

Supporting People Inspection Report

June 2007



# Supporting People

London Borough of Bexley

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## Supporting People Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing).

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. Supporting People inspections are carried out with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

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

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG), and the probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (ALA). Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

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

The former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)<sup>1</sup> has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local authorities and their partners will need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk).

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<sup>1</sup> Now the Communities and Local Government department (CLG).

## Summary

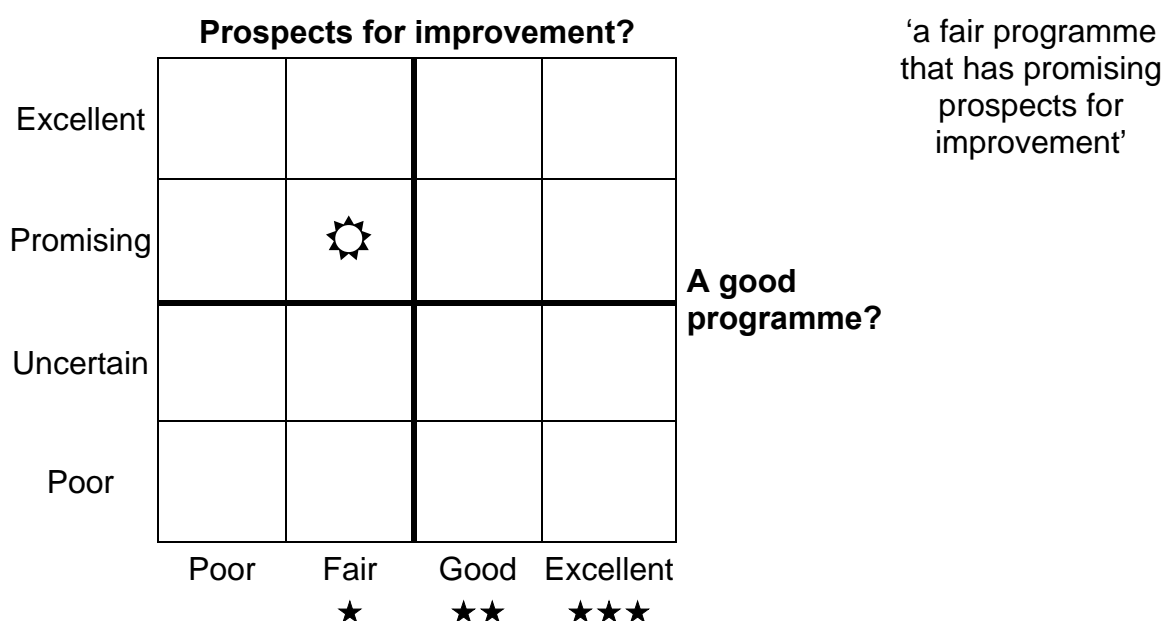
- 1 We have judged that the Supporting People programme in Bexley is providing a fair 'one-star' service and has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Supporting People programme is assessed as a one-star fair service because of the following strengths and weaknesses.
- 3 Governance structures are established with an effective Commissioning Body. A detailed Five-Year Strategy is in place and move on strategies are effective. There is a stable and committed Supporting People team in place who have completed the service review programme in a thorough way and commissioned some new services. Performance monitoring has led to some service improvements across the borough.
- 4 Cross-authority working is established with SELRIG and has led to joint accreditation and a few other joint initiatives. Several services have been developed at no extra cost from savings made of £500,000 since 2004/05. User involvement at a service delivery level is established. Access arrangements are established and developing. Diversity is promoted via initiatives such as the Needs Champions and the BME Core Strategy Group. Outcomes for some service users are positive and evidence is developing in this area.
- 5 There are areas that need addressing. The Core Strategy Group needs to have more regular attendance by some members as this affects its effectiveness. The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group are not sufficiently focussed on strategic issues and the wider outcomes of the programme. Commissioning priorities are still unclear and decisions here have been delayed. Delays in the sheltered housing review have impacted on the ability of the Supporting People programme in Bexley to reconfigure these services which cover 65 per cent of the clients in the programme. This also adversely affects outcomes for this client group. High expenditure on learning disabilities services is only now being addressed and efficiency savings being made.
- 6 Cross-authority working has not yet led to joint commissioning opportunities. How the team and governing bodies learn from complaints is unclear. VFM principles have been slow to develop and little benchmarking work has happened yet. The strategic impact of service user involvement is currently unclear. There are some gaps around diversity research and slow corporate progress in meeting national diversity standards which hinder the Supporting People team's progress here.

- 7 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement due to the following.
- 8 The Supporting People programme is well governed and is clear about its future priorities. It has been effective in delivering improvements in outcomes for service users and is now clear that it needs to continue this in areas such as sheltered housing. It has the support of its service users and providers to achieve its key aims. It is now focussed on further delivering key strategic priorities having delivered on the major operational parts of the Five-Year strategy. It has an effective team in place who are committed to delivering further improvements.
- 9 It does not evidence excellent prospects for improvement because there are still some issues around the programme's ability to deliver changes as quickly as needed. Some major strategic delivery plans such as the sheltered housing review are only now being progressed. The Supporting People programme exhibits a cautious approach to risk management and this is borne out by delays in key pieces of work. The excellent status of the authority is not replicated in the Supporting People programme although it has made significant advances in achieving its key outcomes and is very committed to developing further achievements.

## Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 10 We have assessed the Bexley London Borough Council as providing a fair one-star programme that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>2</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 11 We found the programme to be fair because it has a range of strengths including:
- there are some improved outcomes for service users that are directly attributable to the Supporting People programme;
  - poor services have been challenged and where appropriate de-commissioned;
  - the Council has put in place an appropriate governance framework for the programme and the Commissioning Body has been effective in this role;
  - the Core Strategy Group has played a clear role in monitoring and developing the programme; and
  - there is political and corporate support for the delivery of the programme.

<sup>2</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the programme is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a programme that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent programme (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the programme, also on a four-point scale.

12 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:

- the strategic leadership role of the Commissioning Body is under-developed;
- the Five-Year strategy requires further up-dating particularly around needs information for certain user groups;
- sector reviews of key user groups to inform future commissioning priorities have not yet been completed;
- the approach to value for money needs further development; and
- the approach to user involvement is weak at a strategic level.

The programme has promising prospects for improvement because:

- there is a reasonable track record of improvement in the services that vulnerable people receive;
- there are some examples of learning from other organisations that are providing an effective Supporting People programme;
- there is a fully staffed team who are effectively implementing key aspects of the programme and have corporate support in the key implementation areas; and
- key aspects of Bexley's internally commissioned consultant's pre-inspection reports' recommendations are now being implemented around commissioning and tendering priorities.

13 However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include:

- the programme has been slow until now to agree commissioning and tendering aims and priorities; and
- there have been barriers to implementing the sheltered housing sector review preventing reconfiguring of services to 65 per cent of the programme's service users.

## Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>3</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with service users, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Ensure sheltered housing services are reconfigured to better meet the needs of current and existing service users by:*

- *completing the sheltered housing review of services in consultation with key stakeholders; and*
- *implementing clear timetabled recommendations and ensuring these are integrated into the Supporting People programme's commissioning and tendering strategy.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services that are better tailored to meet the needs of current and prospective service users; and
- more effective and efficient use of scarce resources.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. The sheltered housing review and a clear implementation timetable should be completed within three months of the publication of this report.

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<sup>3</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

**Recommendation**

*R2 Ensure that the commissioning and tendering plans are agreed and that a funding plan is devised to meet the agreed requirements by:*

- *completing any outstanding needs research to inform current thinking on priority groups;*
- *agreeing a final set of commissioning and tendering priorities and agree a more definite timetable to that already existing once priorities are finally agreed;*
- *ensure the outcomes from the sheltered housing review are included in these plans once the review is completed; and*
- *devising a clear funding plan to achieve these priorities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a clear programme for future commissioning and tendering will be in place to ensure the needs of priority groups are met in line with the initial Five-Year strategy; and
- a clear plan will be in place to fund these priorities.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. The decisions around researching and agreeing priorities should be agreed within three months of the publication of this report.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Complaints should be more effectively learnt from by:*

- *recording learning points from complaints in the complaints file itself;*
- *the central complaints log should be included in the Supporting People complaints file so team members know more precisely how they were resolved; and*
- *ensuring that complaints and learning from complaints is regularly reported to the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the Supporting People programme will learn more thoroughly from complaints and this will promote service improvement; and
- the quality of complaints handling will be more robust.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented within two months of the publication of this report.

**Recommendation**

- R4 Ensure that user involvement at a strategic level is better developed by:*
- *consulting with service users about ways in which they want to be more involved at a strategic level;*
  - *ensuring that the views of users are captured on the Core Strategy group; and*
  - *developing a plan with service users and for future user involvement in governance and other strategic areas with agreed timescales.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the programme will better reflect the priorities of service users; and
- service users will be able to influence strategic priorities and delivery arrangements.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. The plan should be devised within three months of the publication of this report and implemented after this date with clear timescales.

- 15** We would like to thank the staff of Bexley London Borough Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 19 February to 23 February 2007

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# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 16 Bexley is an outer London borough situated in the south east of London. The population of the area is 220,300<sup>4</sup>. The Greater London Authority (GLA) has estimated that the population will increase by 10,000 by 2021.
- 17 The proportion of residents aged 65 or over is 16.02 per cent which exceeds the regional average of 12 per cent. The percentage of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities is 12.1 per cent. This is considerably less than the regional average of 40.2 per cent. The largest individual group is Asian/Asian British making up 2.5 per cent of this total.
- 18 Bexley is ranked as the 196th most deprived authority on the Government's index of local deprivation (2004)<sup>5</sup>. Thirteen districts are ranked within the 25 per cent most deprived in the United Kingdom. Unemployment levels in March 2005 were below the regional average of 3.3 per cent at 2.2 per cent.
- 19 The level of home ownership is high at 78 per cent. The Council's housing stock was transferred in 1998 to two housing associations, Orbit and London and Quadrant.
- 20 Homelessness is lower than the London average with acceptances falling to 270 in 2005/06 and 431 households in temporary accommodation in January 2007.

### The Council

- 21 The Council comprises 63 councillors. The Council has been Conservative-controlled, with 54 seats, since the May 2006 elections. The remaining seats are held by Labour. A leader and Cabinet model of governance is in place. There are ten cabinet members and overview and scrutiny is conducted by the remaining members.
- 22 The Council's net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £280.1 million. For the 2006/07 financial year the budget for social services is £59.9 million and for housing it is £6.3 million. The Council employed 7,159 staff (including school staff) at March 2006.
- 23 The Council was assessed as a 'four-star' authority (out of a maximum of four stars) and 'improving well' by the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2006 and received three out of a maximum of four in the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment of February 2007.

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<sup>4</sup> Office of National Statistics, mid-year estimates, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2004.

- 24 The Council's adult social services were awarded three stars (out of a maximum of three) in November 2006 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The Joint Area review of February 2007 scored the children and young people's services at three out of a maximum of four.
- 25 The Council's vision is to: 'make Bexley a place where people choose to live, learn, work and enjoy life and where a variety of choices exist to match a diversity of needs.' This vision focuses on four key themes:
- a strong, sustainable and cohesive community;
  - individual wellbeing and development;
  - a safe, secure and attractive environment; and
  - economic prosperity and opportunity.

### **The Supporting People programme**

- 26 The London Borough of Bexley acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £2,984,688 in 2005/06 and £2,776,454 in 2006/07. The administration grant received in 2005/06 was £180,194 and this reduced to £145,194 in 2006/7. In both these financial years the administration grant was supplemented by £75,000 by the Council. This was higher than the previous year, 2004/05 when £45,000 extra was allotted to supplement the administration grant.
- 27 The Supporting People team is located within the Environment and Regeneration Directorate. The Supporting People team is made up of a Lead Officer who is the Supporting People Project Manager and four other staff - two contract officers, a team administrator and an IT/Project officer.
- 28 In Bexley, 26 service providers deliver a total of 86 schemes under 46 contracts. In total the programme funds 1,623 units of accommodation based housing support, 185 units of floating support, a community alarm service for 500 people and a Home Improvement Agency for 150 people.
- 29 A breakdown of spending in 2006/07 shows:
- 32 per cent of the budget allocated to people with a learning difficulty;
  - 30 per cent of the budget allocated to older people with support needs;
  - 11 per cent of the budget allocated to people with mental health needs;
  - 7 per cent of the budget allocated to survivors of domestic violence; and
  - 6 per cent of the budget allocated to young people with support needs.
- 30 The Five-Year Strategy identified gaps in service provision for various client groups. These included services for homeless people - both single people and families, frail older people, offenders, those with substance misuse problems, young people, travellers, generic services, those with physical disabilities or sensory impairment and people with HIV/AIDS. More recently in January 2007 the top two priorities have been identified as ex-offenders and survivors of domestic violence.

- 31** In September 2006 the highest cost service at £527.24 per unit per week was a learning difficulty service. The lowest cost service at the same date was a sheltered scheme at £2.91 per unit per week.
- 32** Bexley Council was inspected in the fourth year of the 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 offered by contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

## How good is the Supporting People programme?

### What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 33 Bexley Council's strategic vision for the Supporting People partnership is set out in the Five-Year Strategy as, 'to secure high quality, cost effective housing related support services for all vulnerable people in the Bexley community'.
- 34 The Commissioning Body plans to achieve this over the five years to 2010 by:
- delivering quality and affordable housing support services;
  - maximising opportunities for the inclusion of all vulnerable people including disadvantaged groups;
  - maintaining people's independence;
  - positively contributing to local people's wellbeing; and
  - actively contributing to community safety in Bexley.

### How is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?

- 35 The assessment was based on the following key issues:
- governance and partnerships;
  - grant compliance, strategy and needs;
  - delivery arrangements;
  - commissioning and performance;
  - value for money;
  - service user involvement;
  - access to services and information;
  - diversity; and
  - outcomes for service users.

### Governance and partnerships

- 36 The Communities and Local Government department (CLG) has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.

## 16 Supporting People | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 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. As Bexley is classified as an excellent authority normal grant conditions do not apply and it has certain freedoms and flexibilities allowed to it.

37 Overall in this area strengths outweigh weaknesses. Governance arrangements in Bexley are established and are generally working well. There is evidence of corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme. However, councillors' understanding of the programme is limited at a wider member level.

### **Commissioning Body**

38 The Commissioning Body meets quarterly and has an appropriate level of senior representation, with full engagement of both health and probation partners and is working effectively. There are good links between the two key cabinet members on Supporting People issues (for regeneration and housing, and for health and adult social care). Some key decisions have been made to de-commission or re-commission services. This has led to reconfiguration of services more in line with the needs of service users in Bexley.

39 Although some decisions have been made about current services, the Commissioning Body now needs to agree key commissioning priorities, particularly around sheltered housing. Sector reports were not produced. This means that key strategic decisions are not grounded on a firm base of client needs and provision. As a consequence it will be unable to release savings to use on new and additional services.

40 The Chair of the Commissioning Body has now left the Council and has been replaced in the interim by the Acting Director of Social Care. This is helping to ensure continuity in governance arrangements.

### **Core Strategy Group**

41 The Core Strategy Group provides support to the Commissioning Body and has ensured linkages between the programme and wider service priorities, although there are concerns about the poor or non-attendance of 5 of the 14 members in 2006. Of the six meetings in 2006 three representatives did not attend at all and two attended once. This lack of consistent representation will affect the ability of the Core Strategy Group to make fully focussed and informed decisions.

- 42 Providers are well represented on the Core Strategy Group through the two provider representatives (the chair and co-chair of the provider forum). These representatives attend the 'non-commercial' part of the meeting and feed back to the provider forum. Minutes of the Core Strategy Group are also sent to all providers. This enables a clear reporting link between providers and the Core Strategy Group.
- 43 The effectiveness of the Core Strategy Group could be improved. Agendas and meetings are too long. Papers are not always available with sufficient notice prior to the meeting and items are sometimes taken after relevant members have left the meeting early. Agendas have focussed primarily on operational issues and are not sufficiently strategically focussed. This limits the ability of the Core Strategy Group to make key strategic decisions and operate to its peak effectiveness.
- 44 A BME Core Steering group was set up in early 2006 and reports to the Core Steering Group. It aims to ensure services for minority ethnic people are planned in an integrated and co-ordinated manner. The Chair of this group attends Core Strategy Group meetings and reports on any key issues and priorities that need addressing. The BME Core Steering group has representation and input from a variety of BME user groups, service providers and the voluntary sector.

#### **The Accountable Officer**

- 45 The Accountable Officer (AO) is the Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning and has held this role since July 2006. He has been effective in championing the Supporting People programme and councillors have been kept informed about the programme's development. The Accountable Officer has ensured that there is a strategic overview and monitoring of progress in the Supporting People programme. The Accountable Officer provides support to the lead officer and the team and monitors the programme and its performance. The Accountable Officer attends the Core Strategy Group and promotes links into other relevant strategies relating to older people, social care and regeneration.

#### **Wider partnership arrangements**

- 46 The Commissioning Body has effective links with other council departments. Housing and social services relationships have been positive. There is effective partnership working with the South East London Regional Implementation Group (SELRIG) and this has led to a joint accreditation system. The Probation Service is actively linked with the Supporting People programme so that offender needs have been given an appropriate priority, particularly following a recent report by external consultants. Probation Service staff are actively involved in the Supporting People programme particularly through attendance at the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group.
- 47 The human resource and finance teams are now centralised and this works effectively and has helped to resolve previous problems with IT systems. These links are vital to ensure that the Supporting People programme and the small team, with limited resources, get support to move the programme forward.

## 18 Supporting People | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 48 However, The Youth Offending Team is not sufficiently engaged with the Supporting People arrangements. The representative does not attend the Core Strategy Group. The impact of this is that the support needs of young people who have offended or are at risk of offending are not fully taken account of.
- 49 The multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are effective and housing officers and providers are properly represented in the arrangements.

### **Service providers**

- 50 The provider forum was put in place early in the SP programme and is well attended. The forum meets quarterly and there are generally 15-20 people representing 10 to 15 organisations. There is a provider-only session at the beginning of the meeting to allow issues to be discussed without SP officers present. Providers visited were positive about the Supporting People team, the Provider Forum and their experience of service reviews - including the way they received feedback. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the forum sit on the Core strategy group and act as a conduit to feed back in both directions.
- 51 However, the provider forum is not clearly enough focused. It is attended by a wide range of people, from chief executive to support worker, and there is insufficient space devoted to strategic discussion. Several providers that we spoke to would like to see the forum restructured to enable both strategic and operational issues to be more fully covered.

### **The voluntary and community sector**

- 52 Links with the voluntary sector are starting to mature. The Supporting People lead officer attends the voluntary sector forum and the Volumes Group (for Mental Health services). A voluntary sector compact is in place. Links with BME groups within the voluntary sector have also been promoted via the BME Core Strategy Group and its Chair reports key issues directly to the Core Strategy Group. This has led, for example, to the formation of a new Access Project, primarily for BME service users.

### **Grant compliance, strategy and needs**

- 53 Weaknesses in this area outweigh strengths. Although a comprehensive Five-Year Strategy was put in place it did not demarcate clear commissioning priorities. It identified various unmet needs but progress has been slow to determine which client groups to prioritise and this was only provisionally agreed in early 2007 pending further research. There have been lengthy delays in carrying out the sheltered housing review, which has resulted in an inability to reconfigure sheltered housing services. Move on for vulnerable groups is being prioritised and leading to some effective outcomes.

### **Grant conditions and eligibility criteria**

- 54 Bexley agreed their eligibility criteria in 2005. Funding was withdrawn from March 2006 from several schemes providing residential care. As an excellent authority Bexley has agreed eligibility criteria which allow up to 10 per cent of funding to be spent on 'welfare services' which are not directly housing support costs. It is not clear that all services for sheltered housing have ineligible costs below the 10 per cent threshold that Bexley Council's Supporting People team internally agreed. Information assessed suggests that this has yet to be fully addressed.
- 55 In addition, some Supporting People funded sheltered schemes have residents who have few or no support needs. Although research is being undertaken into this area by Bexley with a provider with results due at the end of March 2007, it is evident that the delays in the sheltered housing review are impacting on the ability of the Supporting People programme to utilise the small grant levels

### **Five-Year Strategy**

- 56 The Five-Year Strategy was widely consulted on and has a detailed analysis of supply and needs and links to national and local strategic priorities. It sets out several future commissioning priorities but does not place them in any priority order. This is an important issue that should have been addressed earlier on in the programme. Some areas of need were identified in needs mapping research undertaken in 2004 - sheltered housing, offenders, Mental Health services, substance misuse, teenage parents, domestic violence services, travellers. Priorities for further development from the Five-Year Strategy are only now being agreed (following a review by the Commissioning Body in January 2007). These are not definite but (based on available data) are likely to be services for offenders and households fleeing domestic violence.
- 57 The full range of performance indicator (PI) targets and outcomes for the contract review process has yet to be agreed with providers, users and partnership boards. To date there has not been much linkage between children's services' planning mechanisms and the Supporting People programme. There is, for example, only a limited service for those with high support needs once a young person leaves the remit of children's services.

### **Needs mapping, analysis and review**

- 58** Needs mapping is developing through the engagement of various 'needs champions' appointed by the local authority. These 'needs champions' are required to give an annual update of needs in their respective client group areas. Updates to the needs mapping in 2006 were provided for key groups such as people with mental health problems, offenders, older people, teenage parents and substance misuse. However, some areas did not have updates and research is now out-of-date - for example for care leavers and young single homeless people, people with HIV/AIDS, Domestic Violence service users and people with physical and sensory disabilities. It is not transparent why Domestic Violence service users were given a high priority in January 2007 for future development when the needs research was not updated in 2006. Indeed the needs research as a whole does not provide robust and clear evidence of why one group should be prioritised over another. Thus future commissioning priorities are not yet based on fully updated research.
- 59** Researching needs for many groups is being done in an integrated and inclusive way involving other key internal partners - social services, the Learning Disabilities partnership group etc. Joint work is also happening with health and social care regarding older people's needs. This will inform the sheltered housing review. There is also joint working taking place between the housing department and the Supporting People programme on the updating of the homelessness strategy. Supporting People is also aware of the Mental Health strategy and is working to implement the needs identified. For example, the Supporting People team has identified unused sheltered housing stock and worked to train support staff and housing association staff to dispel their fears of mental ill health and to provide a support service to maintain those in the community who are on stable medication. This new service is part funded through Supporting People and contributes to the Mental Health strategy to develop 'alternatives to care'.
- 60** Some new services have been commissioned as a result of the service review programme and Five-Year Strategy - including a new Foyer, a BME access project and floating support services. This has been partly as a result of savings from the decommissioning of services which have amounted to just over £500,000 since 2004/05. As a result, some of the identified gaps are now being filled.
- 61** Bexley has recently (December 2006) received a comprehensive consultancy report on the housing support needs and provision for offenders in the borough. The research included data analysis, interviews and a focus group of Probation clients. This is being used to inform future commissioning. As a result the needs of offenders have now been given a high priority along with those facing domestic violence. Research around travellers (a key gap) is being developed and is being commissioned in a strategic way across several local authorities, although this work is still underway and has not yet produced any clear outcomes.

- 62 There has been a substantial delay of over two years in carrying out the review of sheltered housing. There is now an aim to have a commissioning brief agreed by April 2007 but no definite timescale has been outlined for when the review will be completed. This has delayed the reconfiguration of services which are provided to 65 per cent of Supporting People service users.

### **Strategy for access to move on accommodation**

- 63 Move on for vulnerable groups funded by Supporting People is prioritised and there is no evidence of silt up in these services. There are clear priorities given to these groups, although they could possibly be directed through one sole assessment and referral route rather than the several that currently exist. This achievement is ensuring that throughout is maximised and clients who need supported accommodation can gain access to it.
- 64 There is no move on strategy in place but this is not a requirement. A move on strategy would, however, help to clarify priority groups and ensure clearer targets for these are set in place.

### **Delivery arrangements**

- 65 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is an experienced and stable Supporting People team in place which has effectively delivered on key aspects of the programme such as service reviews and commissioning of new services. Clear work plans are in place at various levels and there are connections between the Supporting People programme and the newly devised Local Area Agreement. Performance monitoring is in place and being further refined in line with new steady state contracts now being issued. Other aspects of the delivery of the programme are also well advanced.

### **Supporting People team and work planning**

- 66 Key delivery arrangements are in place. The Supporting People team consists of five officers - a lead officer, two contract officers, an administrative officer and an IT/Project officer. They are given appropriate support and supervision by their line manager, the SP Lead Officer. They are involved in key partnership groups across the council and externally.
- 67 The Key Lines Of Enquiry (KLOEs)<sup>6</sup> are effectively used to inform the team plan and they are discussed in separate meetings every three to four months. The IT/Project officer is now part of the new quality team and this enables the team to acquire additional capacity and support for key monitoring work from this team.
- 68 Relationships with some other departments are uneven and there is not consistent support for the Supporting People programme at a strategic level from some colleagues in children and young people's services and especially the Youth Offending team whose representative did not attend the Core Strategy Group meetings throughout 2006. Where relationships are more developed (housing) this improves the service. More seamless work across the department cited above would improve outcomes for related aspects of the Supporting People programme.

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<sup>6</sup> KLOEs - The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry

- 69 The Supporting People team is seen by providers as very accessible and supportive, and open to discussion and debate. For example, they were willing to develop the new Access Project as proposed by the BME Steering group. Clear delivery arrangements have ensured that key tasks and action plan priorities are followed through.

### **Local Area Agreements**

- 70 A draft of this agreement was sent in early February 2007 to the Government Office for London. Links with the Local Area Agreement are now beginning. There are aligned targets in two areas - KPI 1 concerning independent living for older people and KPI 2 concerning planned departures for young people. There are currently no stretch targets for Supporting People in the Local Area Agreement. The Supporting People programme in Bexley by developing closer links with this agreement are ensuring that the programme's strategic aims will be more closely aligned to the corporate aims in the Local Area Agreement.

### **Performance monitoring and management**

- 71 Key performance monitoring systems are in place. Quality Assessment Framework (QAF)<sup>7</sup> performance is regularly monitored and shows overall improvement. Of the services reviewed up to end of March 2006 only two were assessed at QAF level D and these were both decommissioned. Monthly performance returns from providers are generally returned on time and no default notices have yet had to be served. There are, however, some particular recent concerns about the accuracy of one provider's returns and the team has been proactive in attempting to resolve these problems to avoid serving a default notice. Providers are all now being required to move to level B as part of the requirements of the new steady state contracts now being issued.
- 72 There is progress in developing outcome measures. A six month outcome monitoring pilot is in place (now just ending) which involves SELRIG and CLG ensuring effective use of cross-authority and CLG expertise. This will help ensure that outcome monitoring methods used are also open to benchmarking and will use nationally agreed support frameworks to ensure some consistency of approach at a south London regional level.
- 73 Financial reporting to the Core Strategy Group and the Commissioning Body is now much more accurate and timely than previously. IT systems are now fully linked up with the financial information systems. Accurate and prompt financial reporting and information is vital to ensure Supporting People grant is correctly accounted for and that providers are paid correct amounts and on time.

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<sup>7</sup> QAF - The Supporting People regime's Quality Assessment Framework to assess the quality of services

- 74 There are also appropriate financial controls in place. There was a period when shortcomings in IT systems led to weak monitoring and some inaccuracies in payments to providers. These issues were resolved in 2006 and systems are now operating satisfactorily and the necessary minor reconciliations made. Payments to providers are made on time. Financial management is provided from within Adult Social Services and the officer responsible attends the Core Strategy Group. Links will be further strengthened when the housing service rejoins the Adult Social Service directorate later this year. SPLS data uploads are sent in a timely fashion to CLG and errors are corrected so that uploads can be fully completed

### **Fairer charging**

- 75 Fairer charging assessments are turned around quickly. The council's fairer charging policy and appropriate basic leaflets are in place to explain the systems to providers and service users. All new service users are offered a fairer charging assessment and this process works well. The Commissioning Body approved a sheltered leaseholder charging policy which was operational from October 2006. This ensures that services users receive the appropriate funding support they are entitled to.
- 76 IT in this area needs further refinement. For example, providers would welcome an electronic process for fairer charging assessments, rather than the paper-based system. This would ensure a wider variety of available methods to process these assessments.

### **Risk management**

- 77 Business contingency plans and risk registers are reasonably comprehensive and outline basic actions in cases of emergency or business failure of providers. A business continuity plan was devised in May 2006 and providers were also asked to complete it for their services. The business continuity plan completed by the Supporting People team sets out the corporate arrangements for responding to emergencies and also specific contingencies for housing provision. It also contains a list of Supporting People providers of sufficient size and competency across each client group that could respond quickly to an emergency in another organisation (whether service closure or failure of some other sort). A Supporting People risk register was last updated in September 2006. These arrangements ensure that key emergencies are dealt with effectively.

## **Commissioning and performance**

- 78 In this area strengths are balanced by weaknesses. All service reviews, except one, were completed on time and reported individually to the Commissioning Body. Improvement planning is being monitored with providers. Performance monitoring is in place. Quality Assessment framework standards are in place and providers are monitored against them. This has led to overall improvements in quality standards amongst most providers. Although there is cross-authority working which has led to some agreed processes, there has been no joint service commissioning of services as yet, although discussions have begun with Bromley and Greenwich. While complaints and appeals procedures are in place learning from complaints is unclear.

## **Contracts and Reporting**

- 79 The service review process for individual services was thorough but some reports were delayed. All service reviews were completed by the end of March 2006 deadline, with the exception of one service where the review was completed after the deadline. All service reviews were individually reported to the Commissioning Body and approved by them. The sample of service reviews checked by us found a generally thorough approach to the service review process. All but one provider that we spoke to considered that service reviews were handled fairly and sensitively and that service users were very involved. However, some service review reports took a considerable time to be produced. A thorough service review process ensures that service quality issues are fully addressed and performance driven forward.
- 80 The sample check of service reviews found that there has not always been comprehensive follow up to initial reviews. A review carried out in April 2005 required a stage two review by March 2006, but this did not take place. Progress against the action plan for this service is also unclear from the action plan itself.
- 81 The service review process was comprehensive. However, there was a missed opportunity at the service review stage to also assess service areas via whole sector service reviews – particularly for sheltered housing services (although this was done for Mental Health services). This would have more effectively informed commissioning decisions in a more ordered and responsive way – although delays with the sheltered housing review, in particular, have also significantly held up progress here. This was a missed opportunity and would have maximised the efficiency and effectiveness of the review process.

- 82 The tendering programme outlined in the Five-Year Strategy is behind schedule. This is reducing the effectiveness of the commissioning process in Bexley. The new Foyer service has been subject to a formal tender process. A new tender programme is now in place as from February 2007. The plan to tender mental health and substance misuse services by the end of March 2006 has now been put back to be completed by the end of August 2007. Similarly, tendering plans for older people's services are on hold until the sheltered housing review takes place. The only other sector which has a significant number of services in Bexley is the learning difficulty sector and tendering plans here are set for 2010 due to the large scale and long-term tender already in place with the main provider. Delays here in tendering these services may mean that efficiencies and effectiveness in these service areas are not being maximised, both in terms of cost and as regards of reconfiguring services - especially those for older people.
- 83 The Five-Year Strategy also included an intention to reduce the number of providers for any client group to three. For Bexley this applies primarily to the three large sectors in the borough – older people, people with mental health problems and people with a learning disability. For all other groups there are only one or two services, although the growth of floating support services may make this relevant in the longer-term for this group of services.
- 84 There is a level playing field for internal and external providers. The Council-run Linkline emergency alarm service was robustly reviewed and the previously automatic Council-approved inflation increases were challenged by the Supporting People team. This helps to ensure equity in procurement and contracting processes.
- 85 Steady state contracts are not yet in place - this is now planned for the end of February 2007, although some have already been sent out for signing. This is partly due to delays within the legal department and personnel changes here. These will be one-year rolling contracts due to the continuing uncertainty over central government funding. These delays and the short-term nature of these steady state contracts could mean some uncertainty for providers in funding terms.

### **Quality assurance**

- 86 A service improvement plan is in place with each provider. The Supporting People team go back to providers on approximately a six-monthly basis to review these plans. A contract monitoring system has been developed which monitors providers between one and four times a year, depending on risk. However, this monitoring has yet to commence. The full range of PI targets and outcomes for the contract review process has yet to be agreed with providers, service users and partnership boards. Monitoring of improvement plans will lead to steady service improvements for service users, but until this is fully developed real improvements here cannot be consistently driven forward.

- 87 Quality Assessment Framework improvements have been made as a result of the service review process and this is leading to improvements in the quality of service delivery to service users. The new steady state contracts will now require each provider to work towards level B by the end of the 12 month period after the contract start date. Annual self-assessments of compliance with the national Supporting People quality standards are in place. There is also a robust review system in place for ex-offenders which is enabling the needs of ex-offenders to be met.
- 88 Formal joint contract monitoring of services is under-developed. While there are a few examples of joint monitoring of jointly-funded services, for example, monitoring of Staying Put (part of the Home Improvement Agency) was carried out jointly by Supporting People and Adult Social Services, this is not standard practice. This means that monitoring arrangements are not always minimising the administrative impact on the provider.

### **Cross-authority**

- 89 Effective cross-authority working has led to some joint developments - such as joint accreditation systems, an information sharing protocol and work piloting service user outcomes. The joint accreditation system, in particular, will lead to efficiencies, particularly for providers who work across the South East London region and for Supporting People teams in terms of reduced administrative work.
- 90 Cross-authority working on monitoring is beginning and is leading to some initial outcomes in enhancing efficiencies. Bexley's Supporting People lead officer chairs the SELRIG contract officers group to share good practice and the Supporting People team have had a seminar to share how to complete monitoring forms using CLG trainers. This work is cost effective and is beginning to lead to more cost effective and efficient ways of working across authorities.

### **Complaints and appeal processes**

- 91 There are reasonable complaints and appeals procedures in place and a new approach to reviewing appeals has been set up with Southwark. There were no formal appeals during the service review programme. Complaint and appeals procedures are important to ensure that all stakeholders have appropriate recourse to challenging processes and decisions.
- 92 Several aspects of the Supporting People complaints process are well developed and effective - they are dealt with promptly and effectively, recorded in a systematic way and the procedure in place appears robust. They are recorded centrally and Supporting People team members are actively involved in discussing complaints in meetings and informally. For example, the Supporting People team addressed issues with a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) which admitted its liability and an action plan was put in place. Effective complaints handling can lead to improved services for users, especially if learning is derived from complaints made.

- 93 There is learning from complaints, although this needs clearer dissemination amongst the team. A few aspects of the complaints process are under-developed. For example, how learning from complaints is captured by the Supporting People team. The central complaints log should also be included in the Supporting People complaints file so that team members know more precisely how they were resolved. Also, there have not been recent reports on complaints to the Core Strategy Group or Commissioning Body. Learning from and reporting of complaints are important to ensure that the Supporting People team can assess concerns and improve the service to stakeholders.

### **Value for money**

- 94 In this area weaknesses outweigh strengths. There are some clear value for money (VFM) principles in place corporately across the Council but VFM work is less well developed within the Supporting People programme. VFM principles in benchmarking services and commissioning outcomes are not as far developed as in other London Councils. Methodology is developing and attempts are being made to put limits to costs and assess quality as related to costs, especially in learning disabilities services where efficiency savings are particularly being targeted. Outcomes so far are hard to evidence on a wider level, particularly regarding sheltered housing services. These shortcomings are a missed opportunity to gain further improvements in value for money.

### **Defining Value For Money**

- 95 The Supporting People team has an understanding of VFM principles in terms of cost and quality, but these need further development in how they are applied to services. A VFM framework is in place and has been recently revised. This framework was used during the service review process and service users were also consulted about VFM during the service reviews. Efficiency targets of between three to 5 per cent are now being set for all services. Whether this is improving the quality of services is unclear.

### **Benchmarking**

- 96 VFM workbooks have been developed with the Southwark Supporting People team. These workbooks collect a range of information to help compare services including staffing and administration costs. This enables the workbooks to calculate the weekly cost per user, the hourly cost per user and the full contract value. Bexley are able to use this financial data to compare costs with other organisations.
- 97 Client group benchmarking work is being developed. Work has begun internally with client groups but comprehensive data of client groups at a regional level is not yet available, although this is being looked at with SELRIG. Once benchmarking is fully developed across all client groups both internally and across SELRIG this will lead to an even more effective use of the Supporting People grant.

### **Cross-Authority Commissioning**

- 98 Some initial work is taking place on cross-authority commissioning to achieve better VFM but this is slow to be developed. Current discussions with other boroughs are exploring a possible teenage parent scheme and a complex needs service for mentally disordered offenders.

### **Procurement and Improving VFM**

- 99 Strengths here are balanced out by weaknesses. £500,000 has been saved by decommissioning or remodelling services since 2004/05 and used to open a variety of new floating support services and reconfigure others. For example, a physical disability accommodation service was decommissioned and remodelled to become a floating support service for physical disabilities and service users with sensory impairment. This is a cost effective use of the grant.
- 100 Key commissioning decisions were decided on by the Commissioning Body using a well developed commissioning and procurement policy although open tendering has only happened for one service so far. Bexley is considering other ways to fund service gaps in provision as savings cannot be made indefinitely, ie by using efficiency savings made in learning disability services for other priority service areas. The significant savings made have been effectively used to open new relevant and needed services, although some are still in the pipeline.
- 101 Two key client groups - sheltered housing and learning disabilities - have not been reconfigured so that VFM principles have not been fully applied yet to all services. The above two client groups currently account for around seventy-six per cent of the total Supporting People grant in Bexley. The results of a very recent meeting with the main learning disability provider have produced an efficiency gain of 80 hours per week that will produce £71,000 savings from learning disabilities expenditure from 1 April 2007. This represents a 7.3 per cent saving and exceeds the 5 per cent target agreed. This key service area represents around 30 per cent of the total Supporting People grant in Bexley. Such efficiency savings will enable new services to be commissioned.
- 102 Some procurement practices have achieved efficiency savings. For example, the one service for ex-offenders has been decommissioned and is being replaced by an extended service at the same contract price. Greater value for money and a more appropriate type of service has been achieved through changing to a more appropriate floating support service in two sheltered housing schemes and reducing costs.

- 103** There are also restrictions on the support hour costs of high cost services. Any exceptions to these costs need to be agreed by the Commissioning Body. Some steps have been taken to address the high cost of learning disability services, although this has been slow to come to fruition. The service review of the main provider identified some costs that are not directly for housing support - these have been partly met by the eligibility criteria allowance for ten per cent of costs to be spent on social welfare services. There are also steps being taken to procure efficiency savings here of 5 per cent each year on unit costs. This has recently resulted in some significant savings that can be utilised on other services.

### **Administration grant**

- 104** Bexley does not yet have evidence of value for money in the use of the Supporting People grant. Some benchmarking of the Supporting People team's administration grant has taken place via regional benchmarking comparisons through the eleven SELRIG boroughs. The data shows that Bexley has the lowest level of administration budget (including top-up) but has the highest administration budget as a percentage of Supporting People grant, at eight per cent, compared with between 1.4 per cent and 4.6 per cent elsewhere in the region. However, it is acknowledged that there is a need to have a minimum number of staff to effectively deliver the programme regardless of the size of grant compared to other neighbouring authorities.

### **Service user involvement**

- 105** In this area strengths outweigh weaknesses. Efforts have been made to engage with service users in the borough within supported housing services. User involvement forums have been set up and Speakout days for service users help inform the Supporting People team's priorities within the programme. Service users were involved in the service review process. User surveys are also undertaken and providers are active in involving service users in shaping service delivery. Service user representatives attend partnership groups where strategic issues are discussed. Service users here are contributing to wider strategic issues relating to the Supporting People programme in Bexley.

### **Opportunities and Contracting and Monitoring Involvement**

- 106** Service users contribute to the delivery of the programme through the service user forum. The forum was formed a year ago and meets quarterly; all service users are invited either directly or via their provider (no providers attend - which is appropriate). The forum includes presentations and consultation. Minutes are sent to those attending, placed on the website and summarised in the service users' newsletter. Transport via dial a ride is offered on request to meetings and fares are also offered on request for meetings (which are always held at the Civic Centre). Attendance is variable - around ten attended the recent meeting, primarily sheltered housing residents, although more have attended previous meetings. This forum is an important tool by which to feed back service users' views to the Supporting People team.

## 30 Supporting People | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 107** A survey of service users was carried out in September 2006, with around 300 replies and the results are generally positive and highlight key areas for improvement. Service users were given the analysis of results at the February 2007 service user forum meeting. Results generally show that services are providing good quality support, with 96 per cent feeling safe in their homes and 79 per cent saying that their support needs are being met. However, 22 per cent of respondents said that they had not initially been asked about their support needs (68 per cent had), and 27 per cent did not feel involved in drawing up their support plan (60 per cent did). Areas for improvement highlighted include information and consultation from service providers. The Supporting People team plans to further explore the results and report the action to be taken back to service users. Such surveys are an essential tool for driving forward improvements in services in key areas identified by service users.
- 108** The annual Speakout day is an effective forum for gathering and responding to service users' feedback. Three annual Speakout days have been held so far, to which all service users are invited. The day includes breakout sessions for the main client groups. Those attending are sent feedback which includes information on how issues will be taken forward. Feedback forms are also available at other Supporting People events. The 2006 event was attended by over 70 service users living in Supporting People funded services. The views of the service users and actions being taken to address their concerns and wishes have been reported back to those attending and to other service users via providers and through the Supporting People Newsletter and website. Action taken includes the engagement of the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) to help develop user involvement and the production of new leaflets about Supporting People, although these actions are very recent indeed and outcomes cannot yet be assessed.
- 109** Providers considered that there is a strong approach to service user consultation and involvement by Bexley's Supporting People programme. As well as events organised by the Supporting People team, providers are encouraged to promote user involvement themselves - one provider is holding an event for people receiving floating support in March 2007. Providers themselves have a variety of ways of involving their service users in their services, including recruitment panels and membership of service advisory groups. The Supporting People team also developed a document entitled 'A quick guide to service user consultation' for providers and a Supporting People consultation strategy, although this document from 2004 now needs updating.
- 110** Service users are also involved in decommissioning plans and development of new floating support schemes has been widely consulted on with service users (especially sheltered users).
- 111** There is not yet any structure for service user involvement or representation in the governance arrangements. This has been discussed at the last Voluntary Sector Forum but plans are yet to be fully discussed or implemented.

## **Access to services and information**

- 112** Here strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Supporting People team has worked hard in this area and outcomes here are generally positive. Access arrangements to most services are transparent and there are no restrictions due to local connections in place. The Supporting People programme has responded positively to the need for more access support and advice to BME communities with a new access project. Information about services is generally accessible. As a result services to marginalised groups are improving and information is more accessible.

## **Access and referral to services**

- 113** Access and referral arrangements to services are generally working well. For example, it is positive that homeless 16 to 17 year-olds are jointly assessed by social services (with housing input) under the homelessness legislation and Children's Act and are then referred through the most appropriate route. They may then be referred to the homelessness prevention team, or to the placement team or directly to a housing association through the social needs quota. Also, in another example, the referral system with the teenage parents' scheme works well helped by co-location of the housing officers and support workers who liaise closely together. The referral system from Bexley's housing department generally works well and ensures appropriate onwards referrals.
- 114** There is not a separate referral and assessment process for Supporting People services. Most services are accessed either through social services or the housing register. Access arrangements are determined through discussions when new services open and there are no restrictions in place due to local connection criteria. Referral systems are thus efficient and effective.
- 115** A new Access Project was opened in January 2007 following proposals from the BME Steering group expressing the need to enhance access and advice for BME service users. This supports up to ten users, primarily of BME origin, via a part-time advice worker and signposts users to housing and housing support services. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative.
- 116** Services are changing as a result input from service users. At the Speakout day, service users requested services to be available outside office hours from Monday to Friday. As a result, new services commissioned are required to be more flexible. This will encourage service users to feed in more of their ideas and ensure services remain focussed on customer needs.
- 117** Some examples were evidenced of historically low utilisation levels despite established needs and low levels of provision. For example, the Teenage Parents service, the new service for people with physical or sensory disabilities, floating support for young people and domestic violence services. However, disabilities over access to these services were actively addressed by the Supporting People team and these services are now effectively utilised at maximum capacity.

### **Information**

- 118 Information in a range of formats is available to existing and potential service users. This information is generally fit for purpose and there is positive feedback from providers and service users about what is available.
- 119 For example, a service sheet and leaflet explain the broad areas of responsibility of the Supporting People team, and what housing related support is, in simple language. The longer leaflet, 'What is Supporting People?' covers the programme's main aims and all key areas. Both the service sheet and the Supporting People leaflet list referral agencies but provide no contact details for them. They are informative documents but not attractive.
- 120 Most written information available is informative and available in other formats. Some has also been developed in conjunction with service users. There has recently been involvement of service users with learning disabilities in the production of two leaflets that are appropriate in their format and convey information in a user-friendly way. There are also corporately produced leaflets for sheltered housing and learning difficulty' service users. These are detailed and outline other ways these leaflets can be accessed and offer to translate them into other languages.
- 121 The in-house interpreting and translation service can provide information for service users and providers in other languages via the Customer Contact Centre. However, there are no target times for dealing with service users' requests for translations and the process within the Council is cumbersome as it involves four separate departments.
- 122 A six-monthly Supporting People Newsletter is sent to providers, service users and councillors. Five have been published so far. The Newsletters contain details of events, new services, other information and invite feedback. The most recent issue (winter 2007) includes feedback from the Speakout day. The newsletter is an important method to communicate with key audiences and is well developed and achieves this aim.

### **Supporting people directory and website**

- 123 A Supporting People services directory for Bexley housing related support services has recently been published and is undated. It was discussed with providers and at the December 2006 service user forum. It is comprehensive and offers the information in other formats or in other languages. Providers spoken to are positive about this development.
- 124 The Supporting People website is accessed via the corporate website and is slowly developing. There is no evidence that service users were involved in its design. It provides information on key Supporting People policies and procedures and other documents. It is in its early stages and needs some updating.
- 125 There are no online translations available for either web pages or documents, as well as no facility for bigger fonts. It appears the customer has to ring the Interpreting Service for access to website information in other languages. This limits the usefulness of the service to the diverse communities in Bexley.

- 126** Bexley's 'Better Care: Higher Standards' document contains two clear references to the Supporting People programme - in the 'finding a suitable place to live' section and in the appendices around 'finding out more about Bexley Council and health services'. The document is accessible and easy to read and the references to Supporting People make it clear to service users what Supporting People is and how they could access these services. Such signposting is important for potential service users and helps widen access options for those who may need these services.
- 127** Documents on fairer charging are in place and this information is available on the Supporting People website.

## **Diversity**

- 128** This is an area where strengths are balanced by weaknesses. There is some progress being made in researching the unmet needs of diverse groups and diversity issues are promoted through the BME Core Steering group. A new BME Access Service has also just begun. There are, however, gaps in research for some harder to reach groups (for example travellers, HIV/AIDS) and few or no Supporting People funded services available for some of these groups. Plans to fully assess and address these gaps have also been delayed. At a corporate level the Supporting People team is active in promoting diversity issues but progress has been slow corporately to move further on reaching the next level in the Equality Standard for local government.

## **Identifying Diverse needs and excluded groups**

- 129** Diversity needs research is piecemeal and slow to develop. A diversity strategy around meeting diverse needs is not yet in place. Some areas of the needs-mapping research were not updated by Needs Champions and the research is now out-of-date - for example for care leavers and young single homeless people, people with HIV/AIDS, women fleeing domestic violence, people with physical and sensory disabilities and the needs of BME groups. Research around the needs of travellers has not commenced, although this is now beginning on a cross-authority basis. As a result, the diverse needs of various user groups are not being systematically addressed and several gaps in knowledge remain.
- 130** There is a BME needs champion who has attended two Needs Champions meetings so far. This officer provides a link to local BME groups and can also provide links on other diversity issues such as contacts on travellers' issues.
- 131** The Core Strategy Group has a good understanding of the needs of BME communities. This is enhanced by representatives from BME organisations attending the Core Strategy Group and through the BME Core Steering group. One of Bexley's six Supporting People priorities is to improve access and take up of services by BME communities. The BME Core Steering group focuses on service accessibility, with the chair sitting on the Core Strategy Group.

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- 132 The BME Core Steering group has also helped to improve access and services for BME service users. The group meets quarterly and is well attended (15 to 30 people). The group has shaped the new BME access project and initiated improved provision for people with physical disabilities and sensory impairments.
- 133 The SP team has been pro-active in making links with organisations working with BME communities. For example, the team has attended and spoken at Bexley Commission for Racial Equality meetings.
- 134 At a corporate level there is a 2006/07 Corporate Equality Action Plan. Progress in this area is driven by a steering group of equalities champions across departments (including the Supporting People Accountable Officer) and through quarterly Social Inclusion Steering Group meetings.
- 135 The corporate Equalities Forum enables the Supporting People team to make links with local communities. The forum is attended by the public and the Supporting People programme is a standing item - with the Supporting People team represented at the meetings. The forum covers all equalities issues; for example, the most recent meeting included a presentation by a service provider for older people on the need to increase take up by the BME community.
- 136 There has, however, been slow corporate progress against the Equality Standard for Local Government. The target to achieve level 3 by 2005 was not met and it is not yet clear whether the revised target of March 2007 will be met. This is partly due to a lack of corporate capacity in this area and this will slow down progress the Supporting People team is aiming to make here.

### **Cultural sensitivity**

- 137 There has been some reconfiguration of current services to meet the needs of diverse groups. One sheltered housing scheme was decommissioned as a result of the service review process as it was unwilling to change access arrangements for BME applicants. Two other services were decommissioned due to Disability Discrimination Act compliance concerns and low demand. Elsewhere, service reconfiguration to meet diversity needs has been restricted in scope as the main service user sectors - learning disabilities and sheltered housing - have not been fully reviewed or reconfigured yet.
- 138 Sheltered housing has traditionally had low take-up from BME communities, although steps are now being taken to try to address this by, for example, broadening the use of communal areas for use by the wider community and aiming to attract more BME applicants in this way. Other plans are being considered in this area but have not yet been implemented. The result is that sheltered housing services are not yet meeting the wider needs of diverse local communities.

## Outcomes for service users

- 139** The weaknesses in this area outweigh strengths. The positive outcomes for service users following the service review programme and reconfiguring of services have been restricted as key services - especially those around sheltered housing and learning disabilities - have not yet been significantly reconfigured or subject to a sector review. These two service sectors between them amount to around 67 per cent of the total numbers of service users and 76 per cent of Supporting People funding in Bexley. The sheltered housing review delays, in particular, are a major concern here affecting the positive progress that has been made in this area.

## Supporting People service improvements

- 140** In some services, though, there have been some tangible outcomes for service users. Service users attending the 2006 Speakout event said that overall their services provided a good quality and level of support, with noticeable improvements over the past year, particularly around information. Service users met with during visits to services have talked of the changes and progress they have been able to make to turn their lives around with the support they have been receiving.
- 141** The 2006 service user survey shows some generally positive results, with 96 per cent of respondents feeling safe in their homes and 79 per cent saying that their support needs are being met and they feel listened to by their support worker or warden (12 per cent did not). There are also some less positive results from this survey. 22 per cent of respondents said that they had not initially been asked about their support needs (68 per cent had), and 27 per cent did not feel involved in drawing up their support plan (60 per cent did). Also, seven per cent said they had been bullied or treated badly in their present accommodation and 12 per cent said they would not know what to do if they were bullied or treated badly. The Supporting People team is beginning to address these issues with providers.
- 142** The Performance Assessment Framework (PAF)<sup>8</sup> data for people 'helped to live at home' shows that the Council is in line or performing better than its comparators for 2005/06. This shows effective outcomes for those who are able to remain living at home with relevant support.
- 143** There is also other evidence of action being taken to maintain people's independence. For example, work with social services to increase support for people with learning disabilities; a pilot scheme to provide additional support in sheltered housing (now funded by the PCT); and recently agreed funding of £90,000 for a two-year pilot floating support service for older people in the private sector - although this service has yet to start.

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<sup>8</sup> PAF indicators are CSCI performance indicators

### **Choice for service users**

- 144** A few new services have opened or are being developed to meet identified need and widen choices for service users. Those opened are: floating support services for multiple needs and people with a physical or sensory impairment, and for homeless households; the BME Access project and the Foyer service for young people. Those being developed are: a pilot floating support service for older people in the community; and a floating support service for people with complex needs (including mentally disordered offenders and MAPPA clients). The opening of new services has widened choices for some service users.
- 145** The delay in carrying out the review of sheltered housing has meant that there has not been significant reconfiguration of services for the majority (65 per cent) of Supporting People service users. Plans to review this sector have been delayed since at least 2005. This has led to delays in tackling some poor quality accommodation and the reconfiguring of services to better meet needs - it has therefore restricted outcomes for many service users in this group. Also, the current services house some users who have no or few support needs so that access to these services is being denied to some who may need them more. This is critically restricting effective outcomes for a wide number of service users.
- 146** The housing and support needs of offenders and those at risk of offending in the borough are not currently being met. Recent research found that Bexley's provision for offenders in 2005/06 was far lower than the London average and that of neighbouring boroughs. This research found that of 545 convicted offenders known to probation, 118 had accommodation problems and of these 55 had no permanent accommodation. Half of the 38 Drug Intervention Programme clients were estimated to have a housing related need and ten MAPPA offenders had accommodation problems. Police and Probation are unable to provide as much support as they would like. The research found a need for more permanent accommodation and for shorter-term higher level support. The greatest support needs are for younger offenders who have never lived independently. These provision gaps mean that offenders' accommodation choices remain limited and this can increase the likelihood of repeat offending.

### **Support plans and outcome measurement**

- 147** Support plans are generally in place. The service reviews took a detailed look at support planning to ensure that plans were in place. The 2006 service user survey (a 'quality of services questionnaire') was generally positive about the quality of support received and service users met on our visits said that support plans are in place and generally effective. There is also positive feedback on the standard of support being received from a recent service user forum and the annual Speakout day.

- 148** Outcome monitoring is not yet in place but is developing. Cross-authority work is happening with SELRIG and also internally. Bexley has an interim system of collecting outcome data focusing on six areas (directions of travel in people's lives) and this work has been subject to a six month pilot with providers that has now just ended. The information from this pilot is currently being collated and it is anticipated that these outcomes will fit into the new CLG model to be introduced from April 2007. Developing outcome monitoring work is essential to measure the effectiveness of services and whether they should be retained or whether new models of service provision are more appropriate to meet the needs of service users.
- 149** There is no longer-term outcome monitoring in place to track people who have moved on from services. This work is beginning with SELRIG partners to include targets from which performance can be measured. This work will be vital to assess how many service users sustain their independent tenancies and how they can be helped to continue living independently in the long-term.

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

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

- 150 The Council has a fair track record of delivering improvements in the Supporting People programme although progress has been slow in key areas such as reviewing and reconfiguring the major sector of sheltered housing. Some developments are now just beginning such as deciding on future commissioning priorities and benchmarking with other local authorities. Delays have been assessed at the Commissioning Body and a revised commissioning and tendering plan recently devised.
- 151 Since 2005 a series of developments have ensured that key elements of the Supporting People programme are in place. These have been achieved through effective support from other council departments and by clear Supporting People governance arrangements being in place. The Supporting People team has delivered key aspects of the Supporting People programme - they have completed the service reviews and produced a comprehensive Five-Year Strategy.
- 152 Governance structures are established with an effective Commissioning Body made up of key partners from across the Council. They have made key delivery decisions around decommissioning seventeen services and commissioning new services following the development of a detailed Five-Year Strategy in 2005. Several services have been developed at no extra cost from savings made of £500,000 since 2004/05, although some of these are yet to open. Needs research has been commissioned and updated in some areas. The Commissioning Body have decided on two key priorities for tendering new services but are still due to make final decisions here.
- 153 There is a stable and committed Supporting People team in place who have completed the service review programme in a thorough way and commissioned some new services. Key policies and strategies are in place.
- 154 Cross-authority working is established with SELRIG and has led to joint accreditation and a few other joint initiatives. These are leading to improved efficiencies for the councils involved. User involvement at a service delivery level is established with various initiatives in place, including service user forums, Newsletters and Speakout days, although this has not been effective yet at a strategic level.
- 155 Access arrangements are established and developing and a new access service is promoting access and advice for primarily BME users. Diversity is promoted via initiatives such as the Needs Champions and the BME Core Strategy Group.

- 156** Outcomes for service users in those services that have been reconfigured or remodelled (but not the 65 per cent of sheltered service users) are generally positive and evidence is developing in this area. Service users visited during the inspection were generally positive about the quality of the service and support they received. Outcome monitoring has begun and a successful pilot is being rolled out following the introduction of steady state contracts.
- 157** Value for money methodologies are developing and efficiency targets are starting to be met, particularly in the area of learning disability services where the main service provider is now meeting set efficiency targets.
- 158** Procurement practice is developing. The tendering programme and commissioning framework were discussed and agreed with the procurement team. Corporate tendering support was also given regarding the Foyer tender.
- 159** The Bexley Supporting People programme recognises the need to improve delivery in some areas. It has good self-awareness of the areas that need improvement and has been working hard to move these forward. These include, in particular, the need to ensure that the Core Strategy Group has fuller attendance from certain members and that it and the Commissioning Body focus more on strategic development of the programme. Needs mapping requires further development in some areas as does cross-authority work, especially in commissioning of new services. There also needs to be a fuller integration of the programme in the new Local Area Agreement.
- 160** Progress in delivering the review of sheltered housing services has proved a major stumbling block to service reconfiguration in this sector that consists of 65 per cent of service users and this is a key concern over the programme's track record.

## **How does the Council manage performance?**

- 161** The performance of the Supporting People programme is being effectively managed and strengths here outweigh weaknesses. The Commissioning Body is clear about the main priorities and objectives and these are linked to wider corporate objectives. There are appropriate plans in place. Outcome monitoring is being developed, although this needs further work. Financial monitoring of the programme was initially problematic but is now sound.
- 162** Plans are in place to replace key Commissioning Body members who are leaving the Commissioning Body. Experienced staff from within the adult social care department and probation service with some knowledge of Supporting People will take over in the short-term of which some will stay on after the Chair of the Commissioning Body is replaced.

## 40 Supporting People | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

- 163 Performance of the Supporting People team is reported to and monitored by the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body using current effective corporate performance monitoring methods. Action plans from the Five-Year Strategy link into directorate and departmental action plans and this forms the basis of the Supporting People team's own work plans. Progress against the annual and business plans is monitored annually by the Commissioning Body. There is less formal or regular assessment of the team's progress at Commissioning Body meetings but this is carried out in a more focussed way by the Accountable Officer.
- 164 There is a robust supervision and appraisal system in place. Supporting People staff members receive regular one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals, with six-monthly reviews. Staff members have individual plans which include specific targets and training needs are also identified. There are also regular team meetings. A review of staff appraisal documents confirms that staff members are regularly appraised, performance is reviewed against targets and new targets are set. However, the appraisal forms had not all been signed by the manager or staff member.
- 165 Council members are committed to the programme and are clear about the need to prioritise the needs of vulnerable people.
- 166 The approach to future commissioning has recently been clarified at the January 2007 Commissioning Body meeting when a revised commissioning framework was adopted. The 2006 update of needs research has, to some extent, informed the new agreed commissioning priorities. A consultants' report from December 2006 about offenders also significantly influenced the decisions around future commissioning priorities. Provisional decisions have now been made about key priority groups for future commissioning and where further research is needed. Final decisions are to be made in May 2007.
- 167 Procurement timetables have also been further clarified and revised for new services. These include a sector review of mental health services by May 2007 and the sheltered housing review, followed by a review of homeless services. Plans are thus being further clarified for future procurement and commissioning priorities.
- 168 A risk register and business continuity planning frameworks are in place. These contingency plans will ensure that services are maintained if an unexpected event occurs. These plans also cover the Supporting People team.
- 169 The Supporting People team has regularly assessed performance of providers through performance monitoring, QAF workbooks and validation visits alongside the service review process. Performance has been closely monitored resulting in overall improvements in the quality of service provision. The full range of PI targets and outcomes for the contract review process has, however, yet to be agreed with providers, users and partnership boards. Outcome monitoring is being effectively progressed internally and externally with SELRIG and CLG.

- 170 There are examples of the SP team learning from other high performing authorities. The VFM workbook, monitoring procedures and contingency planning were all developed following examples from other Councils. These initiatives show a willingness to be open to innovation. The Supporting People lead officer has been instrumental in developing links with other authorities. The VFM workbook, in particular, is beginning to lead to efficiency savings and effective cost comparisons between services.

## Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 171 The Supporting People programme is now clearer about its future priorities and areas where improvements are needed and strengths here outweigh weaknesses. A pre-inspection report by a consultancy in November 2006 was clear about where improvements needed to be made. The key recommendations were:
- revisiting the Five-Year strategy to agree commissioning and tendering priorities for a clearer delivery plan with specific outcomes;
  - ensuring the sheltered housing review takes place as a matter of urgency;
  - ensuring that high cost services (such as for learning disabilities) where ineligible funding is concentrated are subject to funding reductions; and
  - adopting a clearer funding plan.
- 172 Following this a timetable with various actions was drawn up. The timetable was too ambitious in the times allotted to achieve pieces of work. The pre-inspection review was also too close to the inspection to have enough time for effective delivery of key improvements. However, several of the recommendations are now in place or beginning. The first and third matters outlined above have been moved forward and significant decisions or changes made since November 2006. The sheltered housing review is still subject to some discussion about exact timetabling but is now a much higher priority for 2007/08. A clearer funding plan, however, still needs to be put in place. Other parts of the action plan around move-on, user involvement and contract management processes are being developed.
- 173 Governance has been effective in delivering the key planks of the programme, although the Core Strategy Group needs to pay more attention to its membership attendance. Plans are being put in place over the future membership of the Commissioning Body as three of its members are leaving the employment of the Council. In the interim this needs careful succession planning. From an outline of these plans there is some confidence that this succession planning will be effective.
- 174 Work has been undertaken to ensure that the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group are now more focussed on the need to develop key strategic priorities and are clearer about what these are.

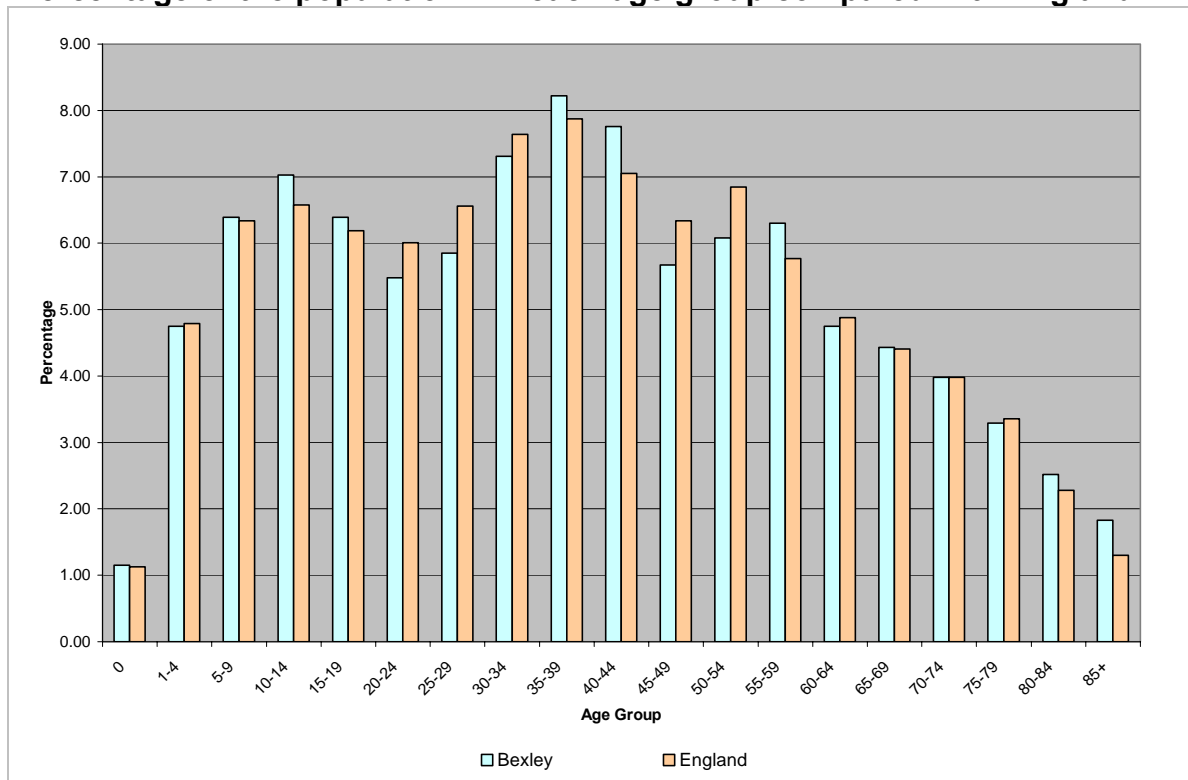
## **42 Supporting People | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?**

- 175** Bexley has a strong track record of corporate working and in delivering its objectives, as evidenced by corporate performance assessments over several years.
- 176** The Supporting People team is stable and experienced and staff are committed to continuous improvement. The lead officer and accountable officer are also committed to change and development and have developed effective links internally, in SELRIG and more widely. There is high regard from other staff and stakeholders for the skills and commitment of the team. Staff report that there are good opportunities provided to receive appropriate training. Training is, for example, planned to enable the Supporting People team to generate its own analysis reports from IT data. There is also mandatory corporate training on diversity issues for all staff, plus training for all relevant managers on carrying out Equality Impact Assessments.
- 177** The limited capacity of the Supporting People team, due to its size, is partly being addressed by merging of functions. For example, the new quality team will include Supporting People performance and quality work and this is already having positive outcomes for the team in capacity terms. The Council's procurement and legal teams are also involved in supporting the Supporting People team in these areas and enhancing capacity.
- 178** Effective partnership working is also adding to the programme's capacity. The Supporting People team has been open to new approaches and has piloted outcome monitoring and developed joint work within SELRIG. Joint commissioning is also underway, in particular with Bromley and Greenwich. Cross-authority research into travellers needs will lead to joint commissioning of services for this user group. Various networks have been established and the team is represented on various internal and external groups. Learning from others is ongoing and examples are outlined above.
- 179** The Supporting People team is attracting some inward investment - for example probation gave £1,000 to develop needs mapping. CLG also gave the team extra money for administration grant following a successful application. The new Foyer service also attracted a large grant from the London Development Authority. The low level of grant in Bexley is, to some extent, limiting the capacity of the programme to deliver against the identified levels of unmet need. However, the programme still has capacity to improve what it does with the small grant it receives. It is receiving an extra £200,000 for 2007/08 in Supporting People grant from CLG and continues to receive extra top-up funding from the Council for administration costs.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Measure	Bexley	England
Population (mid-2005) <sup>9</sup>	220,300	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	16.5	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	8.6	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) <sup>10</sup>	2.2	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>11</sup>	196	-

Percentage of the population<sup>12</sup> in each age group compared with England



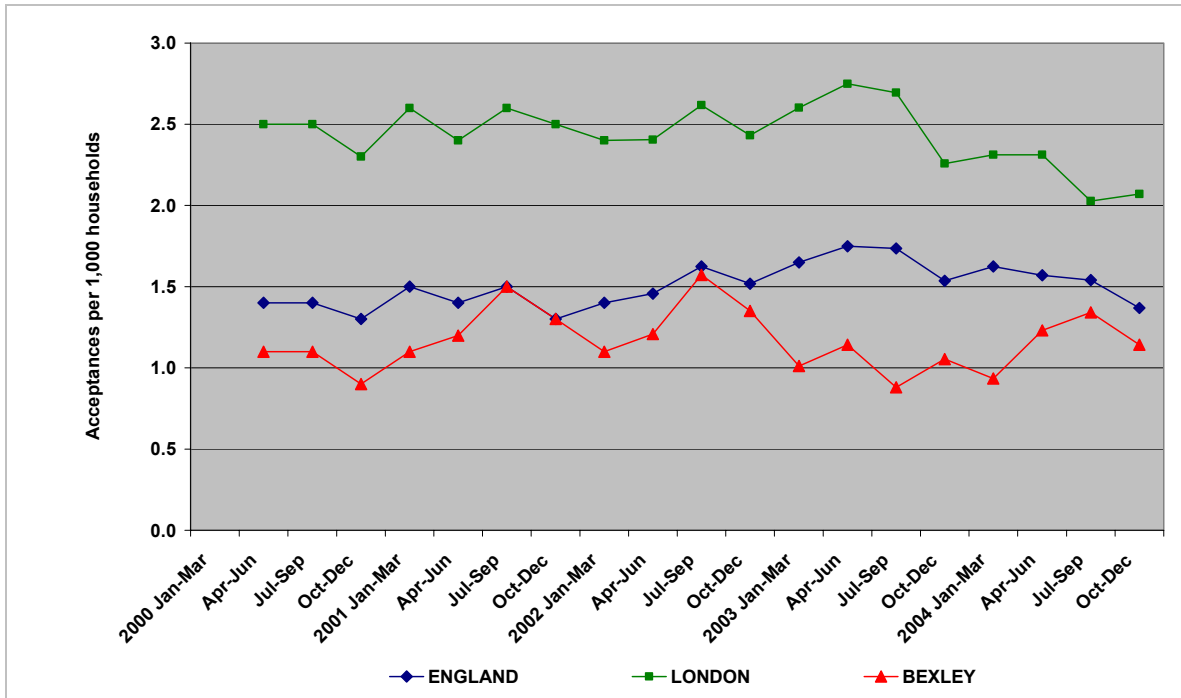
<sup>9</sup> Source: midyear population estimates (2005)

<sup>10</sup> Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (February 2007)

<sup>11</sup> Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

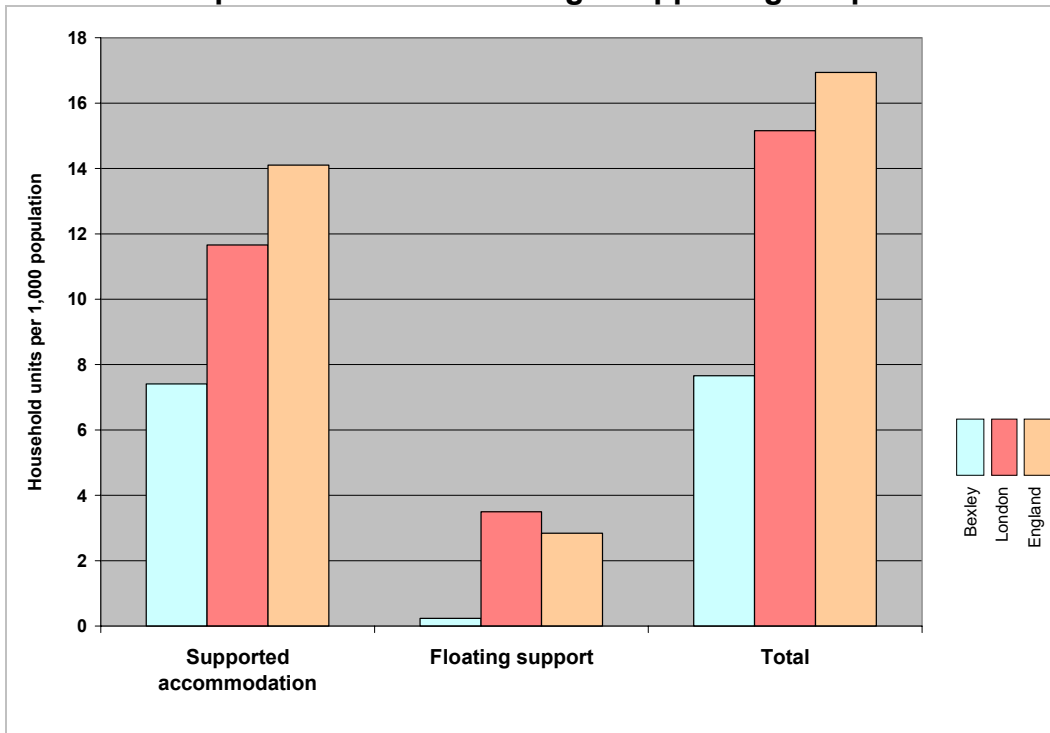
<sup>12</sup> Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

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



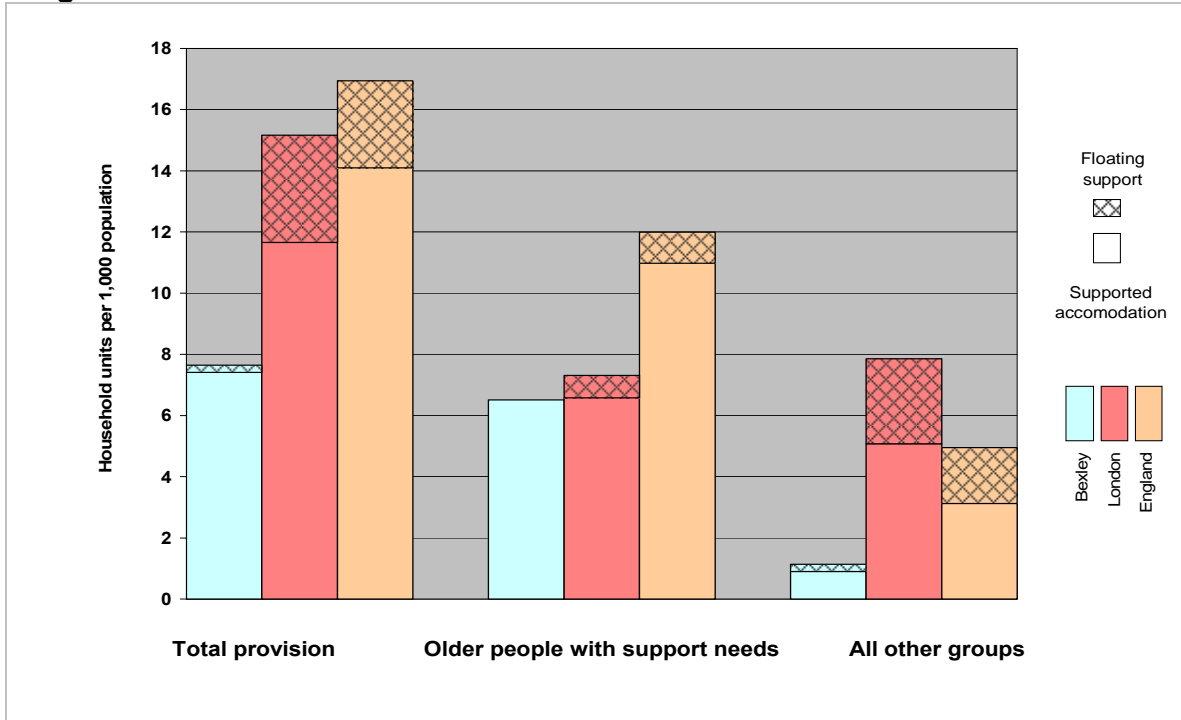
## Supporting People data

### Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>13</sup>

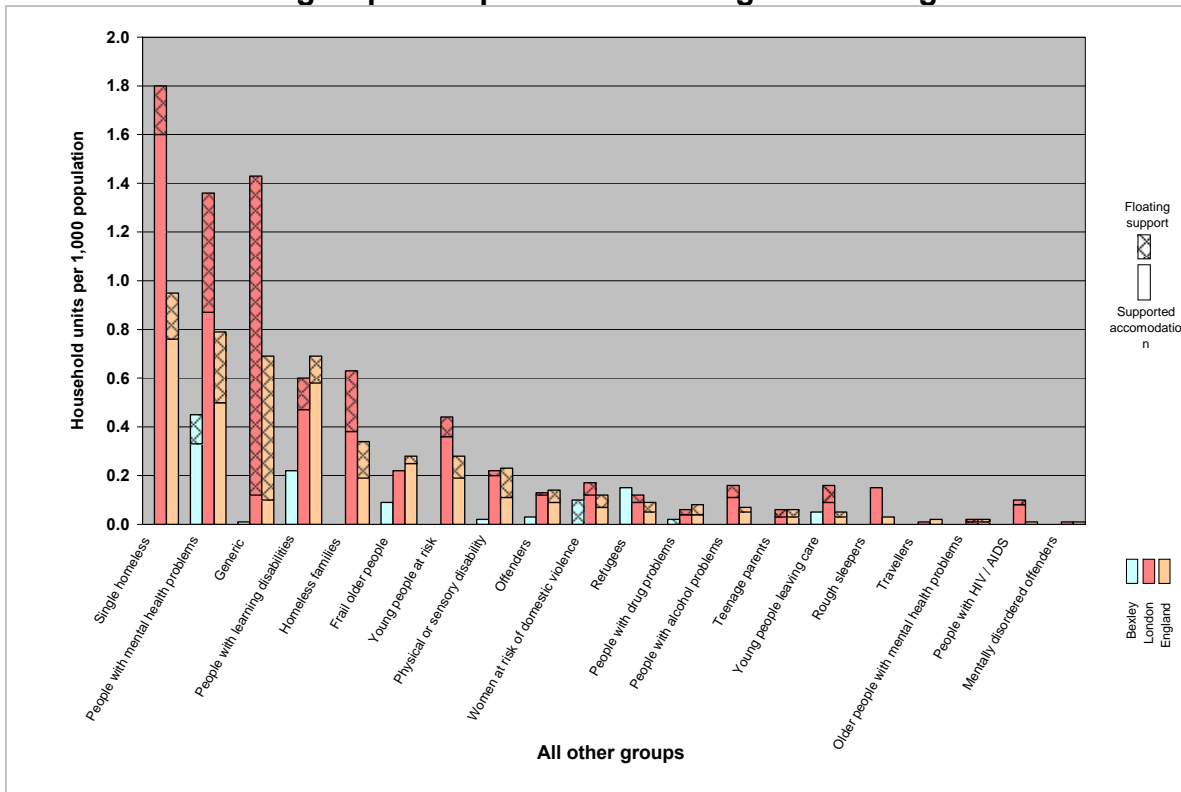


<sup>13</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

### Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>14</sup>



### Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>15</sup>



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

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

**Funding for Supporting People<sup>16</sup>**

<b>Bexley</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>
Final Supporting People grant	£2,809,055	£2,777,648	£2,776,759
Pipeline allocation	£18,173	£30,839	£-
Administration grant	£209,082	£181,493	£145,194

**Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)<sup>17</sup>**

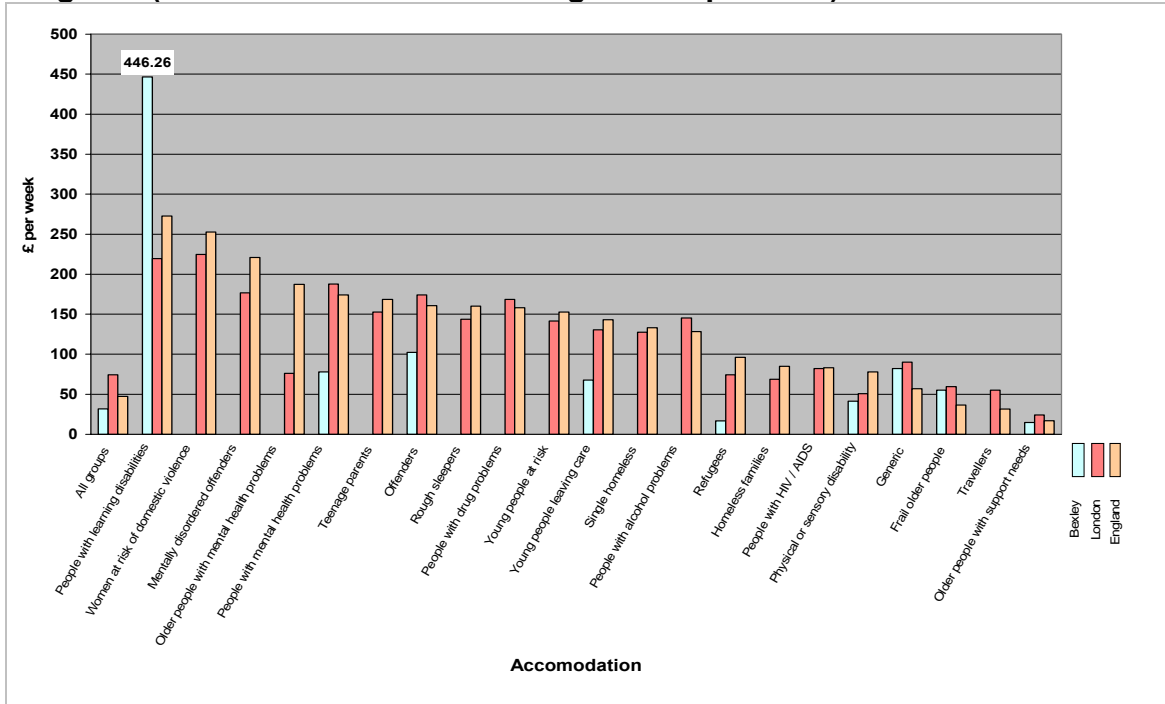
	<b>Per head of population</b>	<b>Per unit</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing</b>
Bexley	£0.25	£21.92	£21.92	£36.90
London	£0.97	£42.37	£48.73	£68.40
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

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

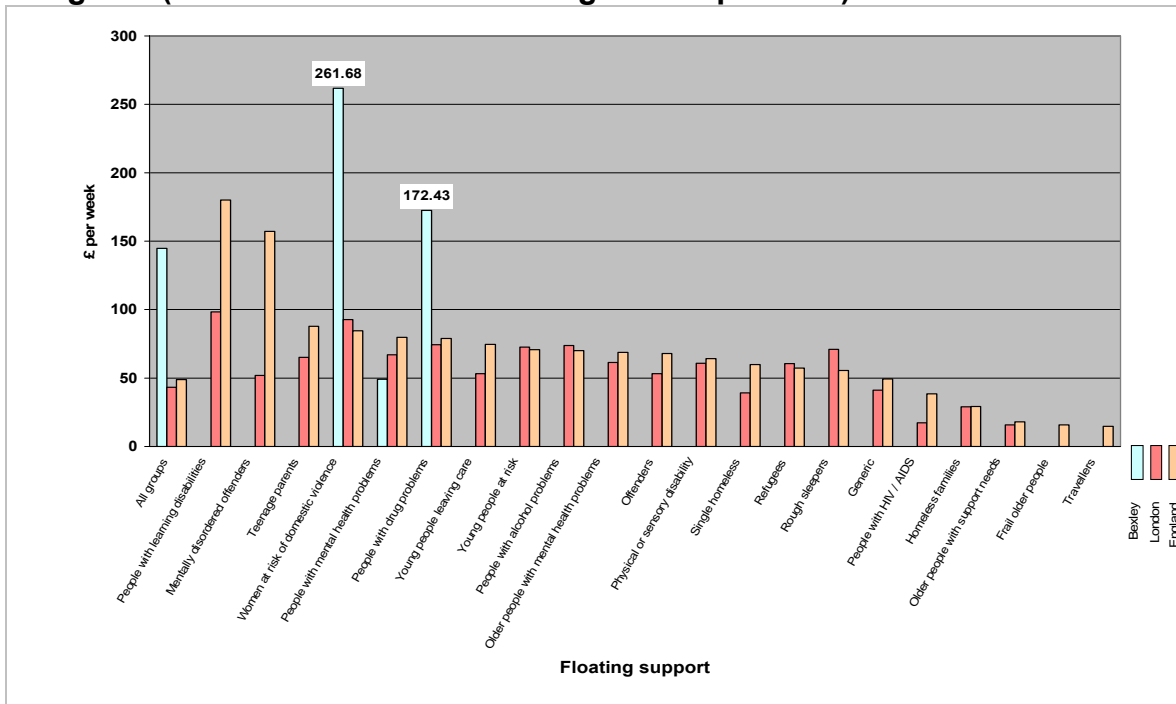
<sup>16</sup> Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) 18**



**Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) 19**

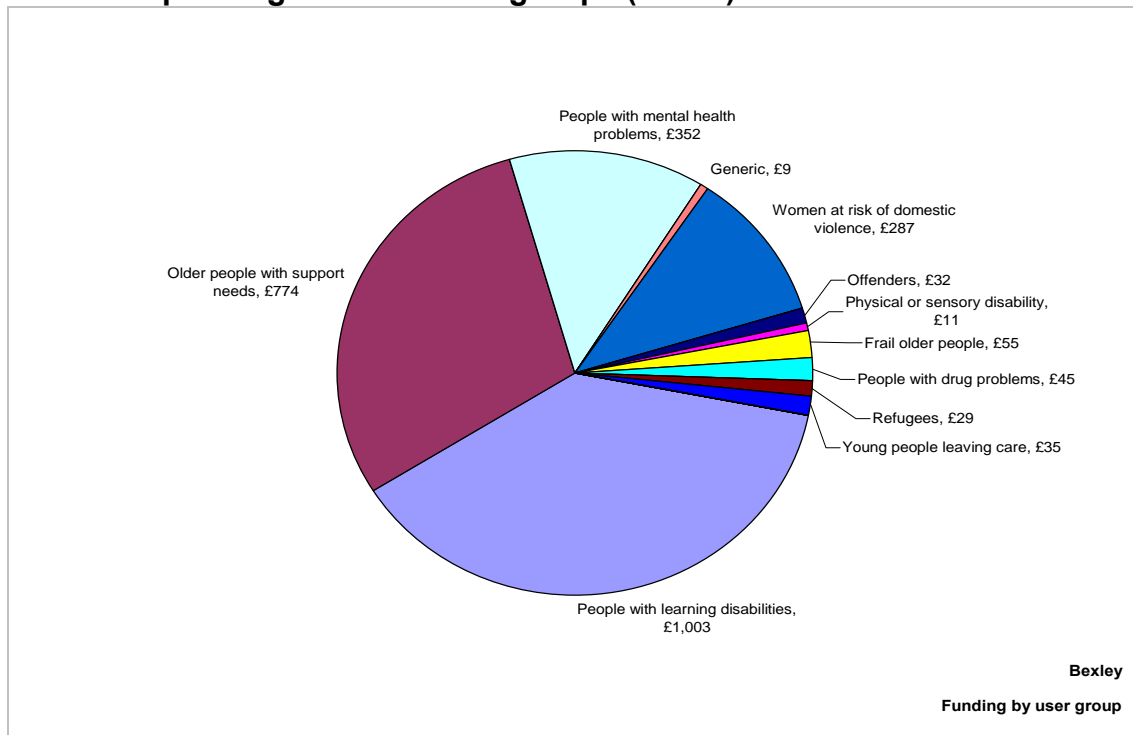


<sup>18</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

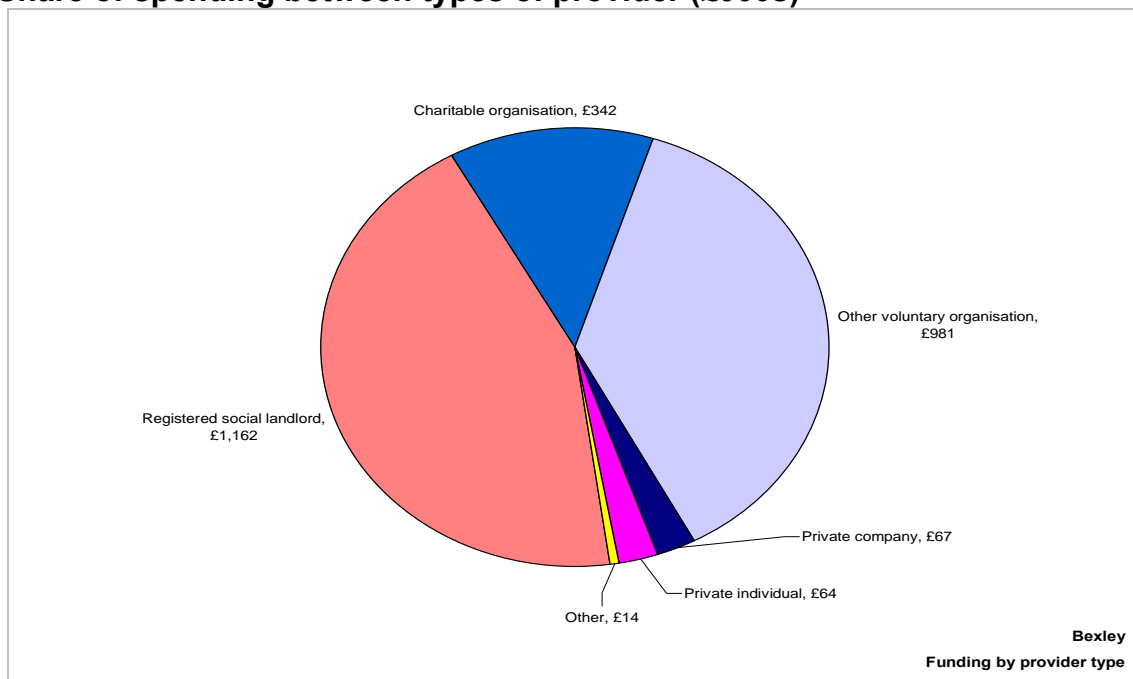
<sup>19</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.



**Share of spending between user groups (£000s)<sup>22</sup>**



**Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)<sup>23</sup>**



<sup>22</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>23</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

### Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Yes	Excellent	☆☆☆ (3)
Children's Services	Yes	Excellent	

### Social services performance indicators

#### Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

<b>Bexley</b>	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	<p>Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)</p> <p>Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26)</p> <p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32)</p> <p>Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)</p> <p>Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)</p>
Above average (●●●)	<p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)</p> <p>Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27)</p> <p>Delayed transfers of care (D41)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)</p>

<b>Bexley</b>	
Average (***)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)
Below average (**)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)
Significantly below average (*)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5)

## Best value performance indicators

### Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with London boroughs

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

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

## Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
  - interviews with key staff;
  - focus groups of staff, partners and providers;
  - visits to nine services funded by the Supporting People grant, including interviews with service users;
  - mystery shopping telephone calls;
  - focus group with providers;
  - focus group with voluntary sector representatives;
  - review of the Supporting People website; and
  - reviews of files.

## Appendix 3 – 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)*