administration of the Supporting People programme to be good. During our inspection we found some positive features in the way that the programme has been implemented to date:

- ◆ Services for many vulnerable people in Harrow have been expanded through the implementation of the programme and the identification of gaps in services.
- ◆ Service users have been involved in the programme through the inclusive forums, other consultation methods and in the service review programme.
- ◆ There is a range of information available that is easy to understand and accessible including information specifically for service users with a learning disability.
- ◆ Support plans are in place and there is evidence that in some cases these have led to better outcomes for service users.
- ◆ The Supporting People team is approachable and helpful.
- ◆ The five year strategy has been drafted and is currently being consulted on. Service users have already been consulted and have made changes to the document.
- ◆ Financial management and monitoring system are in place and are working well.
- ◆ Fairer charging assessments are made jointly with the department of works and pensions and offer an easy way for service users to ensure they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to.

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

- ◆ The service review programme has delivered a significant number of reviews which have led to service improvements and in one case, the decommissioning of a service.
- ◆ There has been consistent engagement of the PCT and the probation service at a middle management level and service providers are engaged and active in the programme.
- ◆ There is a strong cross authority group and Harrow works well with six other west London boroughs to ensure common approaches such as a joint accreditation process for service providers.

14 However, we found a number of weaknesses in the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed:

- ◆ Until recently, representation and involvement from the PCT and the probation service has not been at a senior enough level and there has not been the strategic lead for the programme by these partners.
- ◆ Although service users are involved in the programme, this could be further developed by involving them in the governance arrangements and in the production of information.
- ◆ The current range of services do not meet the diverse needs of the population of Harrow.
- ◆ There is not a clear methodology for continually up-dating the analysis of service needs across the borough.
- ◆ Work has not been completed on a methodology to be able to quantify the outcomes for service users from the programme.

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

- ◆ Improvements to services have already started to be delivered through the implementation of the service reviews.
- ◆ The council has recognised the weaknesses in the governance arrangements for the programme and has addressed these.
- ◆ The council is undergoing a major restructuring of all its services to address weaknesses particularly around the lack of strategic direction and leadership.
- ◆ New plans and strategies are being drawn up and these are overseen by the strategy and programme board to ensure co-ordination.
- ◆ The new five year strategy has been drawn up with input from service users and other stakeholders and will set the direction for the programme for the immediate future.
- ◆ There is corporate support for the programme and additional resources have been allocated. The accountable officer champions the programme both inside and outside of the council.
- ◆ Sound performance management systems are in place and there is a work plan for the programme which flows from the corporate plans with outcomes and targets.

16 There are, however, some areas which may be barriers to improvement:

- ◆ Although the governance arrangements for the programme have been improved it is too early to see how quickly these arrangements will drive the programme at a strategic level;

- ◆ While the council is in the process of developing new plans, a number are out of date and Supporting People is not firmly embedded in these;
- ◆ There is a lack of co-ordination around the assessment of housing need and different agencies are developing there own systems; and
- ◆ The Supporting People team is small and there may be future capacity issues. There is not a strategy to address this and involve other partners as appropriate.

## Recommendations

- 17 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:
- ◆ Ensure there is the opportunity for the commissioning body to understand the issues for the programme in Harrow and to plan how it will provide the necessary strategic leadership by May 2005.
  - ◆ Reconsider the membership of the core strategy group:
    - ◆ to ensure it includes representation from all stakeholders in the programme; and
    - ◆ examine how service users can be involvement in governance of the programme by May 2005.
  - ◆ Ensure all stakeholders understand the new governance arrangements and clarify how the commissioning body, the core strategy group, the providers forum and the inclusive forum links together and feed issues and information to each other by June 2005.
  - ◆ Develop a methodology to ensure that the analysis of service needs is kept up to date to and links to the needs analysis that other parts of the council or other agencies have to inform the re-commissioning of services by July 2005.
  - ◆ Enhance the service review process by:
    - ◆ considering how other resources can be accessed to involve other stakeholders in to the review team, such as staff from the probation service assisting in the reviews of services for offenders;
    - ◆ developing a process to directly feedback to service users who have contributed to the review so that they can see how their comments and suggestions have been used; and
    - ◆ develop a process to formally share good practice and examples of policies and procedures between and with different service providers by June 2005.
  - ◆ Ensure that Supporting People is included in the joint commissioning strategies between social care and health as these are developed.
  - ◆ Develop a service users involvement strategy that will:
    - ◆ formalise how to involve all users across all different types of service provision; and
    - ◆ outline how service users can be involved in the programme such as through the production of newsletters, the development of the website and general information and leaflets by August 2005.
  - ◆ Ensure that the referral routes for Supporting People services are publicised as widely as possible and that stakeholders are clear about how new users can access these by June 2005.
  - ◆ The commissioning body should review the capacity of the team to ensure that there are adequate resources to complete the work programme and identify opportunities for other partners to contribute as appropriate by September 2005.
  - ◆ Ensure that the plans and priorities for the development of services reflect the diverse needs across the borough by August 2005.

- 18 We would like to thank the staff of Harrow council, particularly Christopher Holley and the Supporting People team, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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# Report

## Context

- 19 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

- 20 London Borough of Harrow is an outer northwest London borough council. The borough has eight main population areas including Harrow, Wealdstone, Stanmore and Pinner. The area has a high level of owner occupied accommodation at 80 per cent compared to the England average of 70 per cent.
- 21 The population is 211,700 of which 50.1 per cent describe themselves as 'other than white British'. There are significant minority groups from the Asian communities. The number of people over 65 is 14.5 per cent compared to the England average of 16.4 per cent.
- 22 Overall deprivation is low with the borough ranked at 232nd out of the 354 English authorities, where 1 is the most deprived. Unemployment in the area at 2.4 per cent is near the England average of 2.6 per cent.

## The council

- 23 The council comprises 63 councillors with the Labour party forming the administration with 30 seats. There are 28 Conservative councillors; 3 Liberal Democrat; and 2 Independents.
- 24 The council employs 2,784 staff (excluding schools) and the budget for the council in 2004/05 is £264 million.
- 25 The council's priorities as identified in the council's improvement plan 2004/05 are organised under six focus areas, which mirror those in the corporate plan. These are:
- ◆ Environmental priorities;
  - ◆ Strengthening communities;
  - ◆ Lifelong learning;
  - ◆ Health and social care;
  - ◆ A prosperous, sustainable and diverse economy in Harrow; and
  - ◆ Developing a customer focussed council.
- 26 The council is driving its improvement priorities through the mechanism of the 'New Harrow Project'. This was launched in June 2002 and has five priorities for action:
- ◆ the assessment and delivery of a range of services;
  - ◆ the achievement of financial stability to aid the planning and delivery of services;
  - ◆ a new organisational structure with four new directorates;
  - ◆ the creation of a new IT strategy and partnership arrangement to update the IT support infrastructure to enable improvements in service delivery; and
  - ◆ the establishment of a council-wide performance management system.

- 27 The council was assessed as a 'fair' authority by the Audit Commission as part of the comprehensive performance assessment in December 2004 and as being a 1-star authority for social care services by the Commission for Social care Inspection (previously known as the Social Services Inspectorate) in November 2004.

## The service

- 28 The council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 29 The Supporting People programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people including the homeless, older people with support needs, people with a learning difficulty, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 30 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £3.6 million. In addition, the council receives £193,120 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 31 The London borough of Harrow was inspected in the second year of the programme. The report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

### Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

- 32 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.
  - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
  - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 33 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier council areas, each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where it can demonstrate it faces a financial risk to the administering local authority.

## How good is the service?

- 34 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ Governance of the programme;
  - ◆ Delivery arrangements including strategy and needs assessments;
  - ◆ Financial monitoring and management of the grant;
  - ◆ Service reviews carried out by the administering authority;
  - ◆ Value for money;
  - ◆ User involvement;
  - ◆ Partnerships with providers and others;
  - ◆ Customer care, access to services and information;
  - ◆ Diversity; and
  - ◆ Outcomes for service users.

## Governance

- 35 The council created the necessary governance structures in 2001. These failed to operate as originally envisaged and a recent governance review, held in October 2004, has re-established the necessary bodies to oversee the programme. Because of failure of the original arrangements, the programme has not been driven at a senior level.
- 36 This has meant that there has not, until now, been the senior strategic approach to the programme that would have located it firmly within the strategic plans for the key partners. As an example of this failing, the concept of Supporting People has yet to be fully integrated into strategic thinking about the provision of support services for offenders.
- 37 However, there has been guidance and oversight by elected members and the council has delivered sound arrangements at a middle management level.

## Commissioning Body

- 38 Until recently, there had not been an effective commissioning body. It had not had the level of senior representation that would have enabled it to operate at the necessary strategic level to drive the programme.
- 39 The council originally wanted the Health and Social Care Partnership Board of the Harrow Partnership to act as the commissioning body for the Supporting People programme. Because of problems within the original strategic partnership, this did not happen and the commissioning body role was effectively combined with that of the core strategy group. This combined group met regularly but was largely attended by middle managers from the council, the PCT and the probation service.
- 40 The lack of senior representation was due to all three partner organisations under going major change and restructuring.
- 41 The council was implementing the 'New Harrow Project' and was in the process of creating four new directorates with cross-cutting responsibilities to manage the business of the council. Similarly, the PCT was implementing new arrangements and had vacancies in key senior management posts. The Probation service has been through a number of changes that have impacted on its ability to engage with the Supporting People programme in Harrow.

- 42 Even with these changes going on, the combined group still met on a regular basis and ensured that the programme kept to its targets and that key activities such as the implementation of the service review programme happened in a timely manner.
- 43 The council recognised the lack of senior involvement in these arrangements and reviewed the governance of the programme in the autumn of 2004. This has resulted in the establishment a new commissioning body with membership at the appropriate level of seniority.
- 44 The new commissioning body has so far had one meeting which was chaired by the interim director of community care. The permanent post holder will take over this responsibility at the next meeting so the group has not yet been able to establish itself with stable membership.

### **Core Strategy Group**

- 45 By combining the role of this group with the commissioning body, there has not been an effective core strategy group with the range of membership that would have focussed on operational issues.
- 46 Through the governance review, a new group has been formed and the first meeting was held while we were on-site in January 2005. The group has been expanded to include a much wider range of council officers as well as representatives from the provider's forum. However, at the first meeting there were still a number of people absent whom we would have expected to see involved. These include the managers for adult social care services and young people's services and housing services.
- 47 This issue was acknowledged at the first meeting and there was a discussion about expanding the membership. As with the commissioning body, there is not yet stable membership of this group and it is too early to see how it will manage the workload of the programme. However, the majority of people on the core strategy group have already been involved in the programme so there is a sound level of knowledge to build on.
- 48 A number of stakeholders we met were aware of the governance review but did not have a clear understanding of who attended which group and the relationship between the different bodies.

### **Accountable officer**

- 49 The accountable officer for the Supporting People programme is the Director of Strategy for the Urban Living directorate. The accountable officer is responsible for driving the Supporting People agenda at a corporate level and ensuring that it links into other strategies across Harrow. Since taking on this role in October 2004, the accountable officer has overseen the governance review and championed the programme across the council and with partners. It is still early days in terms of seeing outcomes from this.
- 50 The accountable officer has a good understanding of her role and responsibilities in relation to the delivery of the Supporting People programme. The accountable officer is responsible for the development of the council's new social inclusion programme and sees Supporting People as having a main role in this. Although the accountable officer does not directly supervise the Supporting People lead officer, she is regularly briefed and has up to date knowledge of the programme.

## Member Involvement

- 51 Councillors on the Member's Supporting People Advisory Panel have a very good understanding of the Supporting People programme. Harrow established this panel in 2001 and it met regularly during the implementation of the programme, making key recommendations to the cabinet on all Supporting People decisions. The panel has continued to meet to oversee the programme and the same five councillors have been involved since the outset. This continuity has ensured a good level of understanding and knowledge of the programme.
- 52 There are suitable arrangements in place for items relating to the delivery of the supporting people programme to be reported to elected members of the council. The Advisory panel has received reports on the implementation of the supporting people programme. Recommendations from the Advisory Panel and related papers have been taken to the council's Cabinet.

## Delivery arrangements

- 53 Harrow has adopted effective mechanisms for managing the delivery of the work required for the successful operation of its programme. There is a work-plan that governs the work and the team has the skills to deliver this.
- 54 The supply of supported housing in Harrow has started from a relatively low base with the exception of sheltered housing for older people. The council has identified the level of needs and supply and has started to address priority needs through the development of new services.

## The Supporting People Team

- 55 The Supporting People team is well managed by the Supporting People lead officer. The team comprises two project officers, one contracts officer, one information officer, one administrator and a part-time IT worker. The jobs are regularly reviewed and evaluated as the roles and responsibilities of the posts have evolved.
- 56 The team is effective and has worked hard to deliver an effective programme. They are responsive and are open to change and challenge. This view was supported by stakeholders who told us that the team is very well thought of. They were described to us as 'can do' team who want to hear what people have to say. Providers told us that the team is:

*"Open and accessible and receptive to new ideas" (service provider).*

*"Harrow's approach is professional" (service provider).*

- 57 The team had been stable until December 2003 when two new project officers were appointed. Since then the team has undergone further changes in personnel and is now also dealing with the absence of a key member of the team. For a small team this has inevitably impacted on its capacity but there are plans to use external consultants to supplement the team.
- 58 Operationally, the Supporting People programme is well administered by the team. It has a stand alone IT system that links to the council's existing systems. Harrow piloted this system in conjunction with the ODPM and it has been operational since early 2003.
- 59 The system maintains all the records for the programme, is used to make payments to service providers and also produces a variety of reports. The system is linked to internet-based software which enables the team to share information between partners and providers. Additionally, this allows providers to complete information and quarterly returns on-line.

## Shadow Strategy and Five Year Strategy

- 60 All Supporting People administering authorities were required to complete a shadow strategy in 2002, prior to the implementation of the programme. In Harrow, this strategy was developed through an inclusive process that brought together service users and providers and the voluntary sector. The ODPM assess the shadow strategy as “good” with inclusiveness being ranked as ‘excellent’.
- 61 The shadow strategy identified the need for housing related support services and plotted this against the provision in the borough. Through this exercise, a number of priorities were identified to increase the provision of services for certain groups including refugees, offenders, people with a learning disability and women fleeing domestic violence.
- 62 All Supporting People administering authorities are now required to submit a five year strategy to the ODPM by 31 March 2005. Harrow has robust arrangements in place for delivering this and is on target to meet the ODPM deadline.
- 63 The five year strategy has been developed by external consultants. The decision to do this was based on the capacity of the Supporting People team but the team has had a clear role in its development. The first draft of the strategy was discussed at an inclusive forum held in December 2004.
- 64 This forum, which included a number of service users, wrote the new vision for the programme which has ensured future ownership of the strategy. Service users at this event also commented on the language used in the document and made suggestions for how things could be presented differently to ensure the strategy was more understandable and accessible to users.
- 65 The draft strategy outlines the key issues for the authority in administering and delivering the programme. This includes the high level of owner occupiers who could benefit from services such as those provided by the home improvement agency but that currently the programme is delivering nearly all of its units of service into the social housing sector.
- 66 The draft five year strategy is available on the council’s web site as part of the consultation process. Stakeholders we met during the inspection told us that they felt the council consulted with them well and they had opportunities to be involved in the development of this and to comment on it. Additionally, the council used the BME housing reference group as a way of widening the consultation process and ensuring that views from all user groups were able to influence the direction of the strategy.

The Supporting People team is currently working on a number of ways to ensure that that the data they are using for the five year strategy is current. These include the work being done by the consultants writing the strategy on surveying providers to gain their views on need as well as linking in with the work that the probation service has done on the support needs of offenders and the use of Harrow’s ‘Vitality profiles’. The vitality profiles have given the council a comprehensive base of information about the neighbourhoods in the borough and the people living in them.

- 67 Some of this work is still underway and has not been included in the first draft of the five year strategy but will be included in the final document. The strategy will be weakened without the inclusion of this analysis of need and supply.
- 68 Another area of work that is still outstanding is the development of a methodology to ensure that the assessment of needs is regularly reviewed and updated.

### Existing Services

- 69 Existing services have been expanded to meet identified needs. The council has identified gaps in provision and responded to these by developing new schemes prior to the implementation of Supporting People funding.
- 70 These included funding a second stage project to help women move out of a refuge. This was undertaken in partnership with Harrow's empty homes project and has freed up space in the refuge. This is a positive example of partnership working in the Supporting People programme.
- 71 A pipe-line scheme was also jointly commissioned with a neighbouring authority to provide an accommodation service for teenage parents. This scheme has just opened in January 2005.

### Financial management and reporting

- 72 There are sound financial management and monitoring systems in place. There is financial control over the budget and clear methods of reporting on a regular basis. Providers are very satisfied with the payment arrangements and these have been made accurately and on time.
- 73 There are effective systems for managing and reporting the Supporting People grant and administrative costs, with a three year financial plan in place. The model allows for 2 per cent efficiency savings and contingency resources have been identified and agreed with elected members that have enabled Harrow to manage financial and service delivery risks effectively.
- 74 A total of 97 contracts are in place and all but two of these were signed by 31 May 2003. These two providers were subject to an early service review in line with the ODPM grant conditions. All providers have a block gross contract which has simplified the payments process. This means that any charges due from service users are collected by the council and providers are paid the gross service cost.
- 75 A 'Supporting People Finance Group' was established in January 2004 to ensure that the various financial activities were brought together and effectively linked into existing council financial systems. The Supporting People IT system produces a specific payment management process that allows all payments to be tracked and monitored.
- 76 The council has supplemented the Supporting People grant. There is member commitment to the programme and contingency funds of £200,000 for 2003/04 have been absorbed into the on-going base budget commitment agreed for the medium term.

### Fairer charging

- 77 In 2002 the Department of Health (DoH) introduced a fairer charging policy providing guidance to local authorities on how to set charges for non-residential services. Councils are not required to charge for services but in the event of a decision to charge, they are expected to follow the principles contained in this guidance.
- 78 Harrow developed a charging policy for Supporting People in 2002 in consultation with service users and providers. The policy is part of the councils Fairer Charging regime. There is a joint team carrying out all charging assessments and benefit assessments with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

- 79 One visit is carried out to assess eligibility and maximise take-up and cases are tracked until claims are successful or appealed. The outcomes of this are that claims are now turned round faster and a proactive approach taken to improve benefits take-up. New needs are identified and referred to social service or the Supporting People team to ensure appropriate support.
- 80 Invoicing for fairer charging is positive with 100 per cent of monthly invoices sent out and annually arrears around £2,000 of £80,000 income due (2.5 per cent). There is a range of methods to pay charges which ensure easier access such as online and telephone payments, cash offices and direct debit.
- 81 The charging arrangements are well understood by residents paying charges. A range of easy to understand information leaflets are available for service users on charging. Providers are positive about the council's approach:
- ◆ 75 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the council's provision of information about charging arrangements for service users;
  - ◆ 84 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with their own understanding of the charging policy; and
  - ◆ 67 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the council's provision of training on fairer charging.
- 82 The charging policy was reviewed in November 2004 and it was decided that the scheme was operating successfully with no assessment or billing delays and a very low level of arrears.

### **Achieving savings**

- 83 Savings have been achieved through a strategy of the joint commissioning body and core strategy group. The council had to make savings of £92,900 and approached this by offering zero inflation uplift to all providers and by targeting the five highest cost services in comparison to ODPM benchmarking.
- 84 In addition to these measures, the joint commissioning body and core strategy group decided also to seek efficiency savings from the in-house sheltered housing providers following information generated by the service reviews. By November 2004, savings of £78,000 had been negotiated with in-house and external providers.
- 85 It is anticipated that further savings will be realised this financial year which will be used to provide new services in line with the priorities that have been identified or to provide for an inflationary uplift for some essential and strategically relevant services.

### **Service reviews**

- 86 Harrow has in place a robust service review programme and process. It decided the programme on appropriate criteria and has reviewed this as required. Reviews have already produced savings and service improvements through agreed action plans with providers.
- 87 ODPM guidance requires administering authorities to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years, starting from 1 April 2003. Administering authorities are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to the ODPM as part of their regular performance reviews.

- 88 The service review process is central to ensuring that services are effective, provide good value for money and comply with Supporting People grant conditions. Until services are reviewed, contracting decisions that will influence the future shape of services and meet strategic priorities cannot be made.

### Implementing the review programme

- 89 The Supporting People team has started to deliver a significant volume of service reviews. So far, 60 per cent of services have been reviewed. Although there has been some slippage in the programme, capacity was built in to it so the council is confident that all service reviews will be completed within the ODPM deadline.
- 90 Prior to the implementation of the programme, Harrow set out how it would approach the reviews taking into account a number of factors, including services where there was concern over cost and strategic relevance, services with the largest supply and other local priorities. The programme was consulted on with providers and stakeholders at various forums. The programme then formed part of the shadow strategy. This was a thorough and appropriate approach to take.
- 91 The service reviews have been grouped together and so far all the services for people with a learning disability, the home improvement agency and sheltered housing schemes have been reviewed. The results of these reviews were presented to the first meeting of the new commissioning body in January 2005.
- 92 By and large, the programme has been adhered to with the inclusion of the service reviews of the two providers who refused to sign their contracts and an early review of a service where there was significant concern about the quality of the service and the viability of the provider.
- 93 Sound processes are in place which have been widely consulted on. These are available on the council's web site and the Supporting People team has also provided workshops and training on the service reviews process.
- 94 Providers we met who have been reviewed were fairly positive about the experience. It gave them the opportunity to look at their service and ways to improve it. They had been informed of the time scale and requirements and felt they were given enough time to provide the information required. Providers we met told us:

*"It was hard work but stimulating"*

*"Very thorough review".*

- 95 The Project Officers undertaking the reviews have the required skills and abilities. These staff have previously worked in provider and contracting environments. New staff has shadowed other staff to learn key skills and ensure there is a consistent approach to the process. Other staff has also been used as required such as specialist social workers and environmental health.
- 96 However, the arrangements to involve other staff are 'as and when' rather than part of an inclusive approach. An example of this is that the probation service is not aware of when the services for offenders will be reviewed and has not been approached to be part of this. We were told that there is corporate commitment to involving a wider number of council staff in the service review programme but this has not yet been translated into actions.

- 97 Service users have been engaged with the process – the reviewers have always met with service users in what ever way they have wanted. So far, most service users have been seen as part of a group and have been happy to put their views forward although other approaches such as questionnaires and individual meetings are also used. Advocates were used in the reviews of learning disability services to ensure that service users were able to participate.
- 98 Although service user's views form an integral part of the review, there is not a specific process to feedback to service users about the outcomes. Rather, the expectation is that the provider will share the outcome of the review with the users.
- 99 A number of providers who were reviewed early on in the programme told us that they had concerns about how well their review had been carried out. They had approached the team and there was an agreement to re-review in these cases. This was an example of how approachable and responsive the Supporting People team is.
- 100 There is a formal appeals procedure which again is available on the council's web site. So far this has not been used but may be tested in the near future as the commissioning body has just agreed to decommission one service following the review.
- 101 Harrow is part of the West London Supporting People Group and has benefited from this partnership. For example, there is a Review Officers group where staff are able to share information and good practice and have agreed to review each others in-house services to avoid any potential conflict of interest.
- 102 The West London group has also agreed a common accreditation process. This work is carried out on behalf of the West London authorities by ROCC, a registered charity that is active in this field. All West London providers are required to go through the same standard process once rather than several different processes for each authority they work in.

### **Sharing information and improving practice**

- 103 Service reviews are being used to improve services and copies of policies and procedures are passed on to providers to help them develop their own if these are not in place. However, this is still an informal arrangement.
- 104 The council has reviewed its own procedures and identified changes to its practices as a result of the review work that has been undertaken. The procedure has been reviewed three times so far and an example of how it has been changed is the approach taken to value for money and the application of the model that Harrow has developed.
- 105 Information from the reviews will be used to feed into wider strategic issues. For example, the outcomes from the reviews on sheltered housing will be used to inform the wider review of all services for older people that is due to commence in the spring of 2005.

## Value for money

- 106 There is evidence of a clear understanding and commitment to value for money by the Supporting People programme in Harrow. The service review programme includes a value for money assessment and separate negotiations with providers have begun to deliver savings.
- 107 The council has developed a robust methodology for assessing value for money and costs have been analysed and scrutinised. This methodology is a sound basis for comparing cost and quality and has already been used to highlight issues where, for example, the analysis of costs indicated that a provider is paying below the minimum wage. This methodology is embedded in the service review process.
- 108 Prior to the implementation of the programme, the council took a prudent approach to establishing the cost of housing related support for the people of Harrow. However, while there is some concern that this approach might have an adverse effect if future funding constraints are applied on a pro-rata basis across all administering authorities, the council is confident that if the national funding formula is applied, Harrow should be a net gainer and see an increase in its grant in future years.
- 109 Joint commissioning in the council is underdeveloped at present but work is underway to develop this area now that the council's restructuring into new directorates has been completed.

### Service cost comparisons

- 110 ODPM data on Harrow costs shows that the council has no services with unit costs that exceed £400 per person per week and two that exceed £300. The highest cost service is an accommodation based scheme for young people with a learning disability. The cost is £395.28 per unit per week, but this service is being decommissioned following the service reviews.
- 111 The next highest cost service is an adult placement scheme for people with learning disabilities at £317.29 per person per week. The lowest cost service is an accommodation based service for older people with support needs, with a cost of £2.24 per unit per week.
- 112 The unit cost of the majority of services is at or below regional and national averages and the cost per head of population is significantly lower than the average at £0.33 per person, compared to the London average of £0.97 and the national average of £0.70.
- 113 Harrow's average unit cost for all Supporting People services is £35.90 per week. This is below the London average of £42.37 but above the national average of £28.30. However, these overall costs conceal a higher than average cost for some floating support and accommodation based services. These include the following services:
- ◆ Services for people with HIV/AIDs;
  - ◆ Young people leaving care;
  - ◆ People with mental health problems;
  - ◆ Generic services; and
  - ◆ Homeless people with support needs.
- 114 The data appendix at the end of this report provides further information and illustrates the variations in cost and provision of services in Harrow against the London and national averages.

### Addressing value for money through service reviews

- 115 The commissioning body has already made the decision to decommission the highest cost service. This was based on both value for money and service quality issues.
- 116 Harrow has established eligibility criteria for housing related support services and these are published on the council's web site. Grant eligibility is a key stage of the service reviews and ensures that there is transparency about what services are provided and fall within expenditure under the programme.
- 117 The first service to be decommissioned from the service reviews process has come about through failing to meet the criteria relating to value for money and strategic relevance, as well as issues about the quality of the service provided.
- 118 The strategic relevance process was also used when the council considered the payments made from the Supporting People grant to registered care homes. Prior to Supporting People, these establishments received funding from the supported housing management grant. The use of the strategic relevance process ensured there was transparency as well as clarity and consistency in evaluating the future funding of these services. Because these services are not strategically relevant, the funding will be withdrawn from April 2005.

### User Involvement

- 119 Service user involvement in the Harrow Supporting People programme has been positive. One of the strengths of the programme is its Inclusive Forum that includes a number of service users as well as a variety of other stakeholders such as user and carer support organisations and providers.
- 120 The Inclusive Forum was established in January 2001 and has been on a six monthly basis since then. Approximately 25 per cent of the attendees are service users.
- 121 Harrow engaged with service users in the early stages of developing the shadow strategy and the inclusiveness of this document was assessed by the ODPM as being excellent. Harrow was keen to involve users from the start to ensure that they were seen as active partners in the programme.
- 122 As well as establishing an inclusive forum, the council also sought to work with other, established service user forums such as the panel of older people housing sub group, the learning disability partnership board and the BME housing reference group.
- 123 The Supporting People team has also used other ways of involving and consulting with users such as attending events hosted by young people to consider their housing and support needs, attending annual general meetings in sheltered housing schemes and the Tenant Services conference.
- 124 Partners we met supported our positive view about how service users have been included in the programme. They told us:

*"They [Harrow Supporting People] are keen to get service users involved and are successful in this" (service provider).*

- 125 Consultation has been accessible and the council has used appropriate methods to consult with different groups. For service users with a learning disability, written information has been produced in an accessible format based around pictures.

- 126 The Supporting People team has also used advocacy services to consult with service users with learning disability. This was one of the methods used during the service reviews of learning disability services to ensure that users were involved and able to make their views known.
- 127 There has been some user input from the inclusive forum and feedback from users through the review process to identify outcome users want from providers and the services they receive. There is an expectation that providers will also consult users to identify outcomes when the contract is negotiated with individual providers. However, it is unclear that arrangements to ensure this happens are robust.
- 128 Although we saw evidence of good service user involvement, we did not see an overarching service user consultation strategy that clearly maps out how and when users are involved in the programme. Such a strategy would also ensure that robust arrangements are in place for user involvement to happen at all levels of the programme and with all user groups.
- 129 Service users are not directly involved in the governance of the Supporting People programme. The recent review of this did not consider how service users could be represented at either the core strategy group or the commissioning body but rather saw them feeding into these groups through the existing inclusive forum. Direct involvement in the governance would ensure that service users had even more ownership of the programme in Harrow.

## Partnership arrangements

- 130 Partners are engaged in the programme but as we have already indicated in the section under governance, these have not, until recently, been at a senior enough level to ensure effective engagement at a strategic level. There is evidence of positive working with providers and well developed cross authority working with the West London group of neighbouring authorities.
- 131 The programme has worked well at an operational level and we saw evidence of positive work and problem solving through informal networks and established working relationships between different agencies but do not consider these are adequately supported by formalised structures.

## Providers

- 132 There are effective partnerships with providers. There has been considerable involvement and consultation with them throughout the implementation of the programme. Provider's forums, in addition to the inclusive forums, have been run regularly since 2001 and meet on a three monthly basis with additional sessions on specific topics as required.
- 133 Providers told us they value the meetings they have with the Supporting People team. These have changed over time and are now much more focussed on discussion and training. In the early days of implementing the programme they the meetings were much more focussed on the team giving out information.
- 134 All members of the Supporting People team attend the provider's forum so that they are able to deal with any issues or queries that arise. The providers also have time at these meetings to discuss issues without the team being present. It was mentioned to us when we met providers that in other boroughs, the providers run their own meetings and this would seem to be a natural development to happen in Harrow.
- 135 In addition to the forums held by Harrow, there are also jointly held provider forums arranged through the west London group and jointly held provider events and training on specific issues such as domestic violence and BME issues.

## Health and probation partnerships

- 136 Until recently, there had not been effective partnerships at a senior level with health and probation. We have already said that due to restructuring in the council, the PCT and the probation service, partnerships have not been operating at the senior, strategic level we would have expected to see. The PCT has now established its structure and key senior appointments have been made.
- 137 The PCT is committed to the programme and enthusiastic about the benefits that can be realised through it. However, Supporting People is still not a key priority for health. We were told

*"We have six key targets and Supporting People isn't one of them. We must make it relevant to the things we have to do" (PCT representative).*

- 138 There is a commitment for a senior member of the PCT to be on the commissioning body and the manager who has been involved since the implementation will now sit on the new core strategy group. This will ensure a level of continuity across both organisations.
- 139 Now that both the council and the PCT are settling down in their new structures there is the capacity to look at joint work and joint commissioning which will also have a positive impact for the operation of the Supporting People programme.
- 140 The probation service similarly now has key senior staff in post and a commitment to both the new commissioning body and core strategy group. As with the PCT, there had been consistent representation from the probation service but by a middle manager.
- 141 Risk management policies are in place to handle the housing of high risk offenders in the area and Supporting People is integrated into arrangements through the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). The issue that needs to be addressed in relation to the MAPPA is about making the distinction between high risk offenders who need housing and support and those who just need housing. However, this is an issue across London and probation is working on developing a cross-London protocol.
- 142 For offenders who are not high risk, the housing department operates a 'one stop shop' style service on a Wednesday afternoon. This offers a range of services including benefits and health advice and access to housing providers and means that offenders needs can be dealt within one visit. The probation service saw this as a demonstration of the positive way the council works with offenders.

## Cross authority working

- 143 Successful partnership working has been achieved in this area. Harrow participates in the West London Supporting People group which includes six other west London authorities. The group reports to the west London housing directors group and is chaired by an assistant director of housing. There are regular meetings of this group and there have been real achievements to date.
- 144 Harrow has led on a number of joint initiatives particularly the west London Supporting People strategy. Performance indicators have also been developed and a joint accreditation process. Positive practices and ongoing initiatives have been shared, for example Harrow has modelled their service specifications and these have been used by other authorities, particularly the domestic violence specification for women's refuges.

- 145 The most recent achievement of the group is the successful bid to the ODPM for the value improvement project. This bid will enable the trial of a joint procurement exercise for Supporting People services for offenders. The bid will also provide support to help vulnerable clients access the joint west London choice based lettings scheme.

## Access to Services and Information

- 146 There is a variety of information available on Supporting People for both service users and providers. Information is of a good quality and is available in a range of formats and community languages.
- 147 Access to Supporting People services is largely through the accommodation panels that manage waiting lists for accommodation and floating support. There are accommodation panels for all user groups except people with a physical disability. However, stakeholders were not clear about this process and we did not see evidence of this being clearly publicised.
- 148 Leaflets have been produced for tenants in sheltered housing and leaseholders. These were in a suitable format and easy to understand. This is also true of the information that was produced on charging which was simple and in a large font.
- 149 The Supporting People programme has a number of pages on the council's web site. There is a direct link to these from the home page. However, when we looked at these we did not find them easy to navigate. Although there are pages that are aimed at service users we do not consider that these would be accessible by some service users. The web site is likely to be more accessible to providers and other stakeholders and a number of providers told us that they did find it useful.
- 150 All the leaflets are available on the web site in a range of languages and can easily be printed off as required.
- 151 A service directory is available on the web site that details all the services funded through the programme. This is also available as a hard copy and has been supplied to advice and advocacy agencies and other public access points.
- 152 There is a facility on the website for anyone, including service users to send the council comments on the service. However, the council was not able to tell us how many service users had actually used this facility. Nor was it able to tell us how many people had accessed the information on the web site. The council is aware of the limitations of the web site and there are plans to improve this and create links to the pension service to improve access to welfare benefits.
- 153 The Supporting People team has produced a newsletter that is likely to be of more interest to providers and other stakeholders rather than service users. Although the next edition of the newsletter will focus on service users issues it is not clear how service users will be involved in producing this.
- 154 The council's 'Better Care: Higher Standards' charter is a user friendly document that includes signposting to the Harrow web site and how the document may be accessed in community languages and other formats for people with a learning disability or sensory impairment. The charter summary includes a clear statement of standards users should expect with contact details and an addendum that explains links with the Supporting People strategy. The document though is not dated and there is no way of knowing if it has been reviewed or is up to date.

- 155 We carried out a 'mystery shopping' exercise to test access to information and advice by telephone. Although we had to speak to a number of different people to help us with our query, it was answered well and we were given clear advice and information and a number of suggestions for how to resolve the issue we presented staff with.

## **Diversity**

- 156 Meeting the needs of the diverse community in the borough is not currently a strength of the service. The high level of residents from BME communities is not reflected in the provision of housing related support services. Nor are the needs of all the other diverse groups who would benefit from support services adequately represented.
- 157 The council is aware of this and work on addressing the needs of diverse communities will form part of the actions in the new five year strategy. The Supporting People team is aware of the wide range of needs across the borough. As the majority of its current services are provided through sheltered housing support to older people, resources will have to be moved away from these services in the future. This will also link into the review of older people services which will start in the Spring of 2005.
- 158 The Supporting People team has used a number of different ways of contacting traditionally hard to reach groups and has worked with different stakeholders to do this. The team are also working with new service providers to look at the provision of ethnically sensitive services that will attract more people from minority groups into generic services to improve inclusion.
- 159 The expansion of services to date had been targeted to meet the needs of under represented groups in the programme. Included in this are a support service for offender and one for Asian people with disabilities that is delivered by a specialist Asian housing association.
- 160 Research on user needs to inform the BME housing strategy came out of meetings and surveys of community groups, faith groups and targeted focus groups. The approach used was from positive practice identified by other London boroughs.
- 161 Outcomes from this research have led to improved accessibility of information for those with English as a second language and those with learning disabilities. From this Harrow have set up a permanent BME housing reference group that is being used as a consultation body for best value reviews and overseeing the delivery of BME strategy. This group is also now part of the Supporting People Inclusive Forum and is providing another route into helping hard to reach groups having direct involvement in the programme.

## **Outcomes for Service users**

- 162 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has produced real benefits for many vulnerable people in Harrow. These improvements have come about from the injection of additional revenue resources as well as how the programme has been implemented locally.

- 163 Examples of additional schemes that were developed as part of implementation of the programme through transitional housing benefit and pipeline funding include:
- ◆ a floating support service on Harrow's most deprived estate;
  - ◆ move on accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence;
  - ◆ a support service for offenders and people at risk of offending;
  - ◆ a circle of support scheme for people with a learning disability;
  - ◆ a specialist disability housing support service for Asian service users;
  - ◆ joint provision with a neighbouring authority for teenage parents;
  - ◆ specialist accommodation and support for young single homeless people; and
  - ◆ enhanced floating support for people with mental health problems.
- 164 The fairer charging team has also picked up support needs of people who they are assessing and have made referrals through to the Supporting People team. This is an example of holistic approach to service needs that this team has been able to implement.
- 165 However, the programme is not addressing the needs of potential service users as there is still of lack of services to meet all the identified needs across the diverse groups in the borough.
- 166 Support plans are now in place for people using services provided through this programme. One provider told us that the use of these plans has enabled them to better identify the needs of their clients. Another told us that the use of these plans has resulted in more '3-way meetings' with the support provider, the service users and their social worker. This has led to better understanding of the user's needs and agencies working together.
- 167 Risks to the programme are well understood and documented and there is a risk register and contingency plans used by the Supporting People team. The new five year strategy will also address this area to ensure that there is a consistent approach taken to risks and that the services provided through the programme can be delivered consistently.
- 168 Supporting People is improving the opportunities available for independent living which is having a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. Below is an example of how the Supporting People programme is making a difference to the lives of vulnerable people living in Harrow:

## Case Study 1

When N was 16 years old he committed an offence and was referred to the Youth Offending Team. He committed a further offence and during this time his relationship with his mother and family broke down and he presented himself as homeless. The Homeless Persons Unit accepted him as a vulnerable young person and placed him in hostel accommodation.

The first placement broke down and he was moved to a second hostel. This also broke down as N was unable to get along with the other young people living there. He was then moved to a specialist project for 16/17 year olds but this also failed as he was aggressive towards another tenant.

He was then given a one-bedroom flat on the condition that he received help from a floating support worker to help him manage to live independently. During this time, the Youth Offending Team organised a mental health assessment which concluded that N had behavioural difficulties and mis-used drugs.

N is a good example of the help that the Supporting People programme can provide. It was Supporting People that enabled him to go to the specialist project when the two hostel placements broke down and also provided the floating support in his present accommodation. If these services had not been in place, the Homeless Persons Unit would have not had anything else to offer him and it is likely that he would have been deemed intentionally homeless after the second hostel placement broke down. In these circumstances, it is likely he would have re-offended and perhaps found his way to prison.

By contrast, N is living successfully in his own accommodation and has also been referred to a Drugs Worked to help him with his mis-use of drugs. He is studying and working part-time.

- 169 There has been a positive impact on homelessness through the supporting people programme. The council have recorded a reduction in the number of repeat homelessness applications where tenants have been receiving floating support.
- 170 Although there is plenty of anecdotal information about the benefits that Supporting People has brought about, there is no process for formally measuring and monitoring the outcomes for service users in general. The council has recognised this as an area it wants to develop so that in future benefits can be more easily quantified. Work has started to address this.

## Summary

- 171 Overall, we judge that the London Borough of Harrow is delivering a good, two star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- 172 There are many positive aspects to the manner in which the Supporting People programme has been delivered in Harrow. These include the involvement of elected members in the programme; the effectiveness of the Supporting People team; the gaps in provision that were identified in the shadow strategy and that are being addressed; the sound financial management of the programme; the service review programme that has delivered improvements in services; and the value for money methodology which is a sound basis for comparing cost and quality.
- 173 User involvement in the programme is another area of strength for the council and there have been positive outcomes from the work that has taken place with all the other partners involved in the programme. Easy to understand information is available in different languages and formats and there is evidence of improvement to the range and quality of services available to many vulnerable people.

- 174 However, against these strengths must be weighed a number of areas of weakness. The most serious of these is the lack of involvement from the PCT and the probation service at a senior enough level in the governance of the programme. Although this has now been addressed, it is too early to see how quickly the programme will change because of this. Nor are service users involved in the governance arrangements for the programme or the production of information. The current levels of service do not meet the diverse needs of all the community and there are as yet no formal ways of measuring outcomes for service users.

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

### What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 175 We saw a range of evidence of service improvements across the Supporting People programme. The council has effectively implemented and delivered the early stages of the programme. This is despite the lack of governance for the programme at a senior level across all three partners.
- 176 The council was aware of the weaknesses of the governance arrangements for the programme and took action to address this. The governance review was also used by the council as a way of promoting the programme and re-establishing its importance through presentations to the corporate management team and the cabinet.
- 177 The new commissioning body and core strategy group are in place and both bodies have now met. Although there are still some issues to be resolved such as membership of the core strategy group, we can see that the council and its partners are now able to take a more strategic view of the programme.
- 178 Over half the services have been reviewed and there is evidence of service improvements coming about through this process, savings have been made and one service has been decommissioned. One service had its review brought forward because of concerns about the quality of the provision and improvements have come about through this process. There is also evidence of learning through this work and the process has been assessed and improved.
- 179 There has been learning from the process of developing the shadow strategy that has been used in developing the new five year strategy. An example of this is the involvement of service users and stakeholders. The Supporting People team has involved stakeholders in this process and used the inclusive forum in December 2004 to comment on the draft strategy. Ownership of the new strategy has been demonstrated by the forum re-writing the vision for the programme.
- 180 The priorities outlined in the shadow strategy have been used to shape new services which have now been delivered. There has been a longstanding commitment by the housing department for young people leaving care to be housed appropriately. The Supporting People programme has provided real money to boost existing arrangements and floating support is now offered to support young people where appropriate.
- 181 The Supporting People team has introduced a new system on the Internet for providers to send in their information on-line. Providers we met were positive about this and especially the training they had received from the team in the operation of the system.
- 182 Harrow is a key partner in the sub regional Supporting People lead officer meetings and there have been positive outcomes from these meetings that have improved service delivery. Harrow has led on a number of joint initiatives particularly the development of the west London Supporting People strategy. Positive practices have been shared, for example, Harrow has modelled their service specifications and these have been used by other authorities, particularly the domestic violence specification for women's refuges.
- 183 Positive practice from St Mungo's and the National Housing Federation has been used in the development of Harrow's new draft Supporting People contracts. For example they are using St Mungo's star methodology to model service outcomes so that in future there will be quantifiable evidence as to the impact that the programme and the services it provides are having on the lives of vulnerable people.

- 184 The council has also set about improving its service delivery overall and there is evidence that this is starting to be successful.
- 185 The council was assessed as a 'weak' authority by the Audit Commission as part of the comprehensive performance assessment in December 2002. The assessment found that although the council delivered sound front-line services and officers and members managed the organisation on a day-to-day basis successfully, strategic direction and leadership had not, until very recently, been in place.
- 186 To address these weaknesses, the council had set about re-inventing itself with the 'New Harrow Project'. The restructuring into new directorates has been finalised and senior managers appointed. There is evidence of a more strategic focus overall and service planning is now effectively co-ordinated through the Strategy and Programme Board.
- 187 Harrow is in the middle of this process and can identify some achievements that have come out of this that indicate how things have improved. For example there have been improvements in the housing benefit service; performance management is now embedded at member and director level; and the planning service has moved from having two areas of the service under 'special measures' to one area with sustained improvement in all planning performance indicators.
- 188 The council has re-launched the local strategic partnership and this is now operating effectively. The failure of the original partnership had impacted on the governance of the Supporting People programme but again this has now been resolved.
- 189 The new 'People First' directorate has brought education and social services together under one structure which mirrors the expectations of a Children's Trust. 'Joint Futures' is the working title for the action plan to deliver a Children's Trust and the children's services commissioning strategy is being developed between the council and the PCT.
- 190 We saw evidence of improvements in social care services for children particularly in services for young people who are offending. These include research into the health needs of young offenders that is being used to inform local priorities and the Victim's Service where victims are able to meet the young offender and tell them how the crime has affected them.
- 191 However, the service improvements have yet to make enough of an impact in social care services to improve the star rating of the council by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate. The council has been assessed as one star for three successive years.

### **How good are the current improvement plans?**

- 192 There are a number of plans in place to address weaknesses that have been identified. These are robust and realistic. However, this has been a major area of work for the council and these plans are at different stages of completion. The council has established the strategy and programme board to co-ordinate the production of the boroughs key corporate strategies and have oversight of all the major programmes and projects being delivered by the council. This should ensure that all this work is co-ordinated and complimentary.

- 193 There is a clear understanding of the weaknesses of the organisation and a clear improvement plan, the new Harrow project, to address these. This has required a complete financial review, new financial planning arrangements, root and branch changes to the structure, introduction of planning processes, the collection of evidence to inform plans, the development of key strategies and the introduction of new working and delivery arrangements.
- 194 There is a sound understanding of what needs to be done to improve plans to ensure they are based on need and research. The council is in the process of reviewing a number of key strategic plans, for example the community strategy and the housing strategy. However, a number of current plans are out of date and may not deliver key objectives and the links between Supporting People and other corporate objectives are not yet clearly embedded in all current plans.
- 195 The work of reviewing plans is at different stages across the council. The new community strategy is being re-written. The Probation service have been actively involved in the re-writing of this and found it a positive and inclusive process. They are confident that this new plan will address the needs of offenders and make the necessary linkages with the aims of the Supporting People programme.
- 196 The main improvement plan for the Supporting People programme is the new five year strategy that is currently in draft form. This will set the priorities for the future programme and start to address issues that the council inherited through the existing spread of services and funding.
- 197 The council knows that Supporting People funding is currently skewed towards the social housing sector even though it only makes up small percentage of stock. The new strategy seeks to redress this and put in place plans for how funding can be re-distributed to support other vulnerable people such as older owner-occupiers. It will be the driver for re-configuring services so that they meet the needs of the diverse communities in the borough.
- 198 Harrow, as part of the West London Supporting People group, has successfully bid to the ODPM for funding through the value improvement project. This bid is led by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The bid will enable a trial of a joint procurement exercise for Supporting People services for offenders. The bid will also provide support to help vulnerable clients access the joint west London choice based lettings scheme. The outcome from this work will be later this year.
- 199 The work of the Supporting People team is governed by well developed service and work plans. These address the on-going work that the team has to deliver as well as developmental areas such as further improvements to the IT and plans for using this more extensively to improve the flow of communications between the team and providers.
- 200 The council has developed a BME housing strategy and Supporting People is part of the action plan for delivering this. There is now staff in key posts in the PCT and the probation service and plans will be finalised for more integration across a range of activities with the council and these partners including the Supporting People agenda.
- 201 However, we did see duplication in the area of assessing housing need and a lack of co-ordination. The housing needs survey is out of date and a new one is being procured this year. The drug and alcohol team (DAT) is not involved in this and is currently developing a new database that will include the housing needs of existing and past clients. It is not clear how these activities will make the necessary linkages with the needs analysis undertaken by the Supporting People team as part of the five year strategy.

## Will improvements be delivered?

- 202 There is ownership and leadership of the programme at a senior level across the council. This is mirrored in the PCT and the probation service. There is a clear commitment from all partners to the programme but it is too early to see the impact of this leadership at a strategic level.
- 203 The Supporting People programme has not had high level leadership from all partners until the recent governance review. Previously, the commitment of other agencies was intermittent and there was no-one at chief officer level to engage with the PCT and the probation service. Chief officers are now in post and bring with them experience and knowledge of Supporting People programmes.
- 204 The council is giving clear leadership to the programme and the governance review was used as a means of informing councillors and staff about the programme and what it has achieved so far. Supporting People is well understood by staff across the council.
- 205 The performance management arrangements across the council have been reviewed and realigned to ensure they focus on key priorities and effective management of performance at a member and director level. Performance management arrangements are understood by middle managers and strategies and plans flow from corporate objectives. Arrangements are well embedded and reporting lines are clear and responsibilities are understood.
- 206 The Supporting People team are part of this performance management framework and the work plans clearly link to service and divisional plans. Planning arrangements have been streamlined to ensure that there is a clear and single planning process and key objectives are reflected in service plans.
- 207 Harrow is building capacity and skills in key areas identified in corporate improvement plan, for example performance management and project management. Training has been set up with a local college and staff can study for a certificate or diploma in management. There is capacity building for under represented groups to take up these opportunities as well as mentoring and coaching arrangements to support staff. Staff that have undergone training in project management techniques have used this to deliver the BME strategy.
- 208 The Supporting People team is well managed and staff have regular meetings and appraisals. Although the team is small, staff have the range of skills and abilities needed to carry out all the tasks that are required.
- 209 Harrow has a stand alone IT system for the Supporting People programme. The system is accessible to service providers through the Internet. This enables providers to send in their regular performance information as well as allowing the council to send reminders and information to providers. Providers are able to view the information held about themselves on the system and check that payments have been made to them. Approaches such as this have helped the team manage the workload.
- 210 There is corporate commitment to involving a wider number of council staff in the service review programme but this has not yet been translated into actions. Consultants have also been used to provide extra capacity but there is not a clear strategy detailing how the team will meet the future demands placed on it.
- 211 Councillors told us that any lack of capacity in the Supporting People team is not seen as a barrier to delivering services but as an opportunity to develop partnership working. However, because of the lack of a strategic involvement in the programme, there has not been the opportunity to look at how other partners could contribute to any capacity issues.

## Summary

- 212 We have assessed the Supporting People programme in Harrow as having promising prospects for improvement.
- 213 There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the delivery of the Supporting People programme will improve in the future. The priorities for service development identified in the shadow strategy have been achieved; improvements to services are coming through the service review programme; and there has been positive work through the West London cross authority group. The council has recognised the weaknesses in the governance of the programme and addressed these and overall, the council has embarked on a major 'root and branch' reorganisation to address issues particularly around strategic direction and leadership. There is evidence of improvements that people can see such as the more responsive housing benefits service.
- 214 New plans are being drawn up to further tackle weaknesses such as the new community care strategy and the Supporting People programme will be further developed through the five year strategy. Plans and strategies are co-ordinated through the strategy and programme board to ensure that the necessary linkages are made. Capacity is being built by the council and there is a sound performance management process in place. The Supporting People team are working to a work-plan that flows from the corporate plan with outcomes and targets.
- 215 However, there are also a number of weaknesses that will impact on how quickly improvements will be achieved. While new plans are in the process of being drawn up, they are not yet all in place which means that Supporting People is not yet embedded in them. There is also a lack of co-ordination around assessing housing needs and linking in all the agencies involved in this. Although the governance of the Supporting People programme has been addressed, the partners have still to demonstrate how quickly they will be able to drive the programme at the strategic level that is required and contribute to any future capacity issues of the Supporting People team.

## Appendices

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

### Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Supporting People Shadow Strategy and draft Five Year Strategy;
- ◆ A variety of other strategy documents including the community strategy, the learning disability housing strategy and the homelessness strategy;
- ◆ Service documents including policies and procedures;
- ◆ Performance reports;
- ◆ Harrow's vitality reports;
- ◆ Minutes and supporting documents from key groups such as the commissioning body;
- ◆ Value for money methodology;
- ◆ Business plans;
- ◆ Mental health best value review;
- ◆ SSI inspection of social care services for disabled people; and
- ◆ Children's Services' Achievements 2003-2004.

### 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:

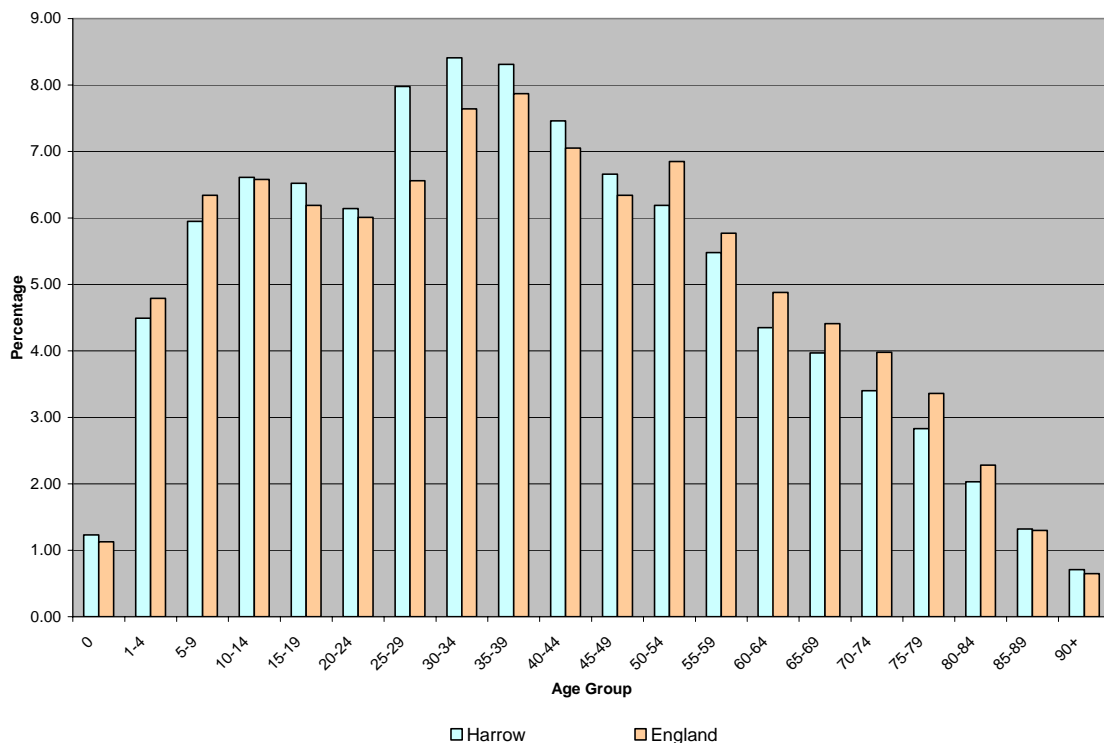
- ◆ Visits to 8 service providers;
- ◆ Mystery shopping by person and telephone;
- ◆ Visits to council offices and the main library;
- ◆ Telephone interviews with members of the West London cross authority group;
- ◆ Observation of a core strategy group meeting; and
- ◆ Interviews with service users.

## Demographic information

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

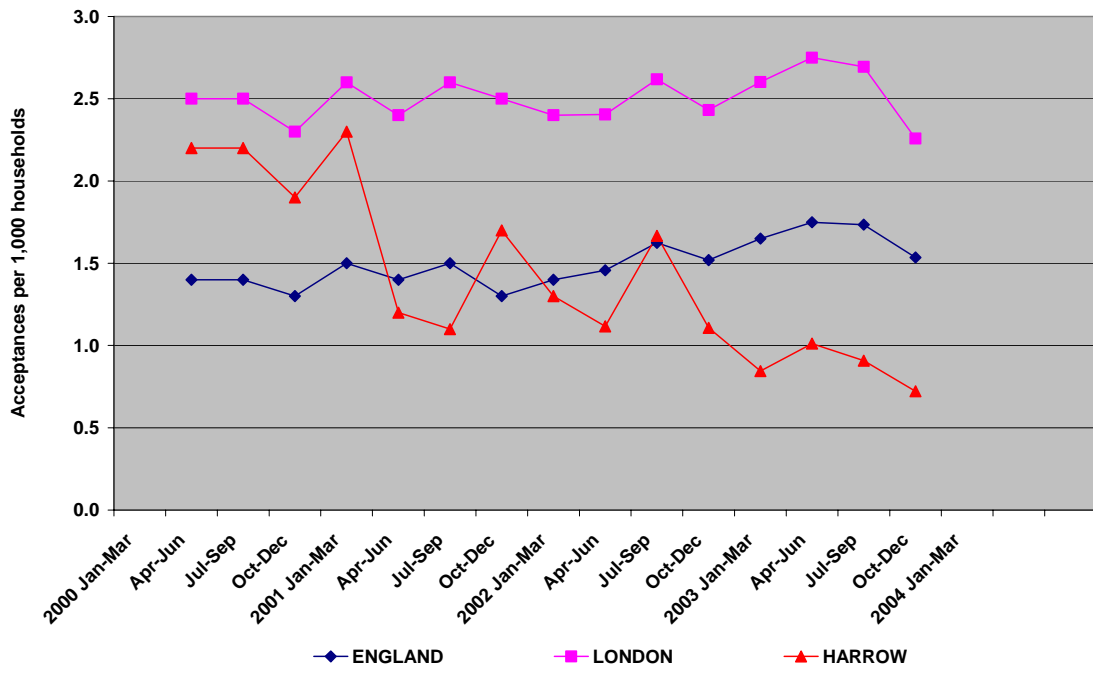
Measure	Harrow	England
Population (mid-2002)	211,700	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2002)	17.90	16.41
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2002)	50.1	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	2.2	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>2</sup>	235	-

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



<sup>2</sup> Deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

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



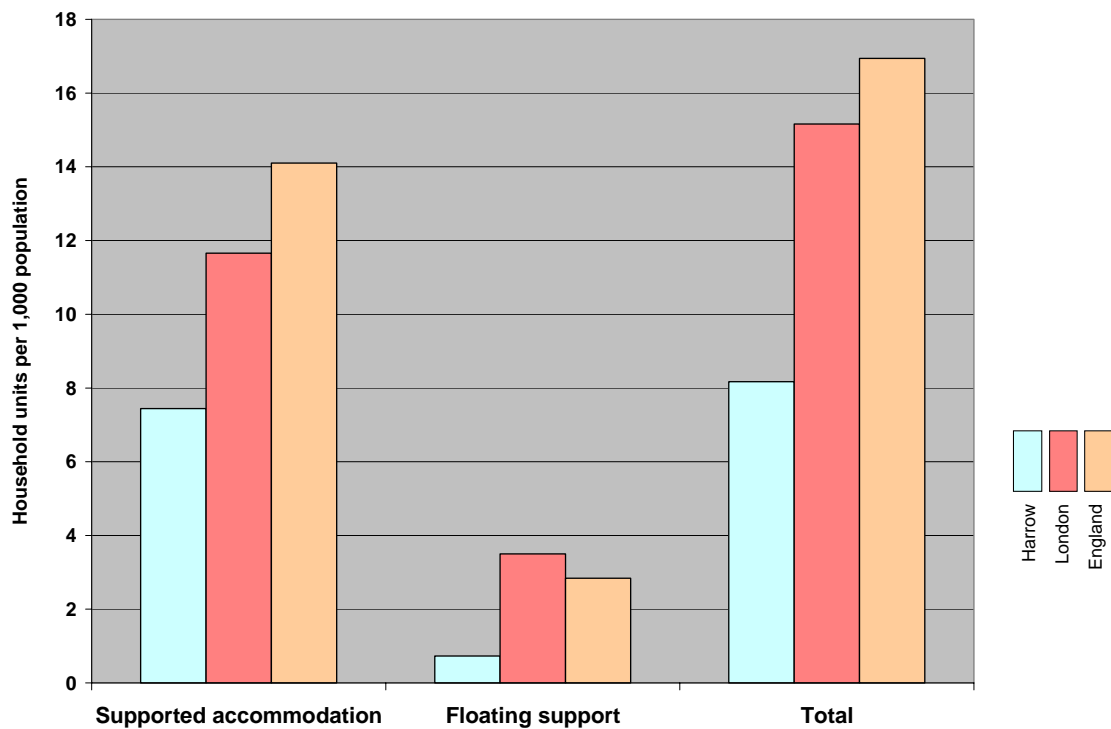
## Performance information

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

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

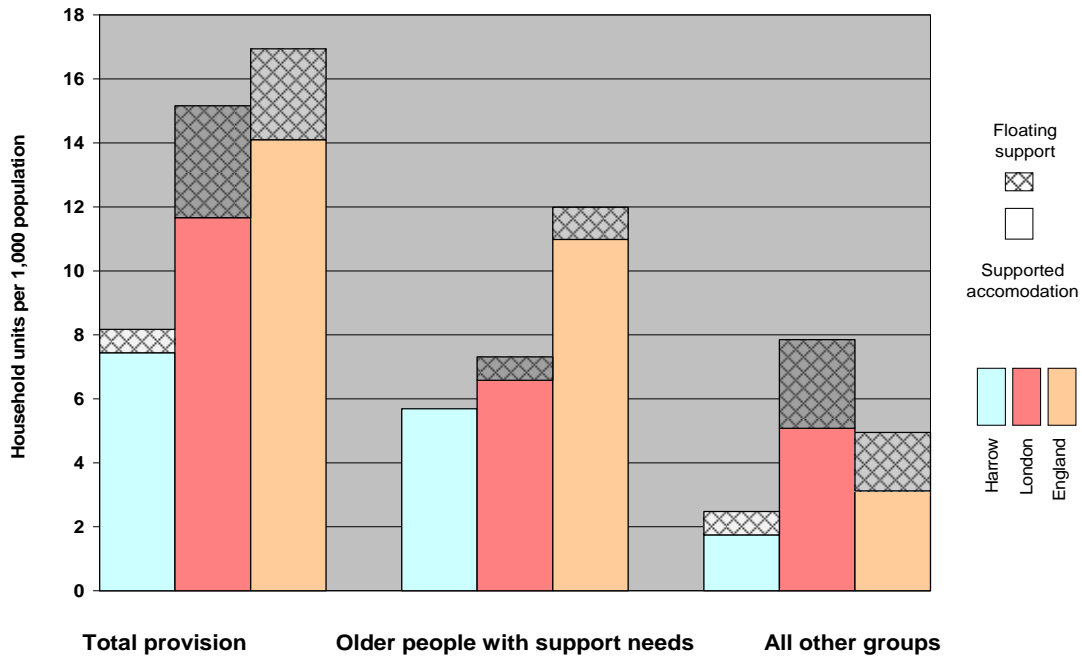
### Supporting People data

**Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>3</sup>**

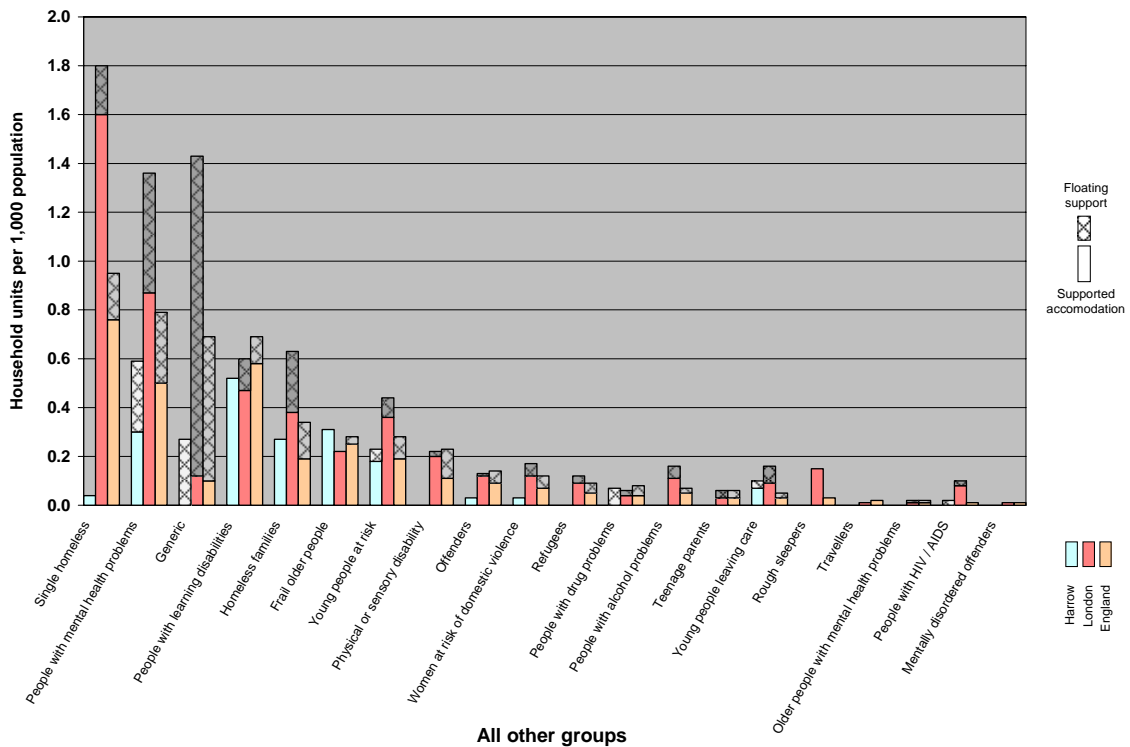


<sup>3</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>4</sup>**



**Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>5</sup> 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**

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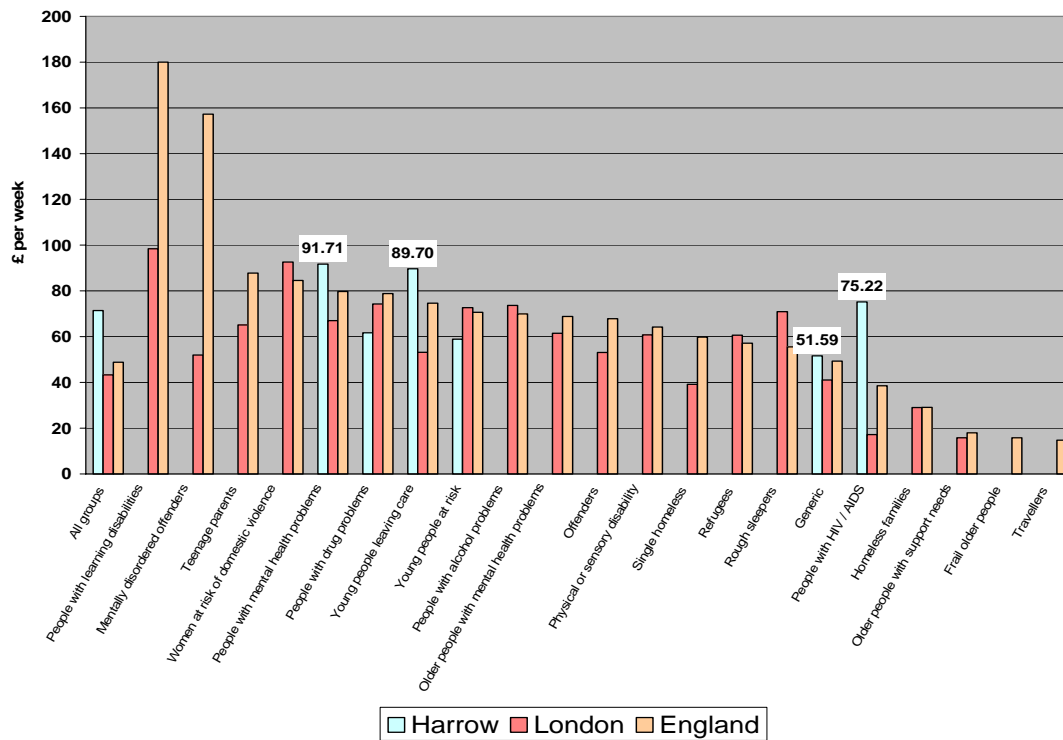
	<b>Final Supporting People grant 2003/04</b>	<b>Pipeline allocation June 2003</b>	<b>Administration grant 2003/04</b>
Harrow	£ 3,614,175	£ 19,336	£ 218,429.53

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

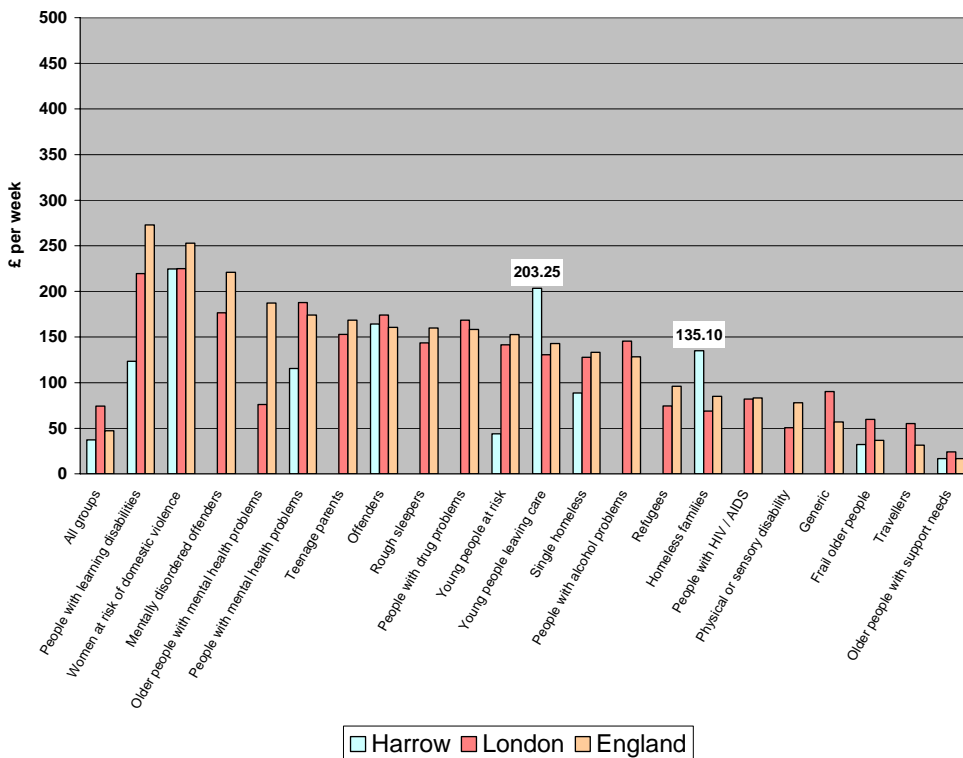
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	<b>Per head of population</b>	<b>Per unit</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms &amp; sheltered housing</b>
Harrow	£ 0.33	£ 35.90	£ 35.90	£ 69.76
London	£ 0.97	£ 42.37	£ 48.73	£ 68.40
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) <sup>6</sup>**

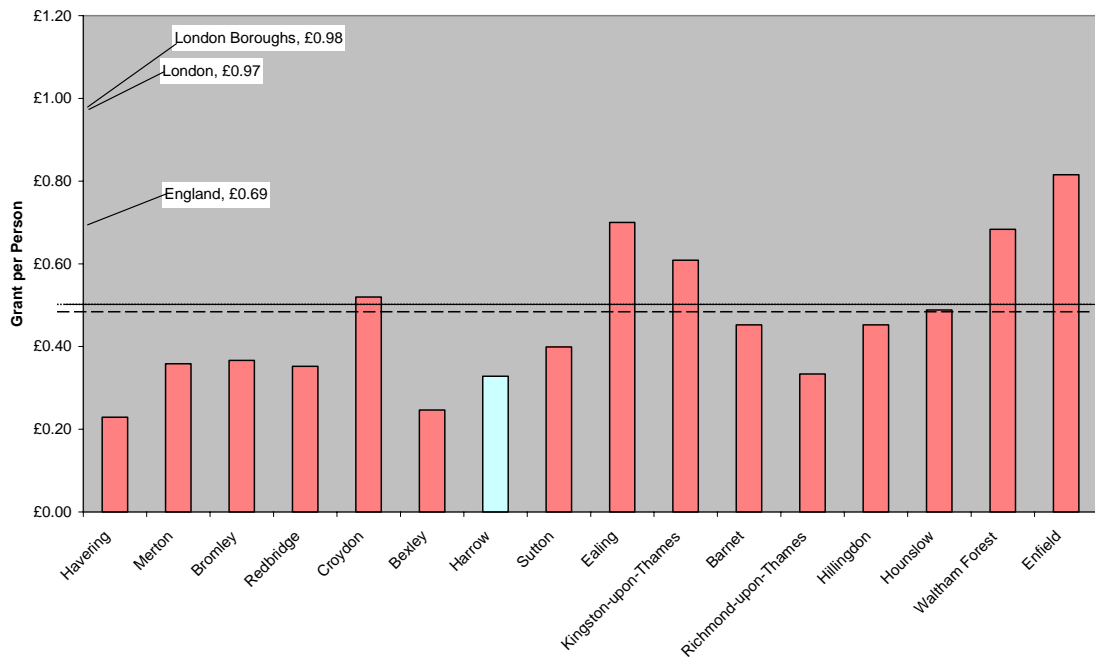


**Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)**

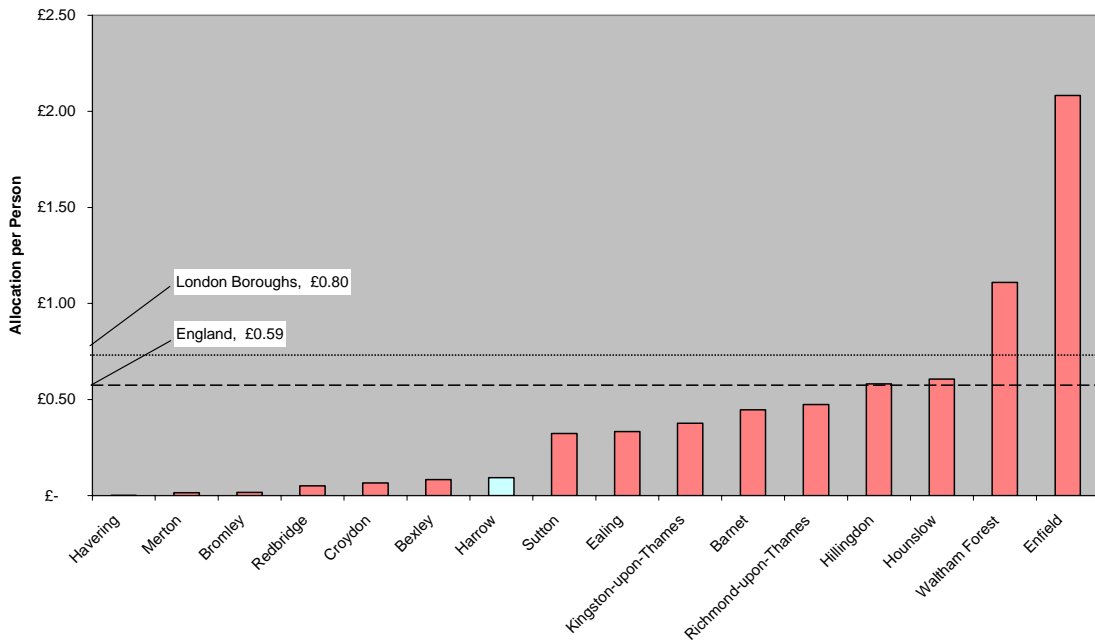


<sup>6</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>7</sup>, all London Boroughs and all English councils (2003/04)**



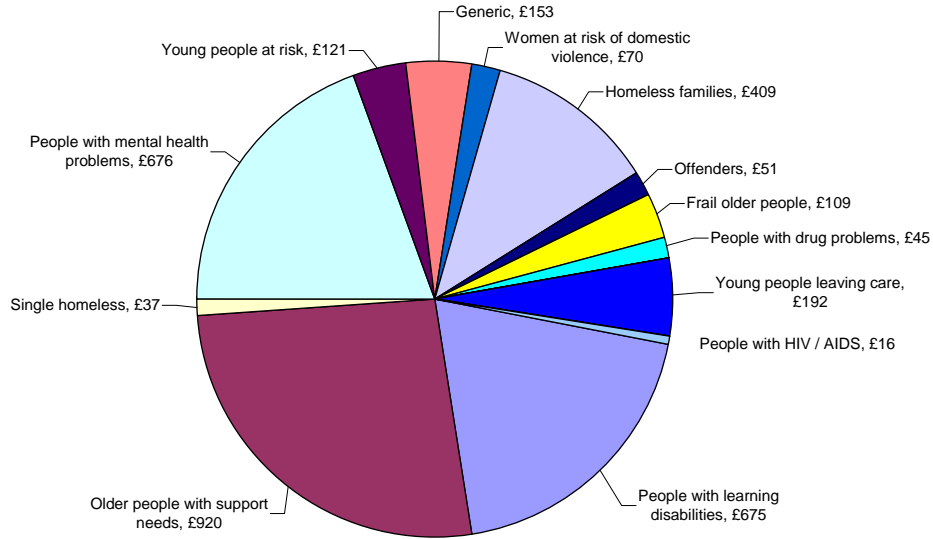
**Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all London Boroughs and all English councils.**



<sup>7</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

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

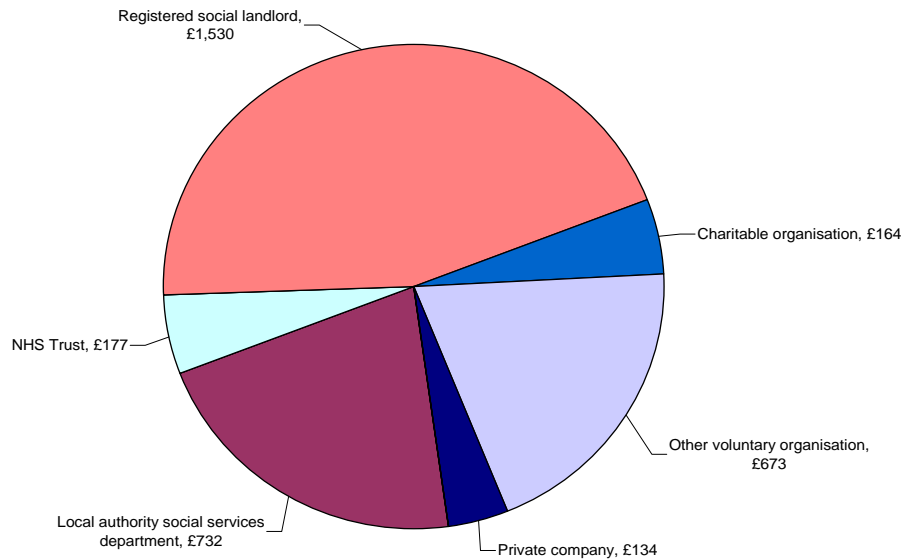
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**Harrow**  
Funding by user group

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

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**Harrow**  
Funding by provider type

### 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	★ (2)
Children's Services	Some	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.

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

## Best value performance indicators

### Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with London Boroughs

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

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

## 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)*

### Harrow's Inclusive Forum

This forum is held twice a year and invitations go out to a very wide number of stakeholders. The forum includes service users who have regularly contributed to discussions about the programme. The forum has determined the vision for the next five years of the programme and made recommendations about ensuring the strategy is written to be accessible to service users.

### Fairer Charging

LB Harrow has set up a joint team with the department of works and pensions and all fairer charging assessments cover a range of financial issues including benefits. This has resulted in over £1 million in extra benefits being claimed.

### West London Cross Authority group

LB Harrow is one of the seven authorities that form the west London group. As well as supporting each other, the group has introduced a joint accreditation process for service providers and has made a successful bid to the ODPM for a value improvement project that will address the needs of offenders.